Disconcerting Ecologies

Representations of Non-Indigenous Belonging in Contemporary

Australian Literature and Cultural Discourse

Emily Claire Potter

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English, School of Humanities, University of Adelaide
South Australia

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Contents

Abstract

Engaging with current debates on national identity, environmentalism, and the legacies of colonisation, this thesis considers non-indigenous belonging in contemporary Australia and its discursive representation as insufficient, illegitimate, and in urgent need of resolution. Apocalyptic overtones adhere to discussions of an unsettled and anxiety-ridden non-indigenous culture in which a 'crisis' of belonging for a non-indigenous majority is seen as an historical inheritance weakening, or indeed dissolving, any kind of national cohesion. It is frequently argued by non-indigenous commentators that the past must be left behind if settler Australians are ever to be 'at home' in their environment. My specific concern in this field of debate is the poetic, as well as literal, significance given to the environment, and in particular to land, as a measure of belonging in Australia. Environment is explored in the context of ecologies, offered here as an alternative configuration of the nation, and in which the subject, through human and non-human environmental relations, can be culturally and spatially positioned. I argue that both environment and ecology are narrowly defined in dominant discourses that pursue an ideal, certain and authentic belonging for non-indigenous Australians. While these definitions often seek to collapse the entrenched western binary of nature and culture, the attempts to settle what is perceived to be dangerously unstable, or disconcerting, ontologically and ecologically, relies on the diametric opposite of a sharp divide: a smooth reunion, whole and complete.

Through various theoretical perspectives of the subject's relation to its environment, I explore an alternative understanding of belonging and its negotiations with the past that refuses resolution or a final settlement and instead endorses a constant repositioning of

the self in dynamic relation to its environment. Of the three novels discussed, Thea Astley's *Drylands* and Nikki Gemmell's *Cleave* are read as apocalyptic narratives that consider the refuse of the past and present (what blights a healthy environment) as excluded from any complex relations or generative encounters within an immediate ecology. Counter to this, Chloe Hooper's *A Child's Book of True Crime* presents an environment and a topographic surface that is spatially disorientating, insisting upon a relation between the subject and its environment that can never be settled. Hooper conceptualises a promiscuous ecology, shifting and becoming, and in which the past is an active presence. The notion of a stable, and as such legitimate, belonging—as it is desired and responded to from a non-indigenous perspective—is confronted, and with it any sense of a firm historical truth which can be finalised and transcended. Ultimately, I propose a concept of belonging that is shaped by these negotiations, and an understanding of being in an environment that engages with cultural forms and effects without demanding ontological security for the subject in place.

Statement

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent for a copy of my thesis to be deposited in the University Library and to be made available for loan and photocopying.

Emily Claire Potter
24 April 2003

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An earlier draft of Chapter Four appears as 'The "Empty Highway" and the "Yelling Silence": Moving Beyond Nikki Gemmell's Landscapes' in CRNLE Journal (2001): 47-52.

This is the country where there are no wars…/ Do not touch, do not disturb/ Where no trace of time survives/ If the cleaners do their job

Paul Carter, *Lost Subjects* 2

In cultural change there is no Before or After—only a Now

Greg Dening, Afterword 155

Introduction

Representing Ecologies

This thesis considers non-indigenous belonging in Australia as it is represented in contemporary Australian literature and cultural discourse through various poetics of landscape and environment. Recent discussions of non-indigenous belonging have referred to an anxiety-fuelled 'crisis' for settler Australians that has resulted in their superficial or unstable place on the land, and this thesis evaluates and responds to these claims. I take ecology as a frame for exploring belonging, in part, because of the prominence that relations between non-indigenous Australians and their non-human environment are given in articulations of this 'crisis' state. In conventional understanding, an ecological milieu is formed through the relations between living organisms and their environment, and in representations of an insubstantial non-indigenous belonging, settler Australians are seen as estranged or without 'real' and effective relations to their non-human surrounds. A sense of cultural illegitimacy or infancy is imputed for a non-indigenous population that cannot be 'at home' in its environment.

Further, given this understanding of ecological making, this thesis contends that relations between indigenous and settler Australians and their environments are asserted in the act of representing non-indigenous belonging, and thus ecology is a useful concept for examining how subjects are configured as existing in the world. Environmental elements prominently afford a language for cultural description and articulation in western cultural discourse, as evidenced in the 'flooding' (305) that for Toni Morrison is a force of

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memory in imagination, or the feeling of the earth 'mov[ing] beneath our feet' (Introduction to Rundle iii) that Peter Craven considers an apt description of prime minister Howard's impact on the Australian electorate. Moreover, and more importantly for this thesis, ontological states are often correlated with, or intuited through, ecological forms. In such discourse a sense of ecological disorder can infer an ontological disaster for individual and collective subjects, and in discussions over non-indigenous belonging in Australia these perceived or forewarned occurrences are often collapsed.

Through representation, or poetics, human subjects make meaning from non-human environments, and human actions and metaphysical perspectives are frequently applied to topographic or meteorological contexts. The 'rape' or 'penetration' of the land by colonial occupation, or the nurturing and saving qualities read into particular landscapes, represent encounters with geographic and meteorological forms through recognisable ontological narratives, familiar and thus useful for the purpose of discursive comment or critique. George Seddon proposes that 'we are constantly translating the environment to make it humanly habitable' (16). He therefore interprets the subject's relationship with landscape (from his western perspective) as 'inescapably anthropocentric: inescapably because the very concept of landscape is anthropocentric', attempting to position the 'external' (16) environment in relation to the self.

Seddon highlights translation, mediation and negotiation as the relational terms for humans and the world with which they engage and, as I have gestured, this thesis looks to relation and its vitality for an ecology in examining non-indigenous belonging. Yet while

Seddon's terms of relation suggest a dynamics of encounter, and the meanings produced through encounters in an ecology, his equating of the act of 'familiarising the unfamiliar' (Seddon 125)—or relating poetically to what is unfamiliar—with anthropocentrism closes off the possibilities opened in his reading of relation. As humans within systems of meaning, it is impossible to conceive of an environment that exists without human intervention. Such consideration, however, does not need to assume a conclusivity of meaning that comes from these relations, nor does it validate external and internal categories which are affirmed as the self 'giv[es] names' (Seddon 125) to otherness— what, I believe, an anthropocentric view configures. In contrast to Seddon, I argue for the potential of representations that are *anthropomorphic* rather than anthropocentric—which would allow the claim and command of an environmental vista—and I initiate an elaboration of this distinction through a discrimination between metaphor and metonymy as poetical modes.

Ross Gibson propounds the theory that humans actively participate in the making of their environments and, like Seddon, he argues that the conceptual existence of environmental constituents is dependent upon their representation. Thus, '[t]here is no such thing as a pristine landscape…such a thing cannot mean anything outside of cultural systems' (Gibson, *South* 75). In this understanding, an environment is where 'nature and culture contend and combine' (Gibson, *Seven Versions* 2): here, there are no clear divisions between the natural and the cultural, and in the relations of contention, combination, and subsequent complexity, an ecology can be construed. Against an anthropocentric interpretation of this, Gibson's analysis of metaphor as a representational device

elaborates a poetic relation to the world that is dynamically charged. Metaphors are 'rough', which means that they refuse complete knowledges and admit slippages and uncertainties into an ecology. As a mode of representing a concept or phenomenon in terms of another concept or phenomenon, metaphors are interpretative, translating and proffering mutable meanings and value to otherwise unfamiliar aspects of the world. Conversely, metaphoric poetics render what is 'over-familiar...new and wondrous' (Gibson, *South* 54-55). Metaphors, Susan Sontag self-reflexively writes, provide the 'spawning ground'—rather than the end point—'of most kinds of understanding' (Sontag 91).

Obversely, metonymic poetics—and the way I consider anthropocentricism—signify the representation of an object or idea in a linear, chronological and thus 'fitting' environment—what that object 'is part of and contiguous to' (Gibson, *South* 54). Metonymy assumes language to reflect objective truths and conveys the real in a positivist frame. John Biln explains that 'representation-in-metonymy is a powerful and insidious form of resolution that flattens the heterogenous life-world to a comfortable understanding' (30)—a homogenous construction that metaphor resists. Refusing to link images, events and effects in a totalising chain, metaphor considers the real as independently existent of any attempts to comprehend or observe it, figuring language as both, to paraphrase Anthony Burke, a practice of and intervention into reality (xxviii). For Gibson, no text 'can be a totally "realistic" or "all-seeing" ensemble. Only a god could comprehend *everything* in the universal, metonymic ensemble. In the secular

world…[the] part must then stand in for the whole, and [any] compulsion to know all about the scene…will be thwarted' (*South* 57).

What is approached through metaphor, therefore, can only ever be partially known or translated as 'it always and necessarily misses what cannot be represented and misrepresents what can' (Biln 31). Exemplifying this in the work of film-maker Chris Marker, Gibson explains that in his attempt to construct a comprehensible world through metaphors, Marker's filmic ecology is comprised of 'heterogenous, yet related, images and sounds' (*South* 57), as if articulating the 'illusion of omniscience in the world of meaning' (55). Such representations implicate ontological coherence in a concomitant reassessment of what can ever be assured or known in totality. 'How composed is the person analysing the subject and object?' (59) Gibson asks. Stephen Muecke similarly proposes: '[l]et us not imagine that the text is at a remove from the real world, that it is its external translator. The text is part of the real world, the real world is a text'. '[N]o subjectivity is fully, evenly, only this or that'; 'metaphors, figures of speech, are real becomings' (*No Road* 231). That is, they refuse a final and stable meaning.

It is the very inconclusivity of metaphor that signals its relevance and dynamic possibility for the lineaments of self and the self as part of an ecology. This study considers what it means to use topographies metaphorically as well as metonymically, and how, in fictional and cultural discourse, relation can not only be represented, but also conceived of *as* representation. I seek to question the desire for a non-indigenous belonging that is certain and assured, and thus the incompleteness of metaphoric gestures, or the uncertain

remainder that is always left in any attempt at conceptual containment, offers much in the way of articulating a subject's being in the world, un-reliant upon ontological assurance. For representing ecologies and environments, such incompleteness is vital if the metonymic suppositions of unity and logical relation which support a discursively dominant understanding of ecological structures are to be confronted. As I will argue, the narrow definitions often applied to ecological and environmental well-being circumscribe the human subject and thus its conditions of being and belonging, delimiting relations between self and place and foreclosing the relational and generative possibilities of the incomplete or environmentally 'unhealthy'. Instead, I propose a model of dynamic relation that takes account of what falls away from an holistic ecology, and at the same time practices what Biln refers to as an ethical 'self-distancing' (26), recognising the impossibility of concluding meaning in ecological relations.

Non-indigenous Belonging and Environmental Discourse

Thinking about belonging necessitates some mention of its terminology. Home, homeliness, locality and place are all concepts which are frequently utilised in discussions of what it is to belong; unhomeliness, displacement, alienation and exile are equally mobilised to describe *not*-belonging or being without place. In my discussion of non-indigenous belonging I do not presume to say what belonging is, but instead trace an irregular and mutable shape that can effect its understanding. I am informed by Elspeth Probyn's discussion of 'outside belonging' (*Outside Belongings* 9) where the mobility of desire and the desire to belong performs an always negotiated relation to place. As I will describe, belonging on the outside replaces a not-belonging with unsettled belonging, and

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displacement with the jolts, disorientations and becomings that infer being in the world. In their work on unhomeliness, Homi Bhabha and Anthony Vidler make a clear distinction between the unhomely and actual conditions of homelessness (Bhabha 9), and caution that 'any reflection on the "transcendental" or psychological unhomely risks trivializing, or worse, patronizing political or social action' (Vidler 13). However, from Vidler's perspective, thinking of unhomeliness 'suggestively and critically' (13) raises questions and ideas that have political effects even if the 'mental state of projection' (11)—which can indicate relation—is poetically configured. This caution, though, is essential, and in the landscape that gives my thesis its geographic frame not-belonging is very real while dispossession is an ongoing, as well as historically traceable, experience and practice.

'Non-indigenous' comes with its own need for qualification, both as an homogenous rendering of all who are not 'indigenous' (itself a term that obscures the diversities and tensions in defining Aboriginal identity), and as it suggests a clear dichotomy between these groups. While there are of course no such easy distinctions or unproblematic definitions, I approach this term as it is used in dominant discourse: sometimes standing for a population of Anglo-Celtic or European descent, sometimes less specific. In the contexts I focus upon, however, non-indigenous Australian identity is generally identified and articulated through particular—if homogenised—specificities which find two repeated reference points: the environment and the past. The invocation of these elements in recent cultural discourse is striking for the poetic synonymity attributed to them as unsettling forces, or what makes a landscape unhomely.

In the contemporary depictions of what is perceived to be a 'crisis' for non-indigenous belonging in Australia that I discuss, the effects of the past are often expressed through topographic metaphors such as rootlessness, depthlessness and barrenness for a non-indigenous majority: hard hearts and shallow relations frequently characterise the legacies of colonisation, and of living without certain connections in a 'new' country. How non-indigenous occupation and settlement are related to an environment—both human and non-human—fronts a causal chain of historical damage from which a current state of alienation and anxiety is considered to be a result. Such arguments do not necessarily seek to overshadow the effects of colonisation on indigenous Australians, however in the texts I critique the problematic assumption of an 'authentic' belonging for indigenous peoples that is frequently made, in contrast to which an 'inauthentic' non-indigenous place on the land is figured. To use metaphoric inference, an 'authentic' belonging is rooted and deep in a ground firm and sure against the unsettling insecurities that plague a (post)colonial nation. The implications of this for indigenous Australians are many and, while I acknowledge some of these, I do not explore them intensively here. My intention is to interrogate the representation of non-indigenous subjectivity predicated on a 'real' belonging that excludes even as it looks to include, and divides and dichotomises relations in an ecology while pursuing an holistic, or unified, environment.

The similar language of 'crisis' that adheres to both environmental concerns and an historically informed non-indigenous belonging implicates, and even expresses, the same resolution for both, indicating not only their interrelation on a level of cause and effect, but the paradigmatic limits in which they are conventionally considered. It is this

circumscription put upon understandings of environment and the present effects of the past that I critique as metonymically producing an invalidated or restored belonging for non-indigenous Australians. I employ the terms 'good' and 'bad' in this thesis as implicitly evaluative but necessarily subjective and unquantifiable values. Values are culturally and individually referenced, and what is considered by an individual or a collective to be fittingly described by such vagaries will elude the containment of totalised meaning. Yet in discourses of non-indigenous belonging and environmental consternation certain measures of 'good' and 'bad' conditions are often suggested or implied, and these vagaries are pertinent as my argument attempts to highlight the dichotomous and homogenic poetics frequently mobilised in Australian cultural debate. I further enlist the expression 'bad things' with an awareness of its ambiguity, but again find this inconclusivity apt for the contexts in which I see such generalisations made and I use the term to describe a discursively constructed frame for ecologically damaging effects. Muecke's application of similar terminology ('Devastation' 126) and Gibson's notion of 'badlands' (*Seven Versions*) inform my rendering of 'bad things': what is seen to blight a settled landscape with the 'mess' (MacCallum 72) or disordering effects of the past and the instabilities of the present, precluding a non-indigenous belonging that is unsullied and assured.

Gibson describes the notion that 'non-Aboriginal Australia…[is] under-endowed with myths of "belonging"' (*South* 64) as a discursive tradition in Australian culture, fed by images of a country 'sparsely populated and meagrely historicized' (64). 'Alienation and the fragility of culture have been the refrains during two hundred years of white

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Australia' (64) he writes. '[U]ntil recently, every plot outside city limits has tended to signify just one thing [for settler Australians]: homelessness' (65). According to Gibson, the inability of non-indigenous settlers to visualise their new environment in an imported system of meaning was both estranging and anxiety-inducing from the onset of colonisation. Paul Carter's examination of the colonist's desire to make a landscape of signs that would subjugate the unfamiliar to settler control argues that a theatrical relation between the coloniser and the landscape was fostered in a bid to allay such disease. This relation constituted a 'mirror logic' (Carter, *Lie of the Land* 11), imposed through representation upon the environment, that refused any dialogue between the non-indigenous self and its surrounds—both human and non-human. Commanded in this way, the environmental other could not 'answer back'.

I align Carter's concept of theatrical poetics with metonymy, as what appeared partial or impervious to translation by the coloniser was, for them, silenced or repressed in the representation of a world ordered and controlled in linear movements of progress. Carter refers to this relational situation as 'ungrounded' (*Lie of the Land* 3), another term I make use of in my discussion of belonging and ecological place. Ungroundedness is enacted in Carter's meaning when the perception of an object or event displaces it from an environmental context. Abstracted from its milieu, the object or event becomes a sign or prop on a theatrical stage upon which the subject strides, imagining itself disengaged from the land's own language and history. As a theatre, the environment and its non-human components will only ever 'speak' in terms of human success or failure: an

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anthropocentric narrative that refuses a non-linear, discontinuous and un-certain landscape of 'in-between sounds or rumours' (*Lie of the Land* 8).

I also apply ungroundedness to a state or occurrence of environmental abstraction, when the subject, object or event is represented as out of touch with its environment: self-contained and un-related except in ways that operate in metonymic connection. Like Carter's colonial figure striding across its stage, the imagining of an ecology where individual units move in straight and certain lines, over, rather than with, the ground, conceptually compacts and pacifies a topography, making it flat for easy progress and divisible for ontological security. Rectilinear lines forged in the ground become a psychological necessity for settlers desiring to oppose themselves to the disorder imagined in an unfamiliar landscape—testament to a western philosophy that privileges rationality and chronology. From within these lines, what lies on the other side of conquered ground appears to be waiting for control and the assertion of order, empowered by the fear and awe inspired in the landscape's supra-naturally charged theatrics. As 'the interpretation of signs presupposes a world beyond,' Carter argues, it 'makes the breaching of the horizon natural' (11-12).

The ecological constituent, disconnected from its environment, becomes portentous, signalling secrets, threat and the necessity for 'external' command. This can be discerned in what Simon Ryan refers to as one of the 'classic tropes' (13) of Australian explorer narratives in which the landscape is figured as 'a mysterious box which must be "unlocked" or an equally mysterious female who must be "unveiled" and possessed' (13).

Roslyn Haynes provides a detailed examination of how the desert in non-indigenous imagination is a dominant poetic signifier, shifting in discursive currency since European occupation, but maintaining an ominous role as 'the epitome of absence, of the metaphysical void' (185) in non-indigenous culture in Australia. The landscape, broken down into signs, not only refuses dynamic relations between environmental elements, but condemns a culture to the recurrence of such anxieties. Spiritual, social and geographic alienation shape the current discussion of non-indigenous place on the land. Gibson's addition of 'until recently' to his articulation of perceived non-indigenous homelessness suggests a positive transformation in settler culture that overcomes these fears of non-urban spaces. However, instead of testifying to a cultural movement away from these poetically induced concerns, I read his qualification as compromised by an expansion in the field of anxiety that now includes the cities and urban areas that once demarcated the settled and civilised in an unhomely environment.

It is this expansion that demonstrates, in particular, the inter-implications of environmental discourse and discourses of non-indigenous belonging. A total national space becomes seen as damaged and damaging, while an ecology is figured without protective limits for ontological security. I contend that the shift which *can* be noted in non-indigenous representations of the Australian environment lies in the substitution of conquest and progress narratives—where an 'uncivilised' landscape is tamed by its heroic antagonists—with ones of tragedy and failure, or 'declensionist' (Cronon 1352) ecological narratives. Instead of the unhomely residing outside the limits of urban

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Australian comfort, these narratives present a vandalised and wasted city-scape that fits into a story of global ecological disaster in which the nation is subsumed.

Condemned colonial practices register significantly in representations of a self-unhoming non-indigenous population that has degraded and destroyed pre-colonial ecological harmony. Tim Flannery presents this view when he describes '[t]he deserted and desolated wastes of [Australian] pastoral country' as 'a pathetic monument to extraordinary folly' (qtd. in Pollak and McNabb 117) and the 'colonial and pioneering attitudes [which] were incompatible with a careful and caring husbandry of Australia's resources' (122). Yet it is also in the 'uncontrolled urban growth' (121), 'the destroyed and befouled coastlines' (Lord qtd. in Pollak and McNabb 20) of the mainland cities, and the 'superficial, fairy-floss-like world' (Baxter qtd. in Pollak and McNabb 32) of a post-industrial, technology-driven and globalised culture that non-indigenous environmental alienation is strongly expressed. The colonisation of Australia thus enters a larger narrative of western modernity, empiricism and global commerce within which settler Australians, taken as the direct inheritors of this culture, are seen to be specifically implicated. By inference, Aboriginal cultures are problematically excluded from modernity.

Anxieties for the local, which globalisation is seen to threaten and degrade, inform a dis-ease of non-indigenous belonging. In this thinking, as the local is read as giving way to the global forces of new technologies, transnational corporate structures, and a 'time-space compression' (Carter, Donald and Squires viii), firm and stable belongings are

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compromised. Dissolving a certain designation of place, physical and psychic, Anthony Giddens explains, the 'implications of modernity for ontological security, for the confidence we have in the continuity of [our] self identity and the constancy of the surrounding social and material environments of action' (*Consequence of Modernity* 92) are considered to be grave. To recover a certain belonging, or a 'home' that is assured, is to restore ontological assurity and in doing so fortify the self 'against future uncertainties' (Morley and Robbins 6). Therefore, environmental demise has ramifications beyond human dispossession in an unsustaining landscape; or, as Jagtenberg and McKie propose, the 'killing' of nature 'involves more than a physical or biological process, more than the unintended consequences of an industrial society'. '[The] death of nature,' they continue, 'is an identity crisis, our own potential death, and an ongoing hedging of bets in a risk culture' (22-23).

In this discourse, an environment near its collapse both testifies to and exacerbates ontological disorder, revealing a presumption of what form a coherent environment should take. Similarly, a chaotic human 'condition' is attributed to an ecologically fractured system, with the refuse of modernity—indicative of this 'crisis'—littering the landscape in which the self fruitlessly seeks to be 'at home'. A 'risk culture' for Jagtenberg and McKie entails the gambling of ontological and ecological certainties in the west that 'our' own desire for progress and material gain dangerously involves. As they explain, 'increasing satellite-generated knowledge of ecodegradation, Gulf war "ecocide", Chernobyl-style eco-catastrophes, AIDS, and a riskier world encompassing everything from financial Black Octobers to possible planetary destruction by passing

meteorites' (21) feed into the precarious cultural and ontological consciousness *and* place that characterise the contemporary west. Risk is configured in declensionist rather than dynamic and generative terms.

Pollak and McNabb, in elaborating this argument, suggest that 'the technological advances of the past century—accelerating dizzily with every new decade—now put the earth in peril' (11). They cite novelist Gabrielle Lord on the point that '[p]eople have always been expecting the end of the world. But now, we're abusing it like never before, and greed and waste are combining': '[t]his time our apocalyptic visions might actually come true' (qtd. in Pollak and McNabb 15). In accord with these sentiments, Hugh Mackay attributes the recent surge in support for Green politics in Australia to the strengthening belief that 'our emotional and intellectual bearings' are disconcerted in a globalised modernity that proclaims 'ideology [as] dead, and practical economics [as] everything' (7). Proffering a 'moral compass and commitment in a wasteland of values' (7), Green politics are seen by Mackay to renounce social and political vacuity poetically transposed on, and materially measured in, a degraded topography. In the examples of ontological and ecological conflation that I explore in this thesis, social dysfunction, non-indigenous alienation, and environmental distress combine.

Paradoxically perhaps, 'Australia's ecologically anxious present' (Robin, 'Mobile Icons' 51) is not only attributed to the devastation of the local. While globalisation is dominantly figured in environmental discourse as a harbinger of cataclysm, global ecological concern is often referred to as a unifying reference point for all of human kind.

Tom Griffiths attributes the rising prominence of ecological awareness around the world to a 'dramatically enforced...planetary consciousness' (*Forests of Ash* 192)—or as Stephen Pyne suggests, a sense of 'macrocosmic doom' (Pyne 25)—stemming from the atomic bombing of Hiroshima in 1945. The relatively recent discipline of environmental history, in which Griffiths is a scholar, is considered to be 'a response to [this] sense of global ecological crisis' (Worster qtd. in Griffiths, *Forests of Ash* 192), and many environmental campaigns as well as ecological critical debates figure the globe (itself a poetic sign as Urry points out: 'there is no single 'globe' but rather different metaphors of the globe and globality' [26]) as the primary victim of human-inflicted environmental damage. Suggested in this is the idea that by considering 'good' environmental practice as a responsibility beyond the local sphere, a 'common, global past' (Griffiths, 'Ecology and Empire' 5) and a commonly restored or catastrophically disordered future can be established. The ecological and ontological fractures of a non-cohesive globe are, theoretically, able to reconciled.

Much recent ecological writing, such as eco-criticism and environmental histories, has attempted to overcome the theatrics Carter identifies by conceiving subject and environment beyond the parameters of an anthropocentric, one-way relation. In his work on environmental history, Griffiths argues that land is 'rarely allowed a dynamic of its own...hence we often talk about "impact" or "land-use" or "conquest"' (*Forests of Ash* 188), and he asserts the importance of realising 'the independent and semi-independent dynamism of the natural world' ('Ecology and Empire' 2). The environment is not a backdrop to human endeavours, passively receiving its afflictions, but in Griffiths'

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understanding is relationally configured. This perspective offers an alternative to 'the alienated view of the organism and the environment...[in which] environments have an autonomous set of laws, and organisms discover them, meet them, and have to cope with them' (Lewontin qtd. in Poovey 437)—historically in the west, in terms of mastery. Through the medium of environmental history, Griffiths posits a renovated ecological past that reconsiders and re-tells human subjectivity *through* its environments, breaching a traditional divide in western thought between the scientifically apprehended 'natural laws' of an environmental matrix, and the 'political, quixotic and historical' ('Ecology and Empire' 1).

These dichotomous understandings of the contained and rational subject, making sense of its 'outside' environment through observation and taxonomy, have informed the empirical relationship between humans and nature that Griffiths seeks to overcome. Historically, visual apprehension, or the establishment of 'brute facts in "our minds' eye"' (Urry 24), in traditional western thought was seen to organise the world from an internal and ontologically certain position. Yet, equally, the scientific recognition of humans 'as a species as well as political beings' (Griffiths, 'Ecology and Empire' 1) is viewed as opening the way to an understanding of the environment that can take account of human histories *as* ecological histories, thereby disavowing a unified and self-driven narrative of wholly 'conscious and deliberate [human] actions' (2) impacting on the 'natural' world. That is, humans can envision themselves as part of an ecology, and thus in different relation with their environment.

Harnessing the implications of this, Griffiths argues, is significant for a (post)colonial politics desiring to critique popular Australian histories of colonial mastery and heroism in an untamed environment. For instance, colonisation read through the introduction of non-indigenous species, domesticated animals and 'old' world diseases—'sometimes purposeful…and sometimes accidental' (2)—to the Australian ecology can elaborate both indigenous and non-indigenous experiences in the process of contact in insightful ways, articulating the complex interrelation of human dispossession, decimation, resistance and adaptation with environmental changes and effects. Further, 'the ecological limits of empire' (Robin, 'Ecology: A Science of Empire?' 63)—an empire that imagined itself ever-expanding—can be articulated by exposing the difficulties settlers experienced in establishing and sustaining European agricultural pastoralism in areas of Australia.

Similarly, the assertion of a pre-contact environmental history (often ignored in discourses of national founding) challenges the fantasy of a land untouched and unmarked by technologies prior to colonisation. Stephen Pyne, for example, argues against this assumption in his history of fire on the continent, insisting that the pre-contact Australian landscape 'had been as fully occupied as technologies had allowed': 'most places were intensively shaped by indigenous practices, [and] many landscapes…were as fully anthropogenic as any found in Europe' (26). In this use of environmental history, encounter, transformation and negotiation between subject and environment challenge the narratives of a colonial imprint on the land that is original and uni-relational.

Similarly, eco-criticism advocates the human renunciation of 'exploitative or "objective" attitude[s]' (Wylie 177) towards the non-human constituents of a commonly inhabited ecology. According to Dan Wylie, a 'good' ecological approach will admit, and act in light of, 'a web of integrally cross-influencing relationships' (181) that overturns anthropocentric considerations of the self in the world. Jagtenberg and McKie offer an equivalent concept of ecology as 'multidimensional' (xii). Arguing that ecologies are 'about interaction, flows, fields, systems, and space-time as well as the private spaces, world, and value systems of individual organisms' (xii), they identify the relation between the subject and its environment as intrinsically dialogic wherein every contact made by humans upon their landscapes is both self-reflexive *and* communicative. '[C]ultural norms, myths, archetypes, and ideologies' are revealed, Jagtenberg and McKie insist, as '[w]e cut, dig, gouge, hack, build, enclose, and otherwise shape the environment' (2): to impact upon the land is therefore to know ourselves. But in a dialogic understanding, the environment is acknowledged to have an agency of its own since it can be seen to 'answer back', for example, in 'the muck, slime, filth and degradation at the heart of a big city' (Pollak and McNabb 107).

Pollak and McNabb propound such a relational model for fictional representations as offering empathetic and pedagogically affirmative ways of understanding the self as part of, and thus responsible to, an ecology. They argue that 'if a[n environmental] horror is described in a novel, complete with the human element and the emotional consequences, a reader is touched—and takes to heart what is at stake' (12). The conjoining of 'heart' and 'mind' in the title of their text suggests a non-hierarchical placement of the rational

and the emotional in this conception of human and non-human environmental relations. As the cultural is privileged over the natural in traditional western thought, so is rationality over feeling. By arresting this ideological division, Pollak and McNabb suggest that a different, 'deeper' response to the land is facilitated which has ethical attributes and life-sustaining capacities for both individuals and their environments. The potential capacity of literature and literary studies, informed by eco-criticism, to curtail ecological disaster poetically—disciplines which, according to Wylie, 'are way behind environmental history in all respects' (174)—is thus contended, as it is seen to provocatively enable 'a parallel rejoicing at [environmental] splendours and anger at [their] vandalisation' (McGregor qtd. in Pollak and McNabb 29).

I argue, however, that while such environmental discourse foregrounds relational responsibility and mutual implication for humans and a non-human environment, a repeated invocation of apocalyptic visions reduces this actively configured environment to the portentous components of the theatrical stage that these representations purport to transcend. Landscapes become encoded with signs that presage or represent human estrangement from place, symptomatically harnessed to a spectrum of non-indigenous concerns. A 'hard' land comes to stand for experiences of settler displacement and loss, a 'barren' land for settler emotional suppression and absence, while a 'dark' land is full of settler and 'other' secrets and pain. The difference between metaphor and metonymy again becomes crucial as representations of environmental disasters reveal a desire for narrative order.

Marita Sturken, for example, examines the role given to especially extreme weather patterns, particularly El Niño, in American popular culture, whereby California as the emblem of consumerist excess and cultural surface is seen to 'deserve...whatever it gets' (DeLillo qtd. in Sturken 161) by way of earthquakes, tidal waves and 'nature's "fury"' (Sturken 163). She contends that the narrativisation of disaster in these instances seeks to bring coherence and metonymical meaning to perceived disorder and damage, making rational 'the irrational aspects of tragic events, the violence of difference, and the arbitrariness of death' (187). Dialogic relation in these terms—familiarly referenced in times of drought or bushfire in Australia—of a vengeful or corrective environmental apocalypse conveying humanity's own capacities for destruction and excess, still relies upon an anthropocentric view of the self in the world that arrests the inconclusivity of metaphoric poetics. Such dialogue leaves little room for dynamic and complex relations which would allow for mis-translation, continued negotiation and uncertain meaning in an ecology. Moreover, I consider this view of dialogue as suggesting an equitable and thus quantifiable exchange pattern that complex relations cannot provide. The singularity of relations curtails this kind of exact transaction.

Given this apocalyptic frame provided by declensionist narratives, and in the context of Australia, I suggest that 'crisis' is invoked so as to warn, reverse and restore (the language of restoration also prominently features in environmental discourse) a damaged social and environmental landscape, and consequently to authenticate a relationship between non-indigenous Australians and the land. Griffiths, for instance, uses environmental history to foreground what he calls 'deep time' ('Travelling' 1). More than

just countering originary narratives of national founding—giving Australia an ancient past, extending far beyond colonisation—Griffiths sees 'deep time' as offering an image of the Australian ecology that would counter the 'short, sharp, nervous vibrations' of a 'blind' (Braudel qtd. in Griffiths, 'Travelling' 1), and, presumably, superficial national culture. Tapping into 'deeper currents' (1) admits an environmental belonging that is somehow more meaningful, 'linking us to world history in new ways' and 'localising the Australian story' (7) in which all on the land can claim a valid part. This is reminiscent of appeals to a non-indigenous emotional, or empathetic, engagement with environments (such as Pollak and McNabb offer) as a way of addressing a rootless population, in which feeling is something considered to be 'deeply' placed and firmly emplacing.

What I consider to be most disturbingly reiterated in environmental discourse, however, is the re-enactment of colonial tactics, conceptually and literally, in a different guise, whereby what is held to be a 'good' and sustaining model of human engagement with an environment predicates the clearing away of rubbish, waste and the effects of damage as 'bad things' in the landscape. What is considered useless, or without value, for a desired environmental state is excluded from ecological relations: 'mess', or the refuse of 'incorrect' environmental practices, is isolated as mirroring the disconnected subject, without 'deep' or meaningful engagement with place, and consequently equated with a surface or shallow human presence in an environment. The rejection by dominant environmental discourse of certain cultural phenomena—such as technology and commodity-production—as a surface element of human life, and participants in the degradation of a healthy environment, I will contend, is implicated in this dichotomy of

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surface and depth that delimits environmental meanings and ecological possibilities in the texts I discuss.

Further, I argue that as environmental disorder is poetically applied to the Australian landscape—discursively represented as fractured and immobilised by non-indigenous doubts—it comes to stand for the litter of the past: the damage done in colonisation, and perpetuated by a people who cannot adhere to the ground beneath their feet. The desire to clean away the debris of the 'bad things' that darken national beginnings, and dispossessed and devastated indigenous populations and cultures, both adopts and is interwoven with ideals of environmental and ecological well-being and stability. Sarah Nuttall, for example, speaking of (post)colonial landscapes in general, praises the attempt to 'clear a space beyond an appropriative ownership of the land, a space for a different relation, one which might institute a less exclusivist sense of belonging' (228). Proposing a horizon for new beginnings, Nuttall assumes that leaving behind damaging colonial visions, and their ideologically fraught construction of the subject in relation to land, is necessary to reconfigure different belongings for non-indigenous subjects through the self's new and clean repositioning in an environmental milieu. Thus, what signifies the colonial past in poetic or material form is conceived of as an environmental hazard, the effects which must be allayed if ecological and ontological cohesion are to be achieved.

Reading Textual Landscapes

Chapters One and Two explore the discursive desire to admit and overcome ecological and ontological disaster so as to move forward in a restored Australian environment. I

have suggested that human relationships to the world are mediated by narrative representation. It is useful to cite Cronon on this point: '[w]hen we describe human activities within an ecosystem, we seem always to tell stories about them' (1349); '[h]owever much we understand that an ecosystem transcends mere humanity, we cannot escape the valuing process that defines our relationship to it' (1375). An examination of the fictional and non-fictional stories that are told about non-indigenous Australians in their environment reflects how non-indigenous subjectivity and belonging is considered. Chapter One also examines Carter's concept of ungroundedness in terms of narrative. What does an ungrounded story poetically imply, and how is this discernible in representations of contemporary Australia? Here, I make reference to Drusilla Modjeska's recent critique of current Australian fiction in the context of political and social responsibility, noting her similar use of topographic poetics.

Modjeska's imperative for the kind of writing that will 'bring us back to the ground' ('Why I am Not Reading Fiction') opposes narratives that implicate both a culture and a subject in an immediate environment with what I elaborate as 'safe' fictions: stories that offer ontological security by placing the 'bad things' that unsettle and disturb an ordered and safe environment out of touch with the self. In this chapter I discuss the notion of safe fiction and metaphorically configure Carter's imperial landscape, 'smooth, passive, pliable' (*Lie of the Land* 2) as ideologically resonant with securing narratives. I consider the desire for narrative safety as being akin to conceptions of the social and the national as bodies that should 'hold'. I trace reactions to modernity and globalisation that see 'crisis' as the ontological fall-out of unbordered and indeterminate spatialities and tie this

into discourses of national identity and their concern for what is viewed to be a dissolving social sphere that cannot hold the self in place. Such perceptions suggest that homeliness or belonging can be forged in the stories we tell if they contribute to and maintain a holding environment.

In this chapter the motifs of flat ground and sharp edges are introduced, and I identify these as poetically harnessed by contemporary political and cultural discourse to describe the outcomes of a state of uncertain belonging for non-indigenous Australians. I discursively analyse the Howard years of government in Australia and reveal the prominence in political rhetoric and commentary of a double-sided nation: unified and harmonious, and at the same time, sharply divided and emotionally shallow. The articulation of division is mobilised from different political and social points of view but is ultimately subsumed under the generalised term of a 'crisis'-headed nation. Flatness, or the socially and emotionally flattening capacities of a rootless collective, is also invoked from a range of perspectives. However, like division, the motif of flatness is notably consistent in its poetic employment by cultural discourse, primarily to contrast surface with depth. Here I discuss representations of non-indigineity as superficially grafted onto land without 'deep' and meaningful traditions for belonging and how this is attributed to non-indigenous denials of the colonial past, concomitant with the repression of unreconciled feelings and desires in the 'deeply' placed unconscious.

In Chapter Two I highlight narratives in which the consequences of repression and introjection are poetically articulated through the alienated non-indigenous subject and its

perceived cultural and spiritual disenchantment. Attempts to conceptualise a homely belonging for non-indigenous Australians frequently look to models of indigenous culture as offering potential restitution for environmentally alienated settlers. An often unproblematised affinity perceived between Aborigines and the land is commonly harnessed for the cause of non-indigenous legitimacy and national affirmation. Peter Pierce illustrates and mobilises this assumption when he describes the mythological figure of the 'lost child' in the Australian landscape—a figure he takes to stand for national beginnings—'*saved* by Aboriginal men who had been dispossessed of this same land'. This, he considers, is 'potentially, a most potent image of reconciliation between black and white Australians' (xii-xiii) [emphasis mine]. The reunion of divided parts, which the official discourse of reconciliation particularly invokes—such as that employed by 'authorised' advisory bodies—is taken to provide a dual function of ontological and national restoration.

With non-indigenous 'crisis' registered in repression and psychological splits, the fractured self must be reunified and rendered whole, with forgotten secrets brought to light. At the same time, as 'black and white' come together, the divided nation, with its unrooted 'majority', can be repaired. These poetics of healing and reunion inform an environmental discourse in which an ordered and healthy eco-system is a cohesive, holding one, and I particularly examine Tim Flannery's 2002 Australia Day Address as applying these metonymic connections to the state of the national ecology. It is important to point out that my use of the term 'reconciliation' is informed by dominant non-indigenous representations, and I particularly refer to its use as a symbolic force for

uniting the nation. I acknowledge that reconciliation is mutable in meaning and has singular resonances and political implications for different groups and individuals.

I examine three novels at length, each offering different understandings, and applying different representations, of the current Australian social, cultural, and geographic landscape. Each responds in some way to coeval discourses of ontological, ecological and national crisis. Modjeska's notion of grounding narratives, expressed as part of her desire for fiction that is in touch with, and brings into relation, a local environment for its readers, looks to stories that engage with the now. This is an important imperative behind my thesis, to pursue and articulate how contemporary Australian literature registers and represents its spatially and temporally immediate environment, or that which 'is in the midst of happening' (Foucault qtd. in Probyn, *Outside Belongings* 102). In Chapter Three I describe the figure of the weather forecaster as poetically configuring this kind of environmental touch—engaged but inconclusive.

Chapters Three and Four extend the arguments of the preceding chapters to two recent Australian novels, Thea Astley's *Drylands* and Nikki Gemmell's *Cleave*. In these texts contours of land reflect a millennial image of national, social and environmental dis/order. Here, flat ground and sharp edges proliferate as the consequences of 'bad' pasts and ongoing ecological disorder set apart individuals from each other, estranging them from any sense of belonging. Representations of drought and sterility, wastelands and urban clutter invoke situations of untenable existence for non-indigenous Australians. In the harsh light of Astley's rural lands and Gemmell's dank, dark city-spaces, a

malnourished country speaks of a malnourished culture and a dissolute collective. Ontological and community division is conveyed through land degradation: traces of the colonial past and its damage are registered as out of place in the landscape, lying about wasted and useless. There is a discernable awareness in each text of a globalising world that is dysfunctional, polluted and irreverently transformative, dissolving the local, evacuating tradition, and deposing the self from home. The landscapes depicted in *Drylands* and *Cleave* culturally describe non-indigenous not-belonging. They communicate settler alienation on the flat surfaces of violence, failure and loss, while admonishing a non-indigenous refusal to live, as Gibson puts it, 'in and of the land' (*South* 6).

Despite their similar poetics, these texts conclude two very different futures for the Australian ecology and the possibilities within it for non-indigenous belonging. *Drylands* proposes an apocalyptic vision in line with 'crisis' discourse and can see no place for any restitution of the environment and its alienated inhabitants. Astley conveys a sense of the local as being assaulted by unremitting global forces, their new technologies and commodity culture wedging sharp divides in the small town that is the novel's namesake. What is outmoded by the drive for techno-progress becomes anachronistic and without place in a redefined Australian society. The operations of technology reflect, as well as inform, social relations which become hard and brittle on a flat, dried-out ground. The blank and non-relational surfaces of the television and the computer screen poetically figure a settler culture, superficially homed. It is an image compounded by the litter of

alienated lives and found in the polluting detritus that clutters the arid rural landscape. Waste is thus without value in a culture bent on its own material pleasures.

Astley's cast of characters is destructively untethered to the earth, anxiety-ridden, unsettled by difference and heavy with melancholy. It is 'the malignant cultural body of the settler' (Turner 23) that is depicted in *Drylands* as malcontent un-generatively spreads. Stephen Turner's supposition that, for non-indigenous peoples, it is 'easier to forget than to acknowledge the pain of the past' (23), is realised in the text as each of Drylands' residents trail around their secreted stories of failure, dispossession and damage. A perpetually fractured, estranging and harmful culture is the prophesied result. I argue against what Astley advocates through her representation of Australian society as divided and aimless, and critique in particular the novel's depiction of a world voided of traditions and meanings by global processes. In response to this I suggest the existence of dynamic ecological relations between the self and technology.

Gemmell's *Cleave*, on the other hand, envisions a reconciled nation wherein unrooted Australians can eventually claim a home. To do this, the novel indicates, the repressed memories and events that have historically prevented settlers from belonging in Australia must be unearthed and transcended. Like Astley, Gemmell depicts the consequences of deliberately disremembered or unvoiced experiences and juxtaposes deeply buried memories with a surface on which non-indigenous subjects drift without purpose or roots, running from what they cannot admit. This is an image of the split non-indigenous self unable to adhere to the ground: families are fractured and relations cut-off. Gemmell

contrasts the cultural practices and community structures of the Warlpiri people in northern Australia with the disparate collective of non-indigenous people who inhabit the same lands, presenting a vision of 'crisis'-point settler culture in the text.

In a redemptive mode, however, *Cleave* conceptualises a way for non-indigenous Australians to overcome their damage and divisions, learning from Aboriginal culture to reapproach individual and collective relations, and, eventually, to settle in place. To do this, the land must be poetically dug into, uncovered and cleared of repressed burdens. With deeply placed things drawn to the surface of the land, a spatial dichotomy can also be resolved. I read *Cleave*'s depiction of a renewed ecology as one that is clean and clear of ambiguous shadows—what, I argue, signify dynamics—and the novel's title plays on this central motif of divided modalities reunited as one. Ontological restitution informs ecological well-being as the subject newly restored to wholeness can enter into secured and sustaining relations with its environment. Through *Drylands* and *Cleave* it is possible to highlight and critique the repeated poetic employment of division and union, and I argue that in the representation of sharp edges and holistic recovery a metonymic conception of ecology is presented, pieced smoothly together or pulled devastatingly apart. A dynamic ecology, with damage and 'bad things' entered into relation instead of cleared away, is thereby foreclosed.

In Chapter Five I propose an alternative way of considering and representing an ecology and the subject's relational place within it. Gibson's understanding of 'natural' environments provides an example of how ecological milieux might be conceived:

> If this term 'nature' must be deployed, I would like to clarify what it means to whomever is deploying it. If it is related somehow to a notion of the given environment that one is born into and that one must work and play upon (or acculturate) in order to humanise one's existence, then I'm prepared to claim as part of my environment not only sunshine, clouds, landforms, and all things 'green,' but also the cinema, television, pop music, books, motor cars, magazines, and all available mass-mediated images and sounds. (*South* 223)

While much environmental discourse professes to a view of inter-connected 'nature' and 'culture', the refusal of various, often 'polluting', cultural forms into an ecology of subject-environment relations maintains a dominant perception of the environmental 'good' that must be protected from intrusive harms. Astley's representation of new technologies dividing subject from subject, echoed in environmental writings that pit commercial culture and its by-products against environmental well-being, excludes the elements that Gibson lists above from ecological relation. Yet Gibson insists that '[p]eople know about [these cultural forms] as an aspect of their environment and they use them as they see fit' (*South* 224). His concern is '*how* people use the elements of their newly [and continually] defined environment, just as people have traditionally used the sun and sea while knowing how to avoid the perceptible dangers' (224) [emphasis in original]. How people 'use' their environment is a question of relation.

As I confront the prospect of attaining secure belongings, I argue for a poetical approach to the self in a world that registers this always negotiated relation, and consequently present a concept of groundedness, and an interpretation of belonging, that elaborates unsettlement as an ecological condition. To be in relation is to be in touch with another,

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and for my reading of relation I make use of the notions of proximity and distance in the work of Probyn, Deleuze and Foucault. Touch, or relation, does not mean the alignment of sharp edges—in Sara Ahmed's terms, 'two persons facing each other' (7)—or the resolution of divided parts—'a coupling' (7)—but instead insists upon dynamic process.

For the subject to be in touch with an environment, in my understanding, means for them to be always rearranged in proximity and distance to things—explained by Probyn as 'the movement together of different distinct elements' (*Outside Belongings* 6). I see ecological relations as never stable and constantly formed, dispersed and reformed in another shape. Touch defies chronology and the solidity of origin. Neither is it conveyed solely in affective communication, but is recorded in disordered effects, spatially and temporally dispersed in an environment. The cohabitation of distance and proximity in relation enables the ethical positioning of self and other that I attribute to metaphor, since it never finalises meaning or ecological constitution.

Deleuze's theory of the fold suggests a way of conceiving human subjectivity and relation that challenges ontological certainty, describing the self as mutably folded in opposition to a surface/depth configuration. In this conception, the surface is a milieu of relations, and is taken as the place of habitation, or the subject's becoming. Deleuze's surface can be topographically imagined in line with Carter's view of the ground as creased and uneven, full of pockets, arrests, and inclines. A folded landscape, like the folded self, resists total knowing and revelation: here, the 'unseen' exists 'within the seen' (Carter, *Lie of the Land* 304). The metaphoric employment of geographic and

material forms to reference subjectivity in this way thus relates the self to the world, or humanises an environment—in an anthropomorphic practice—without centralising the self, elevating it above the ground and out of relational touch. Anthropomorphic poetics attest to the always partial, always changing meaning of being in an ecology, and thus in these terms, subjectivity can only be understood through its non-totalised, non-holding, and non-archaeological position in an ecology. 'Relation', as Robert Pogue Harrison puts it, 'is the abode' (201) of human dwelling.

I argue for an 'environmentally-grounded poetics' (Carter, *Lie of the Land* 4) continually produced through mutable relations, against the sharp edge, the flat ground, or a clean, smooth and recovered landscape. From this perspective, there is nothing in a landscape that should not be there. To educe an understanding of an ecology as being constituted by an infinity of arrangements between elements that meet and disperse in unique, un-replicable moments, I harness Carter's 'intentionally provisional conception of environment and hence of [the] dwelling forms appropriate to it' ('Where the Ground' 8), that seeks to ground human identity and ontology in an equally provisional mode. Rather than the certain self in dialogue with its environment, such a vision necessarily considers subjectivity as made and remade through processes of relation that are always open-ended. As we come into touch with our environment—conceptually, poetically, physically—we produce ourselves. What this tactic offers is the deposition of signs to the potentialities of a representation that can 'circle' its subject 'without ever coming to the point, or settling down' (*Lost Subjects* 14).

The concept of grounding, or grounded representations, opposes a portentous rendering of environmental constituents, and is not the same as configuring a solid and rooted place from which to engage with the world. In my use of the term, being grounded—or grounding being—means to recognise what has marked, shaped, or tracked an environment, and continues to do so, inclusive of 'the supplementary rubbish of time and space' (Carter, 'Where the Ground' 9), and to admit relations between these effects or objects and the self. As I see it, this implies a subject's responsiveness to its environment, coming into touch with what is immediately happening. By considering the environment beyond a metonymic order, wherein a 'good' environment fits neatly together, ontological boundaries are unsettled and dynamic, with complex relations allowed. Anthropomorphic interpretations of the non-human world, allowing for incompleteness in representation, are premised on mobility and kinesis rather than firmness and foundation as ontological and ecological characteristics.

The term 'morphic' itself suggests transformation and becoming without beginning, middle or end. Muecke writes in agreement with this: if 'the metaphor makes a man into a pig...the man *is* a pig, or rather, for the purposes of that process, that moment in the text, he is pig-becoming...[similarly, to say] "You are really only just a dog"...denies a becoming' (*No Road* 231). To identify with the land in this way is to approach both subjectivity and its 'external' environment as always in touch. It is to replace division with relation. There can then be no isolated or disconnected rise in the landscape from which to stand and commandeer knowledge. These grounded poetics oppose traditional western thought's pursuit of indefatigable truths and rock-solid meanings, and it is from

here that my argument turns to the past and how it is discursively perceived as tainting or preventing an authentic non-indigenous belonging.

Carter's suggestion that 'the lie of the land can be a critical tool in reconceptualizing the history of colonization' (*Lie of the Land* 14) opens the way to repositioning the 'bad things' of the past as environmentally constitutive rather than destructive. To imagine a landscape cleared of its 'rubbish' is only to layer over or try to suppress what is still present and in touch with the self. If, as Ahmed proposes, 'in daily meetings with others, subjects are perpetually reconstituted' (7), then an understanding of ontological presence as incomplete and transformative opens up the act of meeting or encounter to an equally unstable and infinite process. An ecology can thus be conceived of as 'a tangled mass of intersecting curves, lines, immanent planes and sections' (Carter, *Lie of the Land* 177-178). To distinguish these kind of relational presences from a whole and embodied rational self (the philosophic equation of being-as-presence), I apply Carter's notion of tracks to invoke an alternative image of ontological making.

Tracks, or traces, are markers of movement and trajectories. They depict becoming and process in a conception of time that is curvilinear rather than chronological, and are to be distinguished from lines which sharply divide. Tracks are the incomplete evidence—sometimes immaterial, sometimes sonic or echoic—of presences and refer to 'happenings'; meetings occur in the 'momentary knotting of two or more tracks' (Carter, *Repressed Spaces* 188). They preclude the possibility of the self's ecological isolation and disavow the idea of an untouched landscape while resisting a history of place that is

continuously rendered, ordered into temporal and spatial units. I compare my understanding of events to Carter's concept of happenings, which are distinct from chronological occurrences.

Paul Virilio, for example, sees a contemporary landscape as being composed of events, 'oriented only by the itinerary of the passerby' (xi). '[I]t is no longer the big events that make up the fabric of the landscape,' he continues, 'but the myriad incidents, minute facts either overlooked or deliberately ignored' (xi) in official accounts of the past. Yet at the centre of Virilio's argument is what he perceives to be the collapse of historical time under the pressures of modernity and mass-media culture. No longer seen as having the capacity for discriminating between 'the "general" and the "particular", the "global" and the "local"' (xi), space under modernity, he argues, is reduced to a time of co-existences, with 'everything...suddenly plunged into a discontinuity that has destroyed the age-old agreement of tenses: the chronaxy that only a little while ago still made sense of history' (xi). Events no longer happen in place, and in a chain of connection, but are conflated for Virilio as one 'universal world time' (xi).

Virilio suggests that it is for fear of the past that the submission of space to time is propelled by a western populace for whom 'a past...gets in the way of the future' (xii). With this, and characteristic of modernity, according to Virilio, personal responsibilities are lost. Consequently, it is 'no longer...the person, the isolated individual who is "at fault" but society and the immediate environment' (xii). Virilio thus desires to locate events, to give them an order and logical reason. In my application of the term, an event,

like a happening, deviates from such a chronological or causal chain, and while I do advocate looking to the in-between fragments and minutiae that are obscured in a history of culturally privileged events, my perspective is not one of loss or collapse when these tracks can no longer be chronologically positioned, but of events existing untethered to time or space and that radiate effects in disordered ways.

Events are singular, but participate in an ecology and, as tracks in the landscape, can never be contained or eradicated from an environment. Our movement in the world is a process of continual encounter and re-encounter (while not ever replicating the first time) with tracks. The representation of a globalised world or a denuded environment as 'trackless wastes' (Carter, *Repressed Spaces* 188) is therefore to deny effective presence and ecological relations, and in my arguing for poetics that do not convey secure or holding representations this idea is significant. If events are tracks or traces on the ground, they 'allude,' according to Carter, 'to whatever cannot be contained' (189). The smooth passage forward, conceptualised for a western culture that looks relentlessly to the future, is destabilised by this reading of tracks, and thus for non-indigenous Australians seeking to transcend all the 'bad things' of the past the potential realisation of this goal is equally challenged.

This being the case, the arrival of anything new in an environment signifies its entrance into different relations, and should not be seen as marking 'a penetrative breach, a widening scar, like the white pages of an opening book' (Carter, *Lie of the Land* 15). This has relevance for my contestation of the idea of solid beginnings and finite endings, since

there can be no clear way in such a view to distinguish an ecological past from an ecological present. Further, this interpretation of tracks provides a means of reconsidering the local as neither assaulted nor invalidated by the global, but as continually negotiated and remade in the interweaving of ecological presences. How the local is understood by this thesis then, is not as a cohesive and contained gathering together of happenings and presences, but as something produced through relation and touch, entailing distance and proximity.

Carter terms this kind of gathering-place a 'thick space of encounter' (*Repressed Spaces* 152). 'Flexible exchanges' rather than 'stiff transactions' (Carter, *Lie of the Land* 12) construct a local ecology that refuses neat quantification as it is formed, but not fixed, in unordered and unpredictable relations. Rather than metrically parcelled out or holistically shared, common ground is always in a state of becoming. Gibson elaborates:

> Once you've redefined "nature", or maybe "environment", you can come to a more viable comprehension of "the local". You might understand how the definition of location in Australia must nowadays take heed of the effects of transnational media, shifting spheres of geopolitical influence, and the epistemological changes brought about in citizens as a result of their increased mobility within systems of communication and information. A notion of locality can entail all these things, without negating the continuing influence of more traditional criteria of place: longitude, latitude, climate… (*South* 225)

Understood in this way, it is possible to suggest that the local provides a means of elaborating belonging as being impossibly solid and authentic while, at the same time, refuses its negation, conveying a shape of being in place that is formed in the processes

of ecological relation. To be grounded is to admit and move with this, implicating the self in the midst of what is happening. The inability to intuit or claim meaning in total does not imply the extraction of the self from its environmental location, ignorant of, or out of touch with, the world in which it lives. Rather, the recognition of what cannot be known admits distance in relation and considers the self's implication in an ecology without claiming the right, and indeed the ability, to mine and reveal in full any ecological other. Such extraction, I suggest, will always evade conclusive divulgence.

Chloe Hooper's *A Child's Book of True Crime* is the third and last novel I discuss. In Chapter Six, through this text, I advocate a poetics of non-indigenous belonging in an Australian landscape filled with past and present crimes that depicts a locality in which the self must continually negotiate its ecological place. Hooper's metaphorics avoid models of sharp separation and smooth reunion, and convey a rough and unsettled landscape tracked by events that elude temporal and spatial order. How *A Child's Book of True Crime* represents the self as it comes into contact with 'bad things' is particularly significant for my opposition to the discourses of nation, environment and non-indigenous belonging that only ever rely on the unification of divided parts in a language of harmony, total reconciliation and equilibrium. Hooper's narrative embraces disequilibrium and disorientation as ontological responses to a confronting and uneaseful past that will not be put to rest, and can certainly not be transcended.

Theories of the uncanny and the ghostly 'return' (utilised in psychoanalytic discourse) are usefully employed here. If one considers spectrality—or what Derrida refers to as non-

present presence active in the world—as being participatory in a relational ecology, then the past is configured as locally constitutive in a model of dynamic gathering. Derrida's hauntology refuses a linkage of present, past and future, and further, destabilises the effects of an event conceptually locked into the same chronological frame. There is no one origin for the spectre as its presence is both a return and a new initiation, and likewise, an event—since its effects extend into an environment—is reactivated by new and shifting contacts in a space of gathering. My reading of this text is informed by Gibson's concept of 'badlands' as landscapes that indicate the haunting at the heart of (post)colonial societies. Through the portrayal of a community disturbed by local crimes, Hooper aligns the unsettling effects of 'bad things' with the disorientating or ontologically destabilising consequences of existing in an ecology where the past and its events still confront the self in everyday ways.

I apply the idea of promiscuous effects to Hooper's poetics which challenge any sense of a firm ontological or historical truth. Like the spread of radiation, which I metaphorically harness, factual knowledge of the past—premised on 'evidence', itself a partial concept—is provisional and porous, and cannot override or settle the impacts of what is not discerned or contained by official narrative. Considering events and their effects as ecologically promiscuous enables a view of belonging and human subjectivity as being continually unsettled in contact with past or present occurrences that shift in relation to the self in untimely and unordered ways. While effects, like an event, are singular, they have no one meaning: as tracks, they are scattered about and move with an ecologically unstable surface. The damaging elements that rubbish a healthy and holding Australian

environment are thus returned to an ecological milieu of relations in the form of a contested capacity for non-indigenous Australians to 'clean up' their environment and claim a stable belonging. Carter's writings on spatial phobias and nausea-inducing disorientations for the subject in public spaces provide a reference point here, since I advocate a view of being 'at home' that is always unsettled.

A Child's Book of True Crime is a 'noisy' text in Carter's terms of a polyphonic topography, resounding with crossing tracks, unreconciled pasts and discontinuous, if continually produced, narratives. A text that pursues safety in different modes of containment is mono-vocal by contrast, out of touch with an environment that is transformative, disordered and refuses control. How we represent the world is a testament to how we inhabit it, and thus poetics such as these foreground a living in the world that acknowledges relation and evades appropriation, or conclusive commodification, of an other. To apply these understandings to contemporary discursive and narrative currents in Australia is to overcome a deadlocked language of 'crisis' and disorder, with 'mess' and wasted pasts rejected from ecological relation and significance. It is also to suggest that rather than lagging behind other movements in environmental thought that address the subject's situation in the world, fictional narratives are already there, interpreting and responding to an active ground. As Harrison writes, 'language is the ultimate "place" of human habitation' (200). With neither the ground nor representation ever complete and stable, however, this place, like any other, quivers with the dynamics of ecological relations. By arguing that textual poetics are relationally constitutive, literature can be

considered as an active element in an ecology, both representing and participating in the world in its constant becoming.

This thesis brings together the insights of contemporary literary and cultural theory to introduce a new way of reading Australian fictional representations of the relations between humans and non-human landscapes. In doing so, fictional discourse is considered as one of many cultural narratives, thus extending the frame of analysis for literary theory and the significance of literature to cultural critique. My extensive application of Carter's work to discursive and fictional landscapes, and the ecological/ontological forms offered by and mirrored in narrative, is innovative in this way, as is my reading of his folded and unsettled ground through Deleuze and Probyn's folded ontology. The environment occupies a prominent place in western cultural and political debate at this time and, rather than seeing the literary or the discursive as subordinate to the anxieties of global ecological disorder, this thesis advocates their importance as cultural, and thus ecological, referents *and* participants. Further, when a language of ecology and environment is applied to the poetic, the privileging of actions over images that characterises much environmental discourse, and its concern for the state of 'our' living conditions, is challenged. Concepts of environment and ecology such as I have proposed provide an alternative language for being in the world that extends beyond delimited understandings of each, such as the realm of 'nature' or the 'green stuff' surrounding us.

The land is a familiar, even perennial, motif in Australian literature and cultural narratives and this thesis contributes to its prominent position in cultural discourse. In the perspectives I offer, a new role for land and environment is identified in critical thinking that has relevance for (post)colonial studies in general, and specifically for an analysis of the anxieties, turned to 'crises', that the legacies of imperialism's damage are seen to entail for guilt-burdened non-indigenous populations. The dominant contemporary discourse of settler belonging in Australia remains that of social, cultural and ecological dysfunction. However, my argument offers a different intervention into the debate over non-indigenous guilt and disremembering, and retrains a focus on the ontological and ecological consequences of non-indigenous not-belonging to an analysis of how unsettled and anxious conditions are represented and why. Such a shift will initiate a critique of the politics involved in any act of representation, and therefore the relations that constitute the subject's ecological place. Through this approach, unsettlement can be read as ontological and ecological becomings instead of heralding total collapse and loss.

To point out the poetic synonymity between environmental 'mess' and the legacies of colonial or contemporary social and political damage is also to reconfigure the space of the local, or the everyday, as one that exists in relation to these effects and consequences, making them not just immediate presences requiring consideration, but as no less belonging in an ecology than any other constituent. Nothing and no one can be placed ecologically 'outside'. This, of course, has implications for the way contemporary Australian culture approaches its waste and frames its dealings with what is, indeed, a shadowed, and, for many, hurtful past. If the meanings of destruction are concluded, an

event becomes conceptually conquered and put away, out of memory, touch and complex effect. While the official rhetoric and structures, operating as if the world did consist of sharp edges and smooth ground, lie on top on the land, there is an environment that exists in relation to these that shifts and folds, refusing totality and metonymic order.

For non-indigenous Australians seeking to overcome 'bad' pasts and articulate their meaningful place on the land, an understanding of ecological belonging in this way will neither invalidate nor approve of the motivations that drive the desire to belong. What it will insist upon, and demonstrate, is that so much is excluded in a model of firm and settled belonging. An environment, like the self, can never be wholly charted and known, and discussions of non-indigenous belonging must take account of this. In the ecology I propose, the representation of subjects as discrete, contained and isolated from one another—with all its implications of certainty and security—is confronted by an image of the self in the world configured through distance, closeness and negotiation. My point is not to invalidate the imperative to belong, but to deny this a final and fixed destination. Thus, as relations between subject and environment are made, unmade and re-made again, the possibilities for living also become, infinitely mutable, and risk, as an environmental characteristic, can be claimed as productively disconcerting, generating new relations and meanings in a complex, transforming ecology.

Chapter 1

Fictions of Safety

In her public address delivered at the 2002 Adelaide Writers' Week, 'Why I am Not Reading Fiction' (later published as 'The Present in Fiction', in *Timepieces*), Drusilla Modjeska spoke of an emerging predicament for contemporary Australian fiction. For her, fiction's popularity was falling far behind that of non-fiction texts—memoir, history, political commentary—indicating that the fiction coming out of Australia was not providing what the Australian reading public wanted to engage with. Her elaboration of this was framed by recent events on a local and a global media stage. September 11, 2001 was still monopolising attention in images and rhetoric, while, in Australia, government and public reaction to the issue of border protection, and against asylum seekers, had reached an apparent peak that, for Modjeska, represented the sublimation of truth to the narrative pursuit of 'political expediency' (*Timepieces* 208). 'When the press is full of government fictions and lies, and corporate fictions and lies,' she quipped, 'it's hard for a novel to compete' ('Why I am Not Reading Fiction').

Modjeska's concerns for contemporary Australian fiction were contextualised in a broader frame of western culture which, embracing modernity, she argued, had transformed the meanings of fiction and reality as they had previously been understood. Citing J.G. Ballard's perception of a hyper-real world now 'ruled by fictions of every kind' (Modjeska, *Timepieces* 202) in a culture of technological convergence, mass-marketing and commodification, Modjeska insisted that now, given this culture, '[t]he fiction is already there. The writer's task is to invent the reality' (Ballard qtd. in

Timepieces 202). In addition, she pointed to the orthodoxies of contemporary critical theory which she identified as having arrested the possibilities of postmodernism through an unrelenting emphasis upon alienation, dysfunction and disintegration. Simultaneously, in her view, the pull of the global market for Australian authors, the majority of whom find it nearly impossible to sustain a living through their writing alone, had induced the suitable tailoring of Australian fiction to an international audience, resulting in a continued rehashing of 'our' mythical past. Though perhaps unfamiliar to an international audience, these figures and events seemed entirely familiar to Modjeska, adhering to a national paradigm in which fabulous creatures, settings, disasters and heroics inform a traditional rendering of Australian history

In these texts a 'non-specific Australia' circulates, 'without much to do or much to say to the [place] we live in' ("Why I am Not Reading Fiction"), reinforcing 'the notion that what we have to offer is exotic, not the stuff of lives lived in this particular experience of global modernity' (*Timepieces* 209). Compounding this was a strongly conservative government busy fostering racial hostility and social inequalities in Australia. The calibration of thought over feeling in postmodern theory combined with the Howard government's lack of empathy towards the socially disadvantaged were thus implicated in the demise of fiction's popularity as a 'disenchantment that was already beginning among readers accelerated' (206). In Modjeska's mind, contemporary Australian fiction had become 'safe' (214), divorced from the realities of everyday subjects in their environments. '[O]ur novels have lost their urgency' (214), she insisted.

I want to take Modjeska's concerns as a starting point for discussing notions of safety, and the ways in which textual and discursive representations seek to convey secure ontological and ecological conditions for the self in the world. Her emphasis on reality, or truth, as something lacking in contemporary Australian fiction claims the novel's range as that of the real, not meaning necessarily the genre of realism, but the text as responsive to and poetically in touch with the environment of its production. Such writing would attend to the 'conditions on the ground' (*Timepieces* 205) in Australia, speaking from or relating to a 'local cultural landscape' (205). The lack of contemporary Australian fiction that explored 'the lives we are living right now, here in Australia' (208) signified to Modjeska a withdrawal from reality and thus a retreat into safety for, as she explained, the realm of the real is urgent, risky and socially unsettling. Her allusion to unsettlement in the experience of touching upon or articulating a relation to the self's environment aligns safety with stability, and I contend that this equation informs much cultural and political discourse in contemporary Australia which depicts an unstable world in a language of ontological, social and environmental 'crisis'.

Modjeska's use of the ground as a reference for an uneasy and uncertain reality indicates an environment that is implicitly 'rough' and, in her argument, responsive narrative is configured as addressing rather than ignoring or attempting to smooth over this irregular texture. The ground that is the present in fiction, evidencing what are the 'conditions of our living' (211), for her, has fallen away from the attention of fiction writers whose narratives are undisturbed (and thus undisturbing to their readers) by the tensions and tremors of a local environment. Being grounded in Modjeska's use of the term—and how

this thesis also understands it—means working from, and acknowledging, an immediate landscape. Her appeal is for stories that would make sense of an unsettling time, and speak out of unsettlement, considering its implications for a social body. Modjeska's invocation of a 'distress[ed]' (206) society, failing to find fictional responses to its local conditions, resonates with Robert Manne's description of contemporary Australian culture as 'a culture of forgetting' (*Culture of Forgetting* 191) in which '[n]othing has weight. Nothing has meaning. Nothing matters' (137). In Manne's opinion, a pervasive desire to look away from issues of ethical and political force in Australia sees the production of the same safe narratives that Modjeska identifies: out of touch with the ground, and thus environmentally extracted.

Instead of seeing this perceived lack of responsiveness to an unstable ground in Australian fiction (or as Manne has it, culture) as a retreat from confrontation with social dis-ease, I consider the construction of safe narratives, disconnected from an environment, as desiring to convey ontological surety and firm belongings in the midst of various uncertainties. Since the subject who writes or engages with narrative exists in an ecological milieu—that is, we are all in the world, living in relation to things—then the representation of such existences as precluded or protected from the ontologically unsettling implications of ecological relations indicates the construction of safety to be an issue of poetics. For Modjeska, who expresses the possibilities for a grounded narrative that would 'show...the familiar afresh and giv[e] shape to the strange' (*Timepieces* 215), a story that maintains touch with its immediate environment will entail a dynamics of proximity and distance. Conversely, a narrative that enables the self to feel

environmentally secure within its limits, with order imposed and ontological certainty provided, will metonymically link the self to the world, denying ambiguity and the ontologically and culturally disturbing forces of mutable truths.

I take Carter's explanation of the ontological motivations that lay behind imperial environmental practices as an interpretative analogy for the concept of safe narratives I interrogate. This comparison between a textual and physical landscape is not unfamiliar in Australian cultural studies that have frequently explained the processes of colonisation in terms of marking or inscribing the landscape. However, where Carter explains the ontological shape imposed upon the land in the colonial gaze, he also describes a correlated, imagined corporeal form, situated in and relating to an environment that is useful for representing the subject as it is conceived by securing narratives. The fantasy of secure ground informed colonial occupation and settlement in Australia and, according to Carter, made for the belief that if solidity, certainty and containment were conferred upon the land, ontological wholeness would reflect back onto the self. Moreover, in conceptualising the ground as a poetic referent for the self in the world, a literal topography and colonial ideologies of the subject's relation to it provide a useful metaphoric language that has application for the physical *and* immaterial encounters that participate in the representation and constitution of an ecology.

As Carter's image of the colonial stage rightly suggests, the Australian environment was conceptualised by colonisers as a passive surface open to conquest and affording unencumbered movement to the coloniser-body. Mobility was prized in an ideology of

progress that sought to harness and compact the land for this purpose, and consequently to eradicate what was considered an obstacle to directed passage. The clearing of the land, and its conceptual flattening—removing the psychological impediments to spatial claiming and conquest—were undertaken to ensure uninhibited movements, and at the same time to cement 'unimpeachably firm foundations' (*Lie of the Land* 2) for the colonial self in its newly claimed place. A correlation is implicit here between a solid and certain landscape (cleaned of potentially lurking surprises) and a sure and stable ontology. Such security inferred the capacity for the coloniser to push back the frontier and claim more territory, while a resolute identity was assured by the subject's certain and erect physical and psychological stance in an 'external' environment, with all impermanencies and ambiguities set outside the self.

Verticality, in Carter's view, was essential to the coloniser's conceptual control of the lie of the land where less erect physical positions on the ground would suggest a regressive ontological shape. To assure progress, process (which is becoming and mutable) had to be arrested, and thus figures such as the old man and the child—as signifiers of ontological process—represented an untenable challenge to the privileged up-right and certain subject: '[t]he old man has no use for open spaces,' Carter explains, 'he takes advantage of the bank to rest. The child has no use for plains; he rolls in the useless sand' (*Lie of the Land* 5). '[A] fear of growing old (or young)' (4-5) testified to the colonisers' paranoia of the irregular landscape and unfamiliar environment that confronted them. To effectively conquer a landscape then, the need for linear, regular and continuous lines demarcating boundaries between the self and its environment was vital, and could not

allow the inconclusivity of becomings. For the coloniser entering a different landscape, there was 'an overwhelming need to clear away doubt' (9). In a model of a one-way relation between subject and environment, the environment had to be imagined without temporal variation or spatial dynamics, and 'have no effect on the objects it contains' (Carter, 'Dark with Excess' 127).

Turning the ground into a grid for metrical mapping and movement signified self-possession in the midst of 'external' chaos, or the unpredictability of an unknown ground. As Carter argues, the colonial 'eagerness to remove every vestige of vegetation' (*Lie of the Land* 9) from a landscape, as well as dispossessing and silencing its indigenous inhabitants, staged its own vision of the environment as empty. A neutralised topography activated the 'myth of the virgin land' (McClintock 30), where even, un-promiscuous space conferred righteousness and legitimacy to colonial occupation. In the smoothing of ground and the laying out of fences and frontiers, the shadows of instability could be pushed back, with knowledge and certainty kept in and the uncivilised and threatening shut out. The natural chiaroscuro, or the interplay of light and dark in the forming and deforming of shadows, that patterned the topography suggested the frightening indeterminacy that compromised an enlightened, secure self. As non-indigenous settlement extended its presence in the Australian landscape, a primary intention remained to stabilise the ground, and provide a secure place for command and survey.

What I want to particularly emphasise here is the way in which, poetically as well as through acts of physical clearance and demarcation, the colonial subject was seen to be

'held' in spatial place and order by these lineaments of conquest and settlement. Security entailed the holding of the self, firmly, in an environment by ideological, conceptual, and material means. Carter alludes to this when he describes 'a permanent ring of light' (*Lie of the Land* 9)—in keeping with the landscape's theatrically conceived proportions—that enclosed official narratives of colonisation and settlement (as the foundation of Australian time and history) in a chronology of illuminated events. Out of dynamic relation with its environment—as this would mean a wavering of ontological boundaries—the self on the stage, held by the light of official narrative, was further secured in its claim to the land. Flattened and cleared, the landscape's own amplitudes, recording presence and relation in 'another kind of history' (9) were silenced by this narrative line.

With the securing of a firm, bounded place on the land, the self placed in relation to its landscape becomes fixed and, in such an environment as the colonial mind imagined, ontological and ecological security is assured as the uncertainties and ambiguities of the ground—environmental noises, tracks, 'secrets'—are denied. The contact between foot and ground in such poetics relays a hard edge of meeting, with no reverberations or tensions admitted that would imply ontological becomings and a different environmental relation. Carter describes the imperial endeavour in terms of billiard balls on a flat and bordered table that imitate individual and contained subjects—'perfectly circular projectiles' (*Lie of the Land* 13)—encountering each other only to hit together and shoot off. 'The corollary of flattening out space and time,' he writes, 'was that no convergence of interests could ever be discovered: no dimples, folds, or slopes remained in the social

field [since they were erased from the ground] where different folk might roll together' (13). Local relations are disregarded or forbidden in the pursuit of metaphysical authority and ontological inviolability.

This is where I see the relevance of Carter's ideas to the questions Modjeska raises for current Australian fiction and to my own examination of securing narratives that seek to regulate a distance between the self and its immediate, or local, environment. I argue that, like the novels that construct a safe narrative space for their readers, the colonial desire to flatten and contain a colonised landscape, where the (non-indigenous) self can then be safely held, is predicated upon an awareness that their poetic and physical ground is unstable. However, by smoothing over a disordered (since it is opposed to colonial notions of order) environment where human subjectivity is uncertainly composed, the local 'voices, shadows, [and] directions' (Carter, *Lie of the Land* 18), that are never settled in a single meaning or articulated state, can be discounted.

Further, as the synonymity between Modjeska and Carter's depictions of an ungrounded subject and collective reveal, the strategies of separating the self from dynamic ecological relation for the purpose of firming belonging are not consigned to past ideologies or practices of territorial occupation. Security, considered as containment and expressed as a desired ontological and ecological condition in Australia today, demands closer interrogation. As it represents the milieu of relations in which the subject exists, it is appropriate to apply a language of ecology to the shape attributed to the Australian nation in the discourses I discuss. That is, as the nation-state is imagined, so is a national

ecology, implying the ways in which national subjects relate and the poetic forms that these relations take on. Within this, I discern a prevalent conception—perpetuating Carter's coloniser clearing and compacting the landscape—of the ideal national subject that is held by the certainties of a smooth and solid national ground.

The Nation that Holds

Modjeska's reference to current political discourse in Australia, inducing an uneasy constituency and thus informing the need for responsive narratives, brings attention to how the poetics of nation and national belonging operate in the socio-political landscape. Her understanding of the local accommodates the national as the effects of its institutions and their adherent ideologies are ascribed an everyday and immediate force for its population. In my discussion of political rhetoric and the discourse of nation I consider how the poetics of security and containment inform contemporary notions of nationhood, and in doing so, reflect the safe fictions Modjeska indicates. The nation in dominant political rhetoric is whole, secure and transcendent of ontological uncertainty, for, as Michael Dillon writes, '[s]ecurity is that value which modern understandings of the political and modern practices of politics put beyond question' (156). Boundedness, assurity and the solidity of self and place are evident within this discourse as the favoured models of national belonging.

In the lead up to the 1996 federal election (which he was to win) John Howard infamously argued that Australians should feel 'relaxed and comfortable' (qtd. in Rundle 54) about themselves, inclusive of the nation's colonial past and still-contested histories.

Self-positioned as championing 'the priorities of the majority of Australians' (Gordon, 'Electorate' 5), Howard's directive as prime minister was to counter what he saw as undue and unfair representations of the Australian nation made unsure of itself by recent so-called 'minority' victories. The Mabo judgement, the increasingly prominent testimonies of the Stolen Generation, debates over indigenous genocide, sovereignty, and the contentions of an official apology to Aboriginal Australians, underscored this agenda, indicating that Howard's 'majority' meant non-indigenous voters, 'embattled' by the political privileging of 'minority' rights. The notion that 'finally we were going to get a government for us' (Glascott 2)—directed at 'ordinary' Australians—was implicated in the rhetoric of redress and restored equality that Howard's key terms such as 'balance', 'commonsense' (Manne, *Barren Years* 4) and 'a commitment to fairness' (Rundle 55) supported. This Rundle refers to as Howard's 'agenda of invisible reunification' (24): an emphasis on social unity and coherence as the necessary virtues of a healthy and settled national body.

Howard's concept of unity has consistently circled issues of national identity which, in his terms of a balanced society, is securely homogenic and a-historic. Claims such as Australians 'travel(ling) a single path' of 'common purpose' (Howard qtd. in Rundle 20)—companions together in nationhood—highlight uniformity as a characteristic of belonging, excluding difference as something that would disturb 'the pure Australian spirit' (Rundle 27). Mobilising what Morley and Robins refer to as 'the comforting absolute' (25) of the secure home, Howard's rhetoric invests in the whole, the authentic, and an assured right to place, appealing to perceptions of a lost social and cultural

stability that only a reaffirmed bounded collective can repair. Like the colonial view of a stable ground claimed through the eradication of disorder, Howard's ideal nation/national self is secured if the boundaries of home—and certain identity—hold well enough against indeterminacy. National security and ontological assurity are correlative.

A discourse of 'smooth and natural continuity' (Burke 221) is evident in Howard's poetics of national identity and belonging in nation. This is informed by a liberal ideology in which the subject, hermetically sealed and whole, retains ontological integrity never relinquished to the social, but still participating as an organic unit in a stable national body. In Howard's liberal perspective—as Carter's billiard table metaphor suggests—the free-moving, discrete individual connects with discrete others to make a community on a smooth and contained surface. His political platforms recurrently return to the collective units of the family and the nation, and the individualistic operations of the market economy, presenting in these models the qualities of his securing narratives for the individual and the state (Rundle 36). This is a view that looks to the future while promising safety and prosperity in the present.

Liberal values such as individual autonomy and choice, free from state intervention in the capitalist system, can be seen to unfix the self from a stable position to be left at the mercy of market chaos. The invocation of containment as security, however, provides 'an umbilical political linkage between ideal images of the individual subject and the metasubject of the nation, state, or civilisation' (Burke xxxvii). Poetically, collectivity and individualism operate in Howard's hands in complimentary ways. Constituting the

'big family of we' (Bauman, 'Soil, Blood' 678), national identity encases its subjects in the 'gratifying safety' of 'inclusion, acceptance and confirmation' (679), while promising the autonomy of individual security and progress—an atomised nuclearity within the bounds of protection. Ontological security is conferred by the nuclear family structure which then stands for the nation. Today, Rundle observes, 'the nuclear family [appears as] the only significant social group worth talking about' in conservative politics, 'the only form of human connection—aside from patriotism—that can be seen as real' (39). Ghassan Hage argues that in this configuring of nation-as-family, the ontological pursuit of 'fullness' ('Nation-Building' 75) is realised in a complete, inviolate self that is thus protected.

The importance of the holding nation-family presents as incontestable in Howard's rhetoric. It is organic and therefore impervious to historicity and change, signifying a certainty and security in its structure 'that was always there, that is' (Rundle 17). Howard's 2000 Anzac Day speech revealed this thinking when he mused upon 'a time and a world in which our nation's spirit was born' (qtd. in Shanahan 1). Reworking war deaths as a solidifying foundation for national identity—or what McClintock terms 'a single genesis narrative' (44)—Howard claimed: '[w]e come to draw upon [the Anzacs'] stirring example', a 'creed to which we can all aspire' (1). As this speech suggests, the 'making' of nation is considered chronologically despite an insistence on the a-historical. By conceptualising belonging to nation as a linear path of inheritance, an image of progress or national maturation can be presented in a frame of securing mythology. Thus

the nation, like the family, is invoked as a pre-social institution where, as Rundle describes, 'physical separation doesn't matter, because the heart cannot be divided' (37).

Zygmunt Bauman describes the paradox of the modern nation that seeks to provide 'a centre that holds' ('Searching for a Centre' 144) while simultaneously pursuing 'unstoppable transcendence' (144). The pursuit of more—more freedoms, more rights, more knowledge and more power—as a characteristic of modernity, is where Bauman situates the rise of nationalism with this central tension over containment and extension. Howard's recent comments on Australia's position as a 'model society' in a global context reflect this. His statement that the nation's 'respect and esteem in the world [is] now higher than it has ever been in history' (qtd. in Gordon, 'Building' 4) suggests a dual desire for stability and progress. The nation, as a unit, grows and legitimises its place on an international stage. In considering the nation as a subject Hage explains that it is the nation's awareness of its standing as one nuclear entity among many that constructs its own sense of selfhood, existing 'from the moment of its birth as an internationally recognised unit…an international subject' ('Nation-Building' 83). 'Like any little child' (84) the nation's passage of progress relies upon recognition by, and identification with, other subjects. 'Only then,' Hage continues, 'can the young unified communal body become a national subject, entering the inter-national symbolic order and acceding to the prized national "we"': that is, 'we are' (84).

The drive for nationhood thereby co-operates with the assertion of stability and a claimed certainty of political and psychic borders. A coherent nation rebuffs indeterminacy and

offers a place of unity and solidarity in which the subject's individual desires are still prioritised. It is thus, Hage argues, that national identity is made synonymous with being itself, as being-in-the-nation is seen to provide ontological certitude. Modernity's 'endemic indetermination' (Bauman, 'Searching for a Centre' 143) which, as Morley and Robins write, has 'progressively eroded territorial frontiers and boundaries'—breaking the continuity of identity assumed in 'older certainties and foundations' (5)—is remedied in the ascription of maturity to national development as it carries its subjects forward. A directive for 'standing upright, shedding hesitations…making common reason rule, and altogether substituting a solid reality for a vague and elusive possibility' (Bauman, 'Searching for a Centre' 142) therefore bridges the 'opposition between openness and closure, indeterminacy and determination, possibility and inevitability' (143) that plagues ontological security.

Making solid and stable the indeterminacy of what Carter's child or old man represents, the national subject can operate smoothly in a duality of 'systemness and contingency' (Bauman 'Searching for a Centre' 143). The nation offers a passage out of uncertain states; here 'the person can become a person that counts'; 'he can have dignity, and he can hope: that is, he can be' (Hage, 'Nation-Building' 75). Still, Hage argues, it is 'a belief in the possibility of the communal home rather than a belief in its absolute existence' (80) that sustains an image of 'homely living' (80) in the nation. That is, it is only through an awareness of incomplete security that the pursuit of secure conditions, necessary to progress, occurs, and the imperative to eradicate or expel threat is central in this. The representation of the nation as safe and coherent relies upon the imagining or

inference of 'outside' disorder. Dillon argues, '[t]he more we demand and insist upon security the more manifold become the insecurities which feed the impulse for security' ('Security' 161).

McClintock describes the routines of housekeeping as 'a semiotics of boundary maintenance' (170) and for the nation-as-home, the prescription of unity and totality is dependent upon spatial regulation. Within national boundaries, and predicated on their continuity, the national subject is endowed with the promise of security 'as a guarantee of the future' (Burke xxxiv). For the Howard government, and its commitment to the nation, the boundary confers identity. To be 'secure' is therefore 'to be Australian' (Burke vxiv). Unified identity strengthens security: '[a]s Australians, we are all one' (Rundle 17). What perceptually threatens national security thus becomes a personal as well as a collective affront. Burke illustrates these ideologies at work in a speech made by the then prime minister, Paul Keating, while visiting Jakarta in 1992. Calling for the two countries to 'participate fully in the rapid economic growth of the Asia-Pacific region', and thus invoking participation and 'common destiny' in a transnational economy, Keating pointed to the necessity of Indonesia maintaining its 'national resilience' while Australians would similarly 'work co-operatively, combine our talents and energy, harness our human and material strength, and make Australia more truly one nation' (Burke xli).

Keating articulated this goal as transforming Australian identity to something 'consistent with the multicultural realities of our society, and the final passing of the vestiges of our

colonial past' (qtd. in Burke xli). Discursive continuity with Howard is evident in the sense that, according to Burke, Keating invoked 'the ideal meaning of security' (xli) in his speech, advocating unification and the subsuming of 'difference and conflict' (for instance, the speech was given five months after the Dili massacre, in which Australia's complicity has been documented [Birmingham]) in a 'common project of nationhood, development and modernity' (xli). In terms of a market economy with its commodities of exchange, engagement is visualised here as contact between two 'common' but hermetically sealed and distinct nations. Further, with the unified nation rhetorically reconciled to its role in the traffic of market exchange, there is 'no need', according to Rundle, 'to reflect on the fragile or ambivalent nature' of the collective body, as 'any difficulties you may have in keeping yours together within the context of a global market' (37) becomes a product of 'external' factors that the organic unit cannot control, rather than structural elements within the nation.

Howard acknowledged this in 1997 when he claimed that '[p]art of the job of a Prime Minister in these contemporary times' entails 'enthusiastically embracing change and globalisation [while still] embrac[ing] what is secure, what people see as "home"'. 'I want to provide Australians with this security,' he continued, 'as we embrace, as we must and will, a new and vastly different future' (qtd. in Burke 187). To summarise his statement, the nation provides—as much as it can in the storms of the global market—the holding shape of secure belonging and ontological certainty for its subjects. What can be figured as a threat to nation in this paradigm therefore comes to stand for an attack on the rights and belonging of 'the fully realised Australian subject' (Burke 36). Howard's

repeated belief that '[w]e are special individuals, not special needs' (qtd in Burke 195) is central to how the unified nation is conceived. National harmony and totality rely on cultural hegemony: individual units moving on the same level playing field in a landscape without difference or instability.

Miriam Dixson argues for the importance of a nation that holds, and states that 'the "holding" capacities of a society concern those influences making a social coherence which works at a satisfactory day-to-day level' (4)—that is, in the space of the local. Her contention subscribes to the model of nationhood as a maturing structure that in its own cohesive growth provides correlative maturing and nurturing conditions for the subjects it protects. Contextualising this thinking through object-relations theory, and Donald Winnicott's concept of the mother holding her child as it enters the symbolic—thus containing its consequential unconscious anxieties—Dixson advocates a structure of nation that has at its centre a core or parent body out of which the nation's holding capacities emerge and strengthen. In the absence of this, she insists, national identity, and the multiple identities that come under its umbrella, 'risk exploding into psychosis' (11). If Australians 'are really serious about diversity,' she continues, 'we must be equally serious about cohesion' (7).

Problematically, the core body Dixson identifies in Australia is what she refers to as the 'Anglo-Celtic majority', thus invoking Howard's championing of this apparently forgotten group. Her concerns for the loss of this majority's ability to hold the national body together are also similar to Howard's and I will discuss these shortly. For now, it is

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important to emphasise that central to her vision of a 'good', workable, and harmonious nation is a securing force that operates at its heart. This corporeal metaphor is most apt since, at the foundation of what she perceives to be the core's holding ability, the operation of feeling and commonly held attachments provide the 'psychic depths' (15) required to help 'bond the population' (50) together. At a time when, according to Dixson, 'many Australians [have] come to feel abandoned by parliament, the nation's central representative institution', and global forces threaten national boundaries, the 'emotional strength' (18) required to secure its holding must be found through other means.

Dixson gestures towards cultural narratives in which 'common ground, common standards and [a] common frame of reference' (48) are asserted to achieve the desired emotional ties she outlines. Affective stories of nation and national cultural identity proffering these elements, she argues, will initiate 'solidarity and belongingness' (163) for those within the nation-space. Reciprocally, a certifying of belonging through identification with these narratives will secure and protect the nation itself. A holding power is thus attributed to such narratives which, while contemporarily accessed and active, are organically produced, garnered over time and through experience in a common environment. Howard also expresses his belief in the power of bonding and organic narratives, insisting that for the nation as a whole 'the symbols we hold dear...and the attitudes we have...are not things generated by [those] who seek to tell us what our identity ought to be. Rather...they grow out of the spirit of the people' (qtd. in Brett 25). As it is the 'Anglo-Celts' to whom Dixson attributes a centralised capacity for providing

national cohesion, it is the narratives attached to this (homogenic) identity that Dixson considers the most necessary for the secured national subject.

The concept of holding narratives is figured in the reflections of both Marion Halligan and Robert Dessaix on the cultural purpose of stories, and it is useful to briefly elaborate on these. Writing in the context of the centennial of Australian federation, Halligan argues for the identity-affirming capacities of narratives that can speak to a national collective, and in doing so maintain a 'fruitful order in the society, the house, we live in' (Halligan 12). With the social thus given as the space of belonging, she invokes a national ecology that is held in health, prosperity and safety by the collective stories told within it. Again, as with Dixson, there is a dual purpose proposed in valuing such stories: if these narratives are 'found…preserved and guarded' (8) then the national self is protected from ontological disorder and loss. '[U]nless our stories are kept we will perish', (10) Halligan insists.

Finally, the ability of the national subject to place trust in their stories is a particular point of Halligan's, and both she and Dessaix infer a trusted relation between the self and its cultural (given as national) environment, that will strengthen and affirm a secure belonging in a national space. The capacity of a national or common culture to provide cohesion, depth of connection to place, ontological certainty *and* civility is propounded by Dessaix, and he poetically conveys this through an image of a holding hearth around which 'our' stories are told and shared. Though all may come and sit by its warmth—and thus it is unexclusive in this way—the hearth Dessaix conceives is securing upon arrival.

It designates home. In the conceptual space created through this exchange and gathering process, 'we can wander at will and in safety' (Dessaix 378) amongst the comfort of 'moral certitudes, [a] sense of scripture [and] of rituals observed' (379).

It is not the import or effect of symbolic narratives at work in culture that I contest in these perspectives, but rather the conclusivity, certainty and solidity that they are seen to confer on a collective body. In the ecology that holds the self firmly in place, an environment is stabilised and smooth relations imagined to constitute a unified whole. Certainly national identities are produced in the telling of stories concerning nation. As Muecke writes, these narratives 'lead us to say what we are or what we want to be, they intertwine personal and public identities, making Australians of us' (*No Road* 221). What I argue, however, is that the subject informed by such stories is neither certain nor secure from ontological transformation, while national identity itself is continually reconfigured in the process of narrative telling. To cite Muecke further, symbolic narratives are 'impure', and can 'neither totally invent, nor totally reflect social realities' (221). As stories are told, different 'modes and moments' (Burke 38) of subjectivity are generated.

The evident power of symbolic national narratives, while attesting to their influence, also reveals the instability of national cultural identity. Muecke refers to the 1992 Mabo decision in this light, conceptualising the cultural impact of Mabo in Australia as instigating 'the space of the next creation' (*No Road* 231) in a national imaginary. 'Mabo,' he states, 'gave Australians the opportunity to say that the country we thought was fully occupied, fully "covered" by a history which has its point of origin and

completion in London, is not at all finished' (228). Moreover, in terms of 'national consciousness' (227)—as Mabo officially instigated the recognition of indigenous history—there was then (again officially, and in terms of the national symbolic) 'Aboriginal "memorial" [and] Aboriginal death to be reckoned with' (227), 'inclusive of black deaths in custody', 'genocide and…martyrdom' (228). Muecke thus advocates an understanding of national narratives as mutable, never total, and open to unsettlement which then initiates national and, in touch with this, individual becomings.

'The Break-Up of Australia' and a Non-Indigenous 'Crisis' of Belonging

Narratives of indigenous experience officially admitted into the public forum—such as those connected to the Mabo decision—during the 1990s did indeed effect a national landscape. Noel Pearson described the resulting 'social, political and psychological turmoil' occasioned by the Native Title Act and the 1997 *Bringing Them Home* Report into the Stolen Generations as something that the nation 'always had to have' (Read, *Belonging* 19). Questions of non-indigenous belonging and ownership were raised in the public forum as an increasing awareness of colonial and subsequent non-indigenous actions against Aboriginal populations confronted and unsettled traditionally triumphant accounts of national history. Manne, for instance, documents the 'culturally transforming impact' (*In Denial* 5) of the Stolen Generation inquiry, and its subsequent shifting of the stories and issues involved with the government's removal of indigenous children 'from the margin to the centre of Australian self-understanding and contemporary political debate' (6). He explains:

> Many stolen generations memoirs were now published; films produced; plays staged; songs sung. Hundreds of thousands of citizens signed what were called—in a language borrowed from the Aborigines—Sorry Books. A National Sorry Day was established. It soon seemed to many Australians that no historical question was of greater importance...no moral matter of greater significance to the life of the nation than the apology to the stolen generations. (6)

Yet at this time such 'post-colonial uncertainties' were also seen as the 'affliction' (Read, *Belonging* 10) of non-indigenous Australians. Compounding these changes in national— or perhaps more pertinently, non-indigenous—awareness, public and governmental anxieties over asylum seekers became prominent, while the concerns for national cohesion that Pauline Hanson and her One Nation party generated and fanned highlighted a discourse of non-indigenous fear and alienation in their 'own' land. The idea that 'minority' groups were overtaking the interests of 'mainstream' Australians informed these particular debates, and, as I have mentioned, this belief was a fundamental element of Howard's electoral campaign and subsequent politics.

Self-positioned as an opponent of his predecessor's ideologies, Howard railed against what he saw as former Prime Minister Keating's 'stranding' (Rundle 57) of 'majority' Australians in favour of 'political correctness' and in support of intellectual 'elites'. The idea that 'if you dare say anything conventional on [certain issues] you're a sexist, a racist, a misogynist, a this or that' (Howard qtd. in Rundle 19), informed by 'fashion' and 'invoked against achievement' ('Constitutional Preamble' qtd. in Rundle 24), was taken by Howard as sounding the death-knell of social equality and national cohesion. In his representation, a nation that is not united with its differences smoothly held together is sharply divided and ideologically oppressive. At this point it is necessary to explore the

poetics of division applied by Howard and others to a social and environmental milieu, in which the antithesis of a desired national whole is represented by a dysfunctional, superficial and fragmented Australia.

Howard's antipathy toward 'noisy minority groups' (Rundle 13) was evidenced in his refusal to apologise to indigenous Australians at the Reconciliation Convention in 1997. His reading of 'positive discrimination' (Brett 33) into what saying 'sorry' for non-indigenous policies and practices of the past would signify, enabled Howard to claim a freedom for 'all' Australians that was compromised by any apparent favour shown to indigenous peoples. Inclusive in this liberty, he argued, was the ability of the national subject to exist 'free from anxiety, free from guilt' (Rundle 18) which, in the context of indigenous reparation, meant the non-indigenous Australian subject. An apology to a comparative few was thus seen to compromise ontological security, figured as freedom, and as an affront to national body itself—at its rhetorical extreme, a 'treachery to Australia' (Manne, 'In Denial' 56).

At this time, expressions such as the 'sorry industry' (67), and the 'black-armband' (72) approach to Australian history gained popularity in cultural discourse. The 'elite's' 'celebration of guilt' (72) was denounced by many strongly Right-wing voices, with any apology to indigenous Australians considered as a humiliating regression that would arrest the nation's ability to 'get on with' the future, as 'civilised' (Duffy 11) countries ought. Paddy McGuiness, for example, accused the 'left-wing intelligentsia' of attempting to change '"the moral balance of power" in Australia over the questions of

reconciliation and the stolen generations: trying, in a mood of deep "self-hatred," to "humiliate" their country…by chatter about "guilt and shame"' (Manne, 'In Denial' 72). The empowerment of indigenous testimony, voice and legal rights in practical and symbolic terms was read as an affront to national history and thus 'psychologically damaging for many people' (Duffy qtd. in Manne, 'In Denial' 72). Consequently, Keith Windschuttle warned, racial politics would prefigure 'the eventual break-up of the Australian nation' (Windschuttle 8). Howard's refusal to use the word 'treaty' in reference to a document of official reconciliation employed this image of potential break-up for a beleaguered nation. He argued that 'treaty implies two nations within one'. This, he insisted, 'is something I have never accepted and will never accept' (Howard qtd. in Burke 202).

In Howard's conception, national inequalities had emerged through the increasing political prominence of indigenous rights, inducing him to claim that 'the pendulum' of balance had now 'swung too far towards Aborigines' (Gelder and Jacobs, *Uncanny* 136) and needed re-setting. This inference of restored equilibrium is one that Howard has frequently harnessed. His rhetoric of balance, in a language of harmony and totality, implies a national ground that must be settled and stabilised. Discussions over such things as the 'right' 'ethnic mix' for Australia, or the 'equitable' distribution of government assistance and 'special privileges' amongst Australian citizens, poetically support the 'Balance Sheet' view (Dixson 13) of Australian history—also favoured by Howard—in which the nation's 'good' past is valued and celebrated, rather than diminished by its 'bad'. Whatever the nation's 'failure and its apportion of shame,' Howard has stated, 'in

the great balance sheet of history it has been a remarkable success story' (qtd. in Burke 221).

The discursive malleability of 'balance', however, reflects a dominant understanding of national equilibrium as being tied to the maintenance of non-indigenous economic and social power. For example, the idea of 'tak[ing] everyone's interests into account' (Gelder and Jacobs, *Uncanny* 138) was challenged by some non-indigenous Australians in support of national cohesion, who argued that any attempt to 'please all parties' (138) in the case of Native Title disputes was a recipe for national disaster. Howard's justification for the 1997 Wik decision, which limited the capacity of the Mabo ruling, was argued in part through a language of balance that ultimately privileged the rights of one (non-indigenous) group over an (indigenous) other. To 'allow a running sore to develop on the national fabric' (138), Howard suggested, was to 'fail Australia' (138). Conflict resolution through the (as much as legally possible) prevention of indigenous land claims was seen to be the only way that national cohesion and progress could be assured.

The poetic application of harmony or division to the Australian nation is also evident in Ross Terrill's condemnation of Australia's 'cultural gatekeepers' (*Australians* 264), or Leftist 'elites', whom he firmly implicates in a situation of increasing national divides. 'In a nation with an egalitarian tradition,' he argues, 'it is startling to see a huge gap between grassroots opinions and a lockstep stratum of journalists, academics, bureaucrats...and other granny-state enthusiasts fuelled by tax-payers dollars'

('Gatekeepers' 17). Terrill's view of a liberal system, in which the path between an individual's 'will and his goals' (*Australians* 278) is unimpeded, frames his condemnation of a guilt-laden and Left-influenced nation. Rather than feeling 'ashamed of our past', (274) Terrill insists, non-indigenous Australians should be free to express an 'innocent joy at "being here"' (308), and he too identifies 'political correctness' as suppressing the 'plurality of opinions' (270) that would mean—in his terms of contained difference—a well-balanced nation. His reference to the 'post-modern virus' (273) attacking the structures of a progressive settler-building democracy suggests the ideological 'fashion' to which Howard is also opposed, and behind the temporality of whose influence lies a solid and impervious 'Australian civilisation' (318).

Dixson also critiques 'the powerful vein in our intellectual culture coloured by post-structuralism' (7), and infers its responsibility for, or at least its participation in, a climate of non-indigenous negativity and 'self-dislike' (12). Dixson's argument is at once an admonishment of settlers' resignation to their anxieties in the face of indigenous and other 'ethnic' challenges to an Australian 'old identity' (7), and a sympathetic depiction of a nation that, no longer holding together, faces 'pain and loss' and 'terrifying emptiness' (50). According to her, 'the problems associated with immigration' (8), a rapidly changing Australian demographic, and indigenous claims to rights and land have diminished the confidence *and* the sense of belonging of non-indigenous peoples. As Read similarly expresses, '[s]ome of us took on the burden of guilt so earnestly that we half believed ourselves unworthy even to be here' (*Belonging* 5). Thus, Dixson insists, the 'host culture'—as the 'core'—'is experiencing...uprootedness' and 'a powerful grief'

(43) in the midst of which, and as the result of a centre that can not hold, the nation is reduced to 'contending factions' (48).

Now 'demonised' (1) in 'elite' discourse—which is opposed, she argues, to any 'unitary ideology' (7)—the 'steadying sameness and cohesion' (6) that the 'core' can provide, when strong, is undermined. Poststructural thought, Dixson, contends, is obsessed with the interrogation of identity to the point of its collapse. A language of ruin accompanies her poetics of division as she refers to the crumbling of social cohesion through the litter of 'vandalism, looting and virtual street war' (28)—her prediction for a disordered and unsettled nation. As well as this, in the nation that cannot offer ontological security, 'unemployment, pressures on family, crime, drugs [and] youth reluctance to join...society' (3) are factors of national break-up. Poststructuralism is further held to account by Dixson for this 'slow riot' of 'social decay' (28) through the oppositional poetics of surface and depth that her discourse of social unification or dissolution relies upon. The alienated state of non-indigenous Australians, shallowly placed on the land and shaken by the effects of (post)colonial uncertainties, is seen as the consequence of a poststructural onslaught that favours the insubstantial and uncertain, and belittles 'ordinary people[s]' (9) need for 'real' and 'deep' attachments to place.

Dixson argues that poststructurally informed commentators and academics demonstrate an 'out-right resistance to exploring the role of the old core-culture' (7) in Australia, thus degrading, even forbidding, a process of mourning for a non-indigenous population as their nation transforms. Poststructuralism is seen here to construct a surface model of

subjectivity that in some ways invokes Modjeska's own cautions against postmodern fiction's representations of the subject as insubstantially constituted and ineffectively distanced from its environment. However, the 'cerebral and…thin sense of selfhood' (39) that Dixson attacks is implicitly opposed to the ontologically securing capacities of narrative, rather than gesturing towards the unrealised potential of different ontological understandings, such as Modjeska does. Meaghan Morris explains that poststructuralist practice, as its works with deconstruction, is a far from indiscriminate and unselfconscious process. One can discern, she argues, 'when to stop that agonising demonstration that every position can be undermined' (qtd. in Mead 255). In Dixson's poetics though, 'surface' modalities firmly pit the 'common' person against an 'elite' constabulary and its apparent denigration of the 'modest but nonetheless important sacralisation' (30) that 'deeply' holding narratives afford a culture. '[F]latness' (28), for her, now characterises the Australian nation.

The imputation of a dissolute holding force for the Australian nation, as we have seen in discourses such as Dixson's, is an ecology of sharp divides and ontological insubstantiality. If a non-indigenous population is denied 'deep' connections to place and cultural history then the nation as a whole will suffer. Literally and poetically, the Australian land figures largely in this argument. As non-indigenous belonging became a prominent issue of cultural commentary, following the Mabo decision especially, along with a disconcertion surrounding its implications—fears, for example, that indigenous land claims would be made on suburban backyards—two variant discourses have become

notably apparent in discussions of settler relations to land, both of which focus on the same issues of non-indigenous rootlessness and national disorder.

In the first instance there is a belief that the dominance of 'minority' rights and cultural diversity in 'fashionable' discourse overshadows the needs and rights of 'mainstream' Australians, and with this the 'goal of national development' (Blainey 1). According to Geoffrey Blainey, the infiltration of identity politics into Australian cultural understanding has arrested the progress of a deservingly self-assured nation. Ontological uncertainties and actual spatial divides in the landscape have resulted in a 'checkerboard' (31) nation, and thus, significantly, he conscripts ideological and cultural differences to an environmental 'break-up'. Blainey, in the vein of 'elite' versus 'ordinary' Australians, argues that urban-dwelling non-indigenous Australians have turned their backs on their rural counterparts, foreclosing, in doing so, on the assured environmental connections upon which a culture of national progress, or development, is founded.

Blainey directs our attention to the role of environmental campaigners, or 'green crusaders' (17), and the indigenous land rights movement in creating and fostering the isolation of rural Australia through the condemnatory rhetoric of resource exploitation and land degradation. He contends that the attempt by environmental and indigenous advocates, and their mainly urban supporters, to create a 'garden of Eden' (31) in the Australian landscape, is reliant upon useless and romantic myths of untouched and pristine environments. 'Today,' says Blainey, 'the national parks, nature reserves, conservation parks and the Aboriginal lands form a straggling but long buffer zone,

straddling tropical and central Australia…' (30-31). This edenic view of environment that Blainey attributes to a city-living majority—though paradoxically harbouring 'minority' interest groups—is represented as both blithely fantastic and nationally divisive.

In contrast to the toil of working the land, Blainey attacks those who leisurely champion the green 'embrace' of nature—'most likely…when most people have reached a comfortable standard of living' (29)—and validates the 'work ethic' (24) of rural culture in which he situates a legitimate Australian belonging. A 'slow growth of respect or love for the land' (21) must therefore be earned in his logic, implying that a 'true' Australian subject must exist within a 'real' Australian landscape, not an imagined one. Here there is an appeal to lineage: a connection to place earned over generations, living and working on the land. This is the discourse mobilised by Pauline Hanson who also contrasts the claims of the hard-working, and thus place-deserving, citizen of Australia, to an 'elite' population separated from 'real' or lived experience. '[T]hese economists [who] need to get their heads out of textbooks' (Hanson qtd. in Brett 15) is one example of such suggested abstraction. 'Like most Australians, I worked for my land,' Hanson stated, 'no one gave it to me' (qtd. in Brett 14).

Hanson's reading of land ownership as a marker of rights and values, located in a rhetoric of equality, literalises the ground as a force of meaning and attachment. The earth of the Australian nation, worked and tended, is taken as a measure of what is irrevocably gained and deserved—an argument familiar in other (post)colonial contexts. As Brett explains, the 'objects of Hanson's grievance are not…the beneficiaries of inherited wealth who

have patently worked for their land or money, but people who get government hand-outs, in particular Aborigines and the "fat cats" in the public service who administer them' (14). Her image of land, worked over time and invested with ontological assurity, appeals to the same paradigmatic premise as that of Howard's notion of organic national self-hood. A shared, or commonly inhabited space, will respect and reward private ownership and tenure with an inviolate belonging.

Further, Blainey considers the 'profound ignorance' of 'rural distress and rural protest' (32) in urban culture, exemplified in its obsession with 'wilderness', as evidence of non-indigenous—again 'elite' induced—guilt over colonial damage and despoilation of the Australian ecology. This again has resonance in Hanson's claim that she will 'work beside anyone and they will be my equal but I draw the line when told I must pay and continue paying for something that happened over two hundred years ago' (qtd. in Brett 14). In these terms, a negative representation of the colonial past is seen to prohibit national cohesion and growth. Those who forged a forward-thinking, economically successful nation through vision and endurance are thereby stranded as the 'sacrificial lambs' (Blainey 20) of non-indigenous conscience. In a country that already exists as 'two separate nations'—the coastal cities and 'the places far away' (46)—Blainey sees the recent political and legal focus on indigenous rights and reparation for colonisation as intensifying national fractures. '[T]he new black nationalism', as he terms it, now compromises 'white Australian nationalism', attacked and left flailing in an—again—'fashionable' disdain for 'materialist European society' (58). His determination is to

'bring…together' (46) these divided parts, an aim predicated on overthrowing a dysfunctional culture of guilt and regret.

Blainey's views, however much he critiques this in others, are steeped in a nostalgia for industrial romance and a pre-modern period—an era when, in his perspective, liberal progress was untainted by conscience, and unchallenged by difference. His conflation of 'wilderness', as a 'minority' desire, with indigenous land rights claims, ignores the politics involved in the identification of an 'untainted' landscape, and which many commentators loudly critique. 'Wilderness' feeds into a discourse of pre-colonial absence in Australia that the whole precedent of the Mabo decision sought to revoke. I discuss this further on in my argument, and in Chapter Two I re-examine the dichotomising of urban/rural, modernity/tradition, that supports Blainey's poetics. For the moment, though, it is important to emphasise the inter-implication of spatial estrangement with historical uncertainty configured by Blainey. The tendency of non-indigenous Australians to 'look back on [their] predecessors with a sense of slight superiority' (50), negates, for him, the cohesion that would constitute their certain and productive (economically and nationally) belonging.

Conterminous with, and implicated within, this discourse of popular or 'elite' condescension towards Australia's past is a discourse of non-indigenous self-dispossession generated by the perceived inherited inability of non-indigenous Australians to 'bond' (Dixson 39) sufficiently with the Australian environment. While Dixson attacks poststructural representations of 'surface' subjectivity, she too imputes a

legacy of wilful superficiality in the relations between settlers and their landscapes. Saying this, however, Dixson does not entirely absolve the 'natural' environment of responsibility for non-indigenous alienation. She considers the 'relentless tasks of pioneering a harsh and alien environment' (100) as informing the 'harsh relational tenor of early colonial life' (117), along with convictism, frontier violence and (speaking of 'Anglo-Celts' alone) a sense of exile from Europe. Yet it is this experience of exile, or loss of an 'original' home, that she most overtly articulates as an historical legacy of shallow relations between non-indigenous Australians and their environment. When settlers encountered a different landscape—what Dixson describes as a cruel and unwelcoming 'mother earth' (101)—she explains, psychic anxieties were unleashed but immediately and deliberately suppressed for the purpose of 'getting on' and making a home (however insubstantial) in the land.

Resultantly, she argues, non-indigenous culture is haunted by these 'emotional burdens displaced' (101), now repressed even more as a result of an increasing focus on the nation's 'bad' and unbearable (in memory at least) origins. The innate lack of 'old', linear history for non-indigenous Australians in their 'new' environment, and a lack still propounded today—as Hugh Dillon writes, '[w]e do not have 1000 years of peasantry, feudalism and civil war as a forge against which a national soul [can be] hammered out' (14)—is interwoven with a foundation of emotional insufficiency. Thus Dixson's call to the sacralisation of non-indigenous culture so as to attribute depth and stability to settler connections in place is an attempt to redress historical beginnings and 'inspire...[feelings of] reverence' (Dixson 39) towards them. Non-indigenous Australians, she insists, will

never feel a settled belonging unless their 'unwanted ghosts' (105) of the past are exorcised.

Rather than expending energy looking outside Australia's shores—a characteristic of 'late-comer Australians' that David Malouf refers to as 'sea-dreaming' (8)—Dixson insists that non-indigenous Australians need to reinvest in their own, hard won origins *here*. A clear elaboration of this position is made by Dessaix who, in his admonition of Australia's cultural state, refers to the inability of non-indigenous Australians (and where his *national* commentary is directed) to 'cleave' (376) to the Australian ground. 'Our' 'failed attempt to be at home here', he asserts, is evidenced by the fact that in the spaces of non-indigenous living 'every stick and feather tells [of] borrowed tales' (378), abstracted from the far off places of settler yearning. Spatial uncertainty is therefore taken as cultural poverty by Dessaix as he contends that 'in Australia we don't seem to have a people at all' (378). For him, a rootless culture, such as Australia's, will only produce 'blankness [and] silence' (380) beyond its superficial noise. Disconnection and relational absence accompany this idea of an ineffective national hold, and a poetics of hard surfaces and sharp divides is again employed against productive and secure cohesion.

Clean Up Australia: Different Politics, Similar Poetics

Modjeska has not been the only writer on the Left to express a dissatisfaction with the dominant politics of recent years, and it is useful to examine further representations of a nation fractured and ill at ease with itself from this political perspective. What I want to highlight are the similar poetics mobilised by those who condemn the Howard years of

Australian political leadership to what Howard, and those ideologically aligned with him, utilise to describe their image of a national ecology. I do not intend to point out a clear binary of political visions in this and even though I refer to the Left and the Right as differing 'camps' of political persuasion, I do so in reference to what discursively constructs such distinction. Indeed, I contend that the often self-professed polarity between the Left and the Right performs the culture of deadlock and division that characterises the fractured nation. Common representations of a national culture without depth, emotional capacities, and a sense of cohesive belonging figure in commentaries that are ideologically distinct, and it is in the image of a crippled ecology, rubbished by its social fractures and damaging human practices, and in need of restoration, that this synonymity is most evident.

Rundle's description of the Howard era as a 'fidgety period—dissatisfying, irritating, exasperating' (54), conveys his disconcertion with what he discerns to be Howard's key political quality: encouraging 'the worst side of the Australian people' to surface in a climate of 'superstitious xenophobia' (55). Rundle argues that Howard's championing of fairness and equality in response to a growing attention to indigenous rights and claims for asylum by those seeking refugee status from his government has induced 'a widening of social divisions, both of outcome and opportunity' (11). For Manne, these are the 'the barren years' (*Barren Years* 7) of political leadership in Australia, void of social accountability and empathetic feeling. Philip Adams' warning, in November 2001, that '[m]alignancies of fear and bigotry are spreading through the body politic', offers an equivalent reading of the nation as 'deeply, bitterly divided' ('Vote for Division' 32).

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Kay Schaffer refers to a 'process of shutting down' (1) in the national psyche as a response to the *Bringing Them Home* report, while Inga Clendinnen saw Howard's refusal to apologise to the Stolen Generations, with his assumption that 'people need simple stories which make them proud of their country' (Clendinnen 9), as enacting 'white-out history' (14), a desire to forget complex pasts that challenge official, chronological narratives. Peter Craven similarly criticises Howard's 'form of wishful thinking about the past' (Introduction to Manne iv), and his rhetorical emphasis upon 'balance'. Further, Howard's response to indigenous issues, Craven argues, is indicative of a lethargic Australian culture that chooses only to comfortably invest in 'an imagined and unified historical past' (3). Manne makes a comparable comment when he refers to 'the closing of minds [and] hardening of hearts' (*Barren Years* 7) amongst non-indigenous Australians, unable to confront the Stolen Generations and their 'shame-inducing revelations' (Craven, Introduction to Manne vi). In these depictions, sharp social fractures and emotional flatness characterise the national environment.

Flatness is also imputed in representation itself that, as it poetically pares an ecology down to a bare and barren ground, makes actual hard and un-generative relations in the space of the everyday. Modjeska's comment on Howard's public rejection of symbolism in a statement of apology reflects the predominance, as she puts it, of 'dry, decent [and] cautiously unimaginative' ('Why I am Not Reading Fiction') official rhetoric. 'Practical Reconciliation,' she uses in example, devalues the 'currency of language' in its particular adaptation of reconciliatory meanings. Manne also points to 'the use of dead metaphors,

prefabricated phrases, [and] the passive rather than the active tense' preferred in contemporary political rhetoric ('Unthinkable Brutality' 13), harnessing representation in such a way as to assert this reality in a local environment. I see Raimond Gaita as extending Manne's critique when he highlights the oppositional use of language to construct and regulate otherness as entirely separate from the self and exemplified in the historical precedent of *terra nullius* with its assumption that, unlike Europeans, 'nothing could go deep within' (Gaita 28) Aborigines. 'Just as many settlers could not imagine that the Aborigines had any relation of depth to the land,' he notes, 'so many of their descendants could not imagine that they had relations of any depth to their children—an argument inferring that "'[t]heir" children are replaceable". "Ours" are not' (28-29).

Gaita's reference to children accords strikingly with a situation that arose a few months after his article appeared. The 'children overboard' scandal, appearing in a vital pre-election period for the government, was harnessed for the political and, as it turned out, popular purpose of differentiating an 'us' and a 'them' in the public's eyes. The series of photographs featuring life-jacketed children both in the water and being hoisted over the sides of a rickety boat, though later revealed to be selectively used, was widely purported to be, and received as, tangible evidence of the asylum-seekers' difference, and therefore the inappropriateness of their desire to enter Australia. Howard's ensuing statement that 'people like that' (qtd. in Head 1) were unwelcome in 'our' society fed into this register of what asylum seekers were not—not like 'us'—and, further, asserted a test of legitimacy in terms of refugees, not dependent upon a set of internationally outlined

conventions, but on subjectively interpreted behaviours. 'Genuine refugees don't do that,' he claimed (Howard qtd. in Head 1).

The reliance on a language of diametric difference by the government at this time has, for Manne, 'gradually helped to reconcile a goodly part of the nation to the unspeakable cruelties enacted daily' ('Unthinkable Brutality' 13) against asylum seekers in Australia. The prevention of 'personalising or humanising' (Forbes and Taylor 1) images of asylum seekers being taken and made public, in addition to the rhetoric officially used against them, has taught 'Australians to think and speak like this' (Manne, 'Unthinkable Brutality' 13). Writing for a different context, Vincent O'Keefe describes such representation as a technique that promotes the calcification of the other, or 'perceptual rigor mortis' (5), since the poetically conveyed object becomes locked within a stereotyped or diminished, and frozen, frame. In the case of asylum seekers and refugees, references to the 'invasion [of Australia] by stealth' (Mares 40) situate these others as not only unconnected to a vulnerable unified nation, but the source of danger and fear. Thus, in Ruddock's words, 'a national emergency' (qtd. in Burke xxi) is generated by the arrival of unwelcome outsiders. For the cause of harmony and the 'ordinary' Australian, this discourse implies, difference should remain beyond the bounds of safe national limits.

This thesis contends that it is vital to critique the effects of representation, and certainly the rhetoric of oppositional difference that has been effectively employed to incite anxiety and hate amongst the Australian electorate in the above situations. I argue,

however, that when the inferences made for a living ecology in such critiques perpetuate the relational modalities discussed, flat and sharp poetics—with a resulting omission of dynamic relations—prevail. No generative relation between those within and without these boundaries can conceptually occur when it is argued that 'minds are shut and…hearts have hardened' (Gaita 25). There is a poetics of disorder also evident amongst such representations of flatness and division: 'our social fabric [has turned to] rags' ('Vote for Division' 32), Adams insists. This is a 'debilitated Australian political landscape' (MacCallum 72) in an ecology characterised by '[d]amage' and 'mess' (72). A language of destruction and diminishment gives shape to visions of a 'vandalised' and 'besmirched' (Adams, 'Boy from the Bush' 24) civil society in Australia. 'He's done more damage to this [country] than rabbits, cane toads and half a dozen Cyclone Tracys,' Adams writes of Howard: he has 'not simply turned back Australia's clock, but ripped the hands from its face while gutting it of cogs' (24). In such imagery, Australian society mirrors its wasted and littered tracts of land, and this is a notion I will return to.

Damage is also configured as a result of non-indigenous resistance to indigenous land rights and narratives. Manne frequently argues that public and official reactions to Mabo and the Stolen Generation report have wrought destructive consequences for the nation's capacity to accept and include these testimonies into a collective self-understanding. The term 'denial' is prominent as a measure of response and deliberate forgetting in the Stolen Generations controversy, with the fragile or tenuous nature of narratives implicated in this. As Noel Pearson claims, '[o]ur collective consciousness should include all the past; if Gallipoli was "ours", so should be the relations with indigenous

peoples' (qtd. in Read, *Belonging* 16). Accordingly, Manne indicates the significance of listening to and incorporating all elements of the national past into official cultural narratives, so as to reconcile and make amends for previous and present injustices. A denial of the past, he argues, only repeats injury in the now, compounded without prospect of repair.

This perspective was endorsed by the Justices Dean and Gaudron who, in their Mabo judgement, and in reference to indigenous dispossession as 'the darkest aspect of our history', claimed that '[t]he nation as a whole must remain diminished unless and until there is an acknowledgement of, and retreat from, those past injustices' (qtd. in Brennan, *One Land, One Nation* x-xi). For Manne and others, denial acts as erasure, evacuating narrative meaning and perpetuating loss amidst a hard and flat national space. While 'this story had the potential to change forever the way [the Australian people] saw their country's history' (Manne, 'In Denial' 104), contestation as disavowal arrested this possibility, leaving an Australian landscape still weighed down by its 'mess' and empty gestures.

Thus, an unsettled nation, full of anxieties over and hostilities towards difference, is poetically conveyed without dynamic or complex relations. In these analyses of official and public sentiment during Howard's time in power, a social and political landscape is presented in terms of separation and superficial engagement. As I will argue, unsettlement involves a disordering of relations that do not subscribe to these poetics. Yet through the representation of a hard, unyielding ecological structure, an unsettled

society—as a product of dysfunction—is delimited by the dichotomous possibilities of repair or conclusive devastation. Another poetic equivalence can therefore be identified between the political discourse of the Left and that of the Right. Wholeness or division are the inferred choices on offer for an uneaseful nation. Frank Brennan, for instance, appeals to non-indigenous Australians to accept the reconciliatory gestures he discerns in the Native Title decision, and expresses his national goal as 'one land/one nation' (Brennan xvi). He insists that '[m]ost Australians, whatever their race, want to live in a situation of racial harmony where race does not matter... They want a situation of peace and security for all... They want to be assured of the legitimacy of the nation state which provides equality [of] opportunity for all Australians' (xi).

The reconciliation of divided parts, as it is prominently evoked, involves redressing social dis-ease, and in doing so, liberating the nation from instability and discontent. In looking towards a nation alleviated of its uncertainty, a consensual suggestion appears to be that there can be no restitution for a damaged country until its 'bad' and 'dark' pasts are left behind. Images of non-indigenous Australia 'struck dumb by "our" legacy of the past' (Schaffer 3) reflect a 'shamed nation' (3), immobilised (in terms of future progress) by its confusion, and condemned to disarray. Expressed by both the Left and Right, the loss of self-confidence and cohesion is fundamentally damaging for a nation whose 'majority' is 'anxious, restless, unsure of themselves' (Tacey 73). Cultural meanings and values are degraded or lost. Whether expressed as a rush to denounce and correct 'bad' pasts, or the pursuit of a national future free from guilt and historical baggage, descriptions of a

'crisis' nation, belittled by its lack of unity and unreconciled pasts have prominent currency in Australia today.

From the dissatisfactions of Mabo and Native Title ('everyone, except the successful claimant, is left unsatisfied' [Read, 'Belonging, Sharing' 1]), to the variously argued 'costs' and 'benefits' of a multicultural nation ('certain immigrant groups' are 'pure social poison' [Kasper 5]) and the uncertainties of non-indigenous Australians confronted by the country's past ('Whitefellas didn't know what to remember and what to forget' [Rose, 'Dark Times' 97]), the Australian population is figured as remembering too little or desiring too much, too soon. And central to this, the belonging of non-indigenous Australians, and their cultural depth and ecological place, is fundamentally at issue. 'Does Australia have a soul?,' Dillon wonders: 'apart from the indigenous peoples, our roots are still shallow…we have shed our European histories but are culturally adolescent' ('Soul Talk' 14). In the following chapter I discuss and problematise recent cultural and environmental discourse that seeks to redress this apparent insufficiency, and identify in them a counter-poetic to division and disorder presented in images of a reconciled and harmonious Australian ecology that re-secures and restores a damaging and unstable national past.

Chapter 2

Ecological Redemption

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the import of reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians is discursively dominant in the representations of a disconcerted nation. Professing a desire to atone for previous injustices, official reconciliation discourse is strongly symbolic, and since it conceptualises 'two sides' being drawn into one, its poetic significance for a unified national identity is readily apparent. Concepts of healing and recovery unsurprisingly feature consistently within reconciliation discourse, with non-indigenous Australians being given the primary role of instigating effective restoration for a national ecology. 'Reconciliation,' Tony Birch argues in this vein, 'is not possible in Australia, and nor is the expression of mature identity, unless White Australia is prepared to "reopen the old wounds, so they can heal"' (Birch 185).

The imperative to clean up 'a tarnished national image' (Moran 101), and 'the opportunity to free the nation of the guilt or shame associated with its foundation' (101) also figure strongly in this discourse. If a 'bad' colonial past is redeemed, the suggestion goes, then the national whole can be recovered. But, while it seeks to allay the anxieties and apparent divisions produced by a 'shallow history' (Moran 109) and damaging practices of non-indigenous presence in the Australian environment, an ulterior need for a firm coming together of ecological parts is also apparent. In the restoration of an ecology composed of holding relations and a redeemed beginning lies the promise of certain settler belonging, and it is to this that my argument now turns. Threatened by the sense of

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a fragile 'home', non-indigenous peoples are asked to look to environmental relations as a literal and poetic force for belonging, and Tim Flannery's 2002 Australia Day Address provides a useful example of this consciousness at work. In the context of a speech to the nation, Flannery demonstrates the kind of restorative rhetoric frequently mobilised in discussions that interrelate Australia's environment, its colonial past and non-indigenous anxieties in an appeal to ecological healing.

At the centre of Flannery's address is the idea that the Australian environment, cleared of its refuse, is where an 'authentic' Australian identity lies. Significantly, he reads cultural disorder in terms of environmental damage and castigates urban non-indigenous Australians for their 'bad' environmental practices—a consequence of them living 'as people from elsewhere' (1). He argues that '[o]ur history and our ecology reveal just how superficial [non-indigenous] roots are' (1), incorporating the environment in a narrative of colonial impact. It is the 'bitter harvest' of an 'arrogant colonial vision [that] we [are] reaping so abundantly today' (2). This harvest is a current state of unease and discord in both social and 'natural' landscapes, and in which the past, as an active agent of national distress, is a key determinant. 'We can't celebrate Australia Day unreservedly, nor can we expect Aboriginal people to celebrate it,' Flannery insists, 'unless we somehow come to terms with that terrible history' (1).

His reference to a 'dark' (5) vision of the land in the early years of colonisation, a continent approached as degenerative 'in every deviation from standard European cultural practice' (5) admits the negative forms taken on by the landscape in the imperial

gaze: what Jay Arthur calls the 'not-ness' of the environment, 'untamed...uncontrolled [and] unreliable' (Arthur 66). Such a vision, Flannery argues, refers to an underlying fear upon which insubstantial relations between non-indigenous Australians and their environment have been premised, damning the nation and the ecology to 'crisis'. Flannery propounds several points from this that are pertinent. Firstly, he identifies a continuum of separation between the non-indigenous self and the land in settler culture, instigated from contact, in the current environmental practices he condemns. This he links to a chaotic or insubstantial national identity as the cost of ecological damage. 'You can't really call yourself Australian,' he comments elsewhere, 'if you're living unsustainably, destroying the resource base that your children will need in the future' (qtd. in Haran 11).

His concept of damage incorporates European agricultural practices unadapted to Australian conditions, the introduction of feral plants and animals, the degradation of soil by cattle and the felling of trees. In terms of the human environment, he points to unsustainable population growth which includes the effects of immigration and multiculturalism. His argument validates the need for ecological harmony, and therefore to preclude the ecological introduction of unsettling 'outside' elements. Further, as the 'outside', or environmental difference, is connected to environmental not-belonging, Flannery's imperative to assure a stable environmental place for non-indigenous peoples becomes obvious in his call for settlers to 'surrender [their] "otherness'' (Flannery 5) to the landscape. Without this gesture, non-indigenous Australians will remain untethered to

place, with ongoing and devastating environmental consequences. 'If we continue to live as strangers in this land,' he asserts, 'we will forfeit our long-term future [here]' (3).

Australian-ness is consequently defined by ecological relations that hold, with the land as 'our inheritance, our sustenance, and the only force ubiquitous and powerful enough to craft a truly Australian people' (2). By modelling human relations on a 'natural' environment a legitimate belonging for non-indigenous Australians can be assured. Flannery describes his pedagogical reading of the Australian ecology thus: 'It...seems the evolution of life here was partly driven by...co-operation for survival rather than competition,' he explains. 'As a result of these trends, Australian life forms have become woven into a web of interdependence' (2). Conveniently, non-indigenous Australian culture already offers elements of this: the leap will not be too large for the nation to achieve such an ecological structure. Flannery sees the Australian phenomenon of 'mateship', for instance, as 'represent[ing] the first significant social response of the Europeans to their new land' (5), indicating the establishment of human 'interdependence fostered by adversity' (5).

His reading of ecological responsibility—to another, to an environment—into this 'national' characteristic, brings a moral implication to the kind of national ecology he envisions, and in which individual trajectories cooperate to make an ordered collective, coherent and unified. As he argues, it is in private 'patterns of consumption' that broader 'transformation' (3) for the nation lies. Organic adaptation and self-regulation are both precepts involved in this view of ecological change, subscripted to the cause of non-

indigenous belonging. These go together in a liberal ideology that values discrete and self-determined units, operating in an holistic shape. In Flannery's argument, it is inevitable that being in the land ('bad' practices or not) will have transformative effects on the self, yet he suggests that the subject can also choose to make its place as either superficial and unstable, or '*deep* [and] sustaining' (2) [emphasis mine].

The values he attributes to an ideal ecological state are stability and diversity in totality, values that the ideal nation also embodies. Here his reasoning on multiculturalism is defended. Using the poetics of wholeness or division, Flannery considers the existence of distinct cultural groups 'side by side' (3)—he apparently cannot imagine multiculturalism in any other way—as damaging for national and ecological health. Connected to this, globalisation provides a final unsettling factor in the cause of cohesive culture. He proposes certain ecological relations as a way of fighting 'the battle to preserve the defining values of Australian society' (5), instigated by a globalising world, and in which mateship, similitude and a workable order have a leading role. In this configuration, which can be compared to the liberal discourses examined in Chapter One, the actions of each individual towards the land are accountable to create or destroy a cohesive society, as well as ecology. The need for common values is asserted in order to live 'deeply', and therefore with the right kind of unifying environmental relations.

Just as the regulation of the Australian environment accords with the regulation of identity and belonging in Flannery's discourse, there is a presumed shared moral ground propounded for all Australians that supersedes the role of political authority. This is

evidenced by Flannery's address to the government inclusive in his address to the nation, where he outlines strategies for 'environmentally friendly' (2) policies that will respond to 'a great desire [despite their 'bad' way of demonstrating this, presumably] among Australians to preserve their environment' (3). To further explore the moral imperatives derived from a belief in shared values that direct such environmental discourse, I want to turn to the issue of recycling and how, as an example of endorsed environmental practice, an approach to waste as a social and individual responsibility reflects ontological and ecological perspectives adherent to such values.

Gay Hawkins argues that current attitudes towards rubbish in contemporary Australia reveal a shift from concepts of waste 'disposal' to waste 'management' (5). She explains that the rhetoric of civic obligation, now a standard part of waste discourse, is a relatively recent phenomenon and has overtaken an individual relation between waste and the self in which refuse as contamination was clearly demarcated as 'purity's other' (6)—thus tactically separable from the subject. What has occasioned this change, Hawkins speculates, is the apparent omnipresence of rubbish in the modern world. With so much waste in evidence, understandings of contamination have been transformed in line with the realisation that there is nowhere effectively in the world where waste can be wholly disposed. Rubbish is now an admitted presence that the subject lives amongst and must consequently manage. As Flannery demonstrates, the right kind of environment, and nation, in contemporary environmental discourse is a well managed one.

What it means to 'manage well' however, is what is at issue, and for my purpose it is important to note the structures of order (social and environmental) that dominant discourses attach to the management of waste. While the immediacy of rubbish in contemporary Australia has prompted a different awareness of how the subject exists in the world in relation to rubbish, certain implications are clear: a healthy environment is still distinct from its waste, and refuse does not participate in productive ecological relations. There is still a discursive distinction between culture and nature at work in this, with a view of environmental harmony that is predicated on a cohesive society, working in unity to clean up the nation.

With waste management seen as a social and environmental responsibility, the individual subject becomes a focus for discipline where 'new principles of self-scrutiny' (Hawkins 11) imply a duty to, and virtue in, working for the greater good. Management practiced at the micro level of personal action is seen as constitutive of a correct citizen, and as Hawkins notes, '[w]aste is now a field of activity structured by legislated and normative moralities…that order conduct in the interests of wider objectives: from the reduction of landfill to global ecological survival' (11). Though state-imposed disciplining and monitoring tactics are used to induce the subject into these participatory codes, there is an asserted reliance upon moral judgement in dominant environmental discourse that invokes personal restraint, responsibility and economy as the ethos of recycling. Beyond government intervention, an assumed 'autonomous rational will in the service of moral codes' (11) provides a sub-text to the articulated imperatives of managing waste. Moreover, the notion of voluntary subscription to these codes of conduct and

environmental ordering mobilises the value of the 'ordinary' person, external to the directions espoused by an 'elite'.

To summarise, environmental responsibility in Flannery's terms means more than routine pragmatic duty, fulfilling the criteria of a well-ordered and sustaining ecology. It takes on—like the domestic activities of waste management—the shared values that make a civil society. His concern for the future of 'our' children, 'our' identity, and 'our' land is based on the desire for stability in what 'we' have and are. The treatment of the environment 'unsustainably, ignorantly, and destructively' (Flannery 1) mirrors our own cultural decay, while a regulated, but 'naturally' interdependent environment can enable the settling and certain belonging of non-indigenous Australians for the benefit of the nation at large. Yet what he also implies is that, despite his fear for a discordant nation, there is already a common ground of belief and value that links Australians together. For if the national subject is to respond to Flannery's appeal, he/she must already belong in this way. A pre-validation of shared values is thus a prerequisite for a sustaining, stable environment.

Reconciling with the Land, Reconciling with the Past (and Future)

As outlined in the Introduction, recent environmental discourse has pursued a deliberate shift from conceptualising the self as an ecological centre, distinct from its environment, and thereby integrating human subjectivity into an holistic frame of ecological relations. Flannery's interpretation of environmental disorder is far from unique, and I want now to provide other examples of commentary that pursue the redemption of non-indigenous

alienation *and* ecological 'crisis' in the making of cohesive or holistic environment/subject relations. From this kind of perspective, an 'authentic' environmental place for settler Australians will be ecologically, nationally and ontologically saving, and is defined through balance, stability, and unifying engagements. What Hage refers to as the decentred 'I' of contemporary ecological narratives can be understood as a shaping force behind these arguments. It provides an ideological frame in which '[r]ather than perceiving itself as separate from nature, the modern ecological subject becomes merely the voice of nature in its totality' (Hage, *White Nation* 171). Such narratives refuse the individual 'as an "I"', but instead 'stage...him or her as merely traversed by a nature that has lost and is seeking herself back' (171). Flannery indicates his subscription to this belief in his transposition of environmental and ontological crisis. If the environment is 'lost', then so is human (as national) identity.

Ross Gibson provides an example of this conceptual transformation in human/non-human environment relations when he discerns three different stages of Australian non-indigenous responses to the land. Starting with a perception of the land as an emblem—or as a portentous sign—for 'preternatural incomprehensibility' (*South* 16), and moving to a secondary phase of mythologised 'heroic failure' (17) in which narratives of settler suffering 'help[ed] [to] make...peace, conditionally, with the continent [colonisers] could not defeat' (17), a final and present stage in non-indigenous relations with the land, neither sublime nor mythological, is proposed. In this, the land is considered as 'something to be learned from, something respectable rather than awesome' (17) and thus Gibson, like Flannery, considers the environment pedagogically.

Rather than defining the self *against* the land, in either negative or positive opposition, this third stage offers the potential of what Gibson calls 'subjective immersion in place' (18). Such a perspective is nonmodern, or opposed to the modern tradition of conceptualising space as 'always definitively other', 'external to the person who [is] looking at it' (6). Conversely, a nonmodern relation 'might be said to be in and of the land', a wholly different configuration of subject/object positions, where submergence, not distinction, is the mode of relating, affirming settled belonging in terms other than 'the acquisitive processes of conquistadorial survey' (18). Gibson's notion of 'immersion' has further resonance with Flannery and his call to the 'surrendering' of non-indigenous otherness in the land, particularly as both elaborate colonial visions of the Australian landscape as indicative of 'dark' and 'troubled past[s]' (Flannery 4).

Read in a paradigm of binary oppositions, the Australian environment to the European eye presented 'the upside-down face of the world', with its 'black swans [and] rivers running inland' (Gibson, *South* 10)—a place of 'half-formed marsupials [and] black savages' (Flannery 5). What Flannery and Gibson foreground in their representation of colonial, pre-immersion perspectives of the Australian environment is the dualistic ideology informing the settler eye. Sharp divisions between self and other produced the ontological limits that western philosophy asserted, and to maintain its assured boundaries, colonial consciousness needed to project onto the land—as the subject's 'outside'—an anti-rational narrative. Disorder could not be admitted into the self. In the unification suggested by immersion and surrender, however, these divides are overcome:

there is wholeness and totality restored to the ecology as the self takes part in intricate ecological relations. We are thereby presented with two ontological alternatives: one defined by separation and exclusion, and the other by holistic interconnection. And as a divided ecology occasions environmental and cultural destruction, a smooth, unified one means health and security for a living ecology. Therefore, in these models on offer, Australians are either together or apart.

A split or divided ontology is defined through an interior/exterior dualism that, instituting the place of the subject in the world, is also taken on in the subject itself with ontological 'crisis' as the result. Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra propound a theory of the split non-indigenous self in Australia that, as they explain, was 'doomed from the outset' of colonisation 'by a contradiction…a double message' (x) at the heart of settler identity. The doubleness they refer to is similar to Gibson's first two stages of non-indigenous environmental relations: a recoil premised on the sublimation of difference—signs abstracted from an ecology of relations—to the validation of settler toil and progress. As Carter argues, the portents read into the Australian environment, or what eluded familiar epistemological knowledge to the settler, meant that difference was wilfully forgotten and put out of touch from the self. Central to this, Hodge and Mishra contend, is indigenous presence which could not be tolerated in a relational ecology that would also hold the settler secure. Australian national identity, according to this view, is founded on the conflict between forgetting and remembering. Hodge and Mishra term this the 'dark side' of the Australian national dream: the 'unacknowledged secret' (204) of indigenous

dispossession and erasure from national texts, lurking beneath the celebrated culture of mateship and egalitarianism.

Darkness stands for secrets, or things unsayable and too disturbing to admit. This is the legacy of 'bad' colonial pasts, still perpetuated today in a 'schizoid nation' (xv), fractured within itself. In Hodge's and Mishra's configuration of schizophrenic identity, a paranoia over what hidden messages are encased in social texts (perceptible, perhaps, in the Right's disdain of 'elite' commentary), a hostility towards and suspicion of difference, and a preference for the superficial, characterise the 'crisis'-ridden nation. Narratives of forgetting are reproduced poetically as the split national culture refuses 'any but the most superficial and literal meanings in the texts of other', while conveying its own as 'banally innocent' (217). The consequences of this in Hodge's and Mishra's perception are (once more) put in terms of flatness, wherein subjectivities 'relentlessly superficial [and] incapable of real relationships [are] so traumatised by the catastrophe of being here that they cannot think or feel' (217). A resistance to depth, for fear of what it may divulge, keeps Australian culture—as a product of non-indigenous 'crisis'—flattened and displaced in its environment.

Hodge and Mishra seek resolution for this fracturing of nation, and in the image of two sharply demarcated halves reconciling together, the whole, healthy nation is again invoked. By releasing hidden secrets from subterranean spaces, non-indigenous Australians can attain a belonging that is no longer superficial. With reality and assurity figured in the reunion of a dichotomised surface and depth, and therefore expunging

paranoia, an holistic ontology is imagined. Wholeness is therefore associated with depth and the capacity for the 'real' ecological relations that feeling and cohesion are seen to bestow. Problematically in this representation, while the surface is surrendered to a totalised ontological shape, depth is excavated and dark secrets brought to light so that the settler subject can be newly constituted as it extends its roots into the evacuated space, finding firmer ground than it occupied before.

Thus, subjectivity is still configured in the stabilising rhetoric of certitude, unity and 'deep' connection. Depth is given the task of 'disclosing reality itself' (Gelder 24) and is consequently privileged in the pursuit of legitimate non-indigenous belonging. For its process of recovery, the settler subject admits what it has repressed and is thus released from immobilising anxieties. If revelation, or the uncovering of buried things, is a quest for illumination, the synthesis of light and dark perform a holding embrace for the self to move within. As thesis and antithesis meet and become one, a 'higher truth' (Muecke, 'Devastation' 124) is inferred from which the individual can assure its environmental place. Chapter Four explores such dichotomies of environmental surface and depth, and the frequently articulated corollary of this: a unified landscape. What I emphasise here, however, are the poetics of fracture and division applied to a nation in 'crisis', and the implications of this for what I have argued to be an imagined non-indigenous ontology, under threat or dangerously perverse, and in need of rescue. The desire to recover the wasted environment that represents cultural and individual disorder, even collapse, associates what Deborah Bird Rose calls 'dark times' ('Dark Times' 98) with degeneration: a downward spiral of chaos, heading to apocalypse. Unless these pasts are

uncovered and expunged from the places in which non-indigenous roots must adhere, 'crisis' will head to its finite conclusion.

Discourse that advocates environmental oneness for non-indigenous Australians has become increasingly evident in cultural commentary, attached to the notion that 'what animates us at a profound level…is related to our identification with the land' (Dillon, 'Soul Talk' 14). Envy for an assumed innate connection between Aborigines and the Australian environment—innate as it apparently transcends centuries of dispossession and cultural change and heterogeneity—is also apparent. The fact that settler Australians do not have their own 'indigenous myths' (Boyd 200) is taken as evidence of their surface relation to land, disadvantaging them in the quest to belong. Martin Boyd elaborates on this point from his own non-indigenous position: it is 'perhaps one of our disabilities that our age-long secretions did not begin in our country, like those of old civilisations' (199-200).

A yearning for narrative depth reflects a desire for 'deep' connections, or stories of being here that elaborate firm roots in the Australian environment. In the context of a perceived 'crisis' for non-indigenous identity and national cohesion, stories that not only hold and thus allay ontological uncertainty, but also provide a culture with 'mythic weight' (Carroll 11), are actively sought out. 'Lucky [societies],' Halligan agrees, 'have had myths and legends for a very long time, beyond quite remembering how or why' (3). The notion of re-enchanting a damaged and malaise-ridden nation so as to instil health and commonality in a disordered ecology, invests the subject who attains environmental

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harmony with sacred qualities. John Carroll points to the lack of 'deep structure[s]' (9) for belonging in the consumerist west, and highlights a faltering Australian society consumed with surface concerns—self-obsessed, materially driven and 'exacerbated by a surrounding culture of therapy and counselling' (11). In his view, a 'crumbled' (10) settler—as 'western'—ontology can be resurrected in the recognition of a non-indigenous cultural 'Dreaming' (216) that would restore an ecology from its shadows of disenchantment. For depth, we must turn downwards, into the ground of settler pasts. The task, then, is to become 'archaeologists, devoting our lives to the search for fragments of relics, [for] secrets…the buried treasure [and the] great obscured foundations' (215) of our lives. In the absence of this, environmental and ontological decay continue. Non-indigenous Australians, it seems, are 'dying for want of story' (7), while 'our' potentially saving 'landscape[s],' Carroll concludes, '[are] wasted by such failure, sometimes unleashing evil' (220).

The distinction that Gibson makes between a modern and nonmodern relation between the self and the land is operative in this, as the onslaught of modernity—equated with 'metaphysical emptiness' (Carroll 9) and cultural 'lethargy' (6)—is discursively countered in an appeal to sacredness which the 'timeless' Australian land can amply supply. David Tacey looks to forge this kind of sacred modality for non-indigenous Australians superficially placed on the land. Tacey sees 'the necessity of re-enchantment' (150) as a moral and saving imperative for Australia. 'We feel isolated, lonely, rootless and disconnected,' he argues. 'Nature is at best a dead background to our human endeavours' (150). It is useful to cite Tacey further on this for he comments that

'ecological crisis is at bottom a psychological and spiritual crisis' (151). 'The truly ecological task is not only to repair our damage to the outer world,' he continues, 'but to repair the deep splits on the inside, to work towards inclusive rather than exclusive concepts of self and identity' (152).

To accomplish this Tacey sees the best, most saving potential for an Australian non-indigenous psyche as lying in the ontological and spiritual connection to place that he attributes to indigenous cultures. 'Aboriginal people have long been an ecologically committed people,' he contends, '...because they spontaneously felt the environment to be part of themselves and to be intrinsically related to their emotional reality' (151-152). Flannery also looks to indigenous peoples as pedagogical in his environmental vision, but only in the sense of pre-contact Aboriginal practices which provide a model for non-indigenous environmental relations: 'they had things right' (Flannery 3), he argues. However, pre-colonial Aborigines can be nationalised in this frame, seen as the first 'Australians' to demonstrate (in Flannery's concept of national constitution) what it means to act as 'a truly Australian people' (2). Tacey, on the other hand, views indigenous environmental relations as intrinsically fixed and unchanged by colonisation. 'They' still belong, it is 'us' who do not.

Tacey also differs from Flannery when he asserts that moral directives and regulatory rules will not bestow the legitimate feelings for environment and place that enable 'real' belonging. Thus he looks to the sacred and affective structures which will 'unite us with "our" family, "our" home and "our" concerns' (Tacey 152). His vision is of what Gelder

and Jacobs term 'sociality-in-Nature' (*Uncanny* 12): an affirmation of holding relations through the 'deep' (where the sacred is located) capacities of emotion and belief. Thus, Tacey supports a non-indigenous mirroring of Aboriginal spiritual relations with an environment in order to solidify and authenticate settler belonging, and in doing so outlines for non-indigenous culture its own '"aboriginal" identity (with a small "a") which has its own "dreaming" (with a small "d")' (Gelder and Jacobs, *Uncanny* 12).

The problematics of this mirroring, or modelling, of Aboriginal culture are not entirely denied in this discourse, with writers such as Tacey and Martin Mulligan arguing for both the reconciliatory symbolics of this tactic and its non-appropriative intentions. For instance, Mulligan qualifies his use of 'dreaming' in a proposal for a 'whitefella' (58) re-enchantment of the world, as a word applied for 'inspiration only' (60). Arguing against a simplification of Aboriginal spirituality, he still finds potential in 'dreaming' for the purpose of non-indigenous 'crisis'—a conceptual way of diversifying yet solidifying settler relations with the land. Mulligan's motivating point is 'the richness in what [non-indigenous peoples] have already started to accumulate' (59) in their places: '[e]ach of us carries our own personal "dreaming of who we are and where we belong"' (59). There is no monopoly on meaning, Mulligan argues, no 'dreaming' that is more significant than another, and experience of whatever kind fertilises the roots of a 'real' belonging. His point is that indigenous peoples do not have the only 'authentic' and deservedly 'good' connections to place in Australia, and that by insinuating all kinds of 'dreaming' paths and forces, different kinds of belonging—but only of the stable variety—will be realised.

Mulligan's argument is framed by environmental imperatives, and thus the synonymity of legitimate belonging and a healthy environment is asserted. A sense of non-indigenous depth in relation to place will transform 'our' so-far 'sterile and ineffective' (58) understandings of the land, protecting a culture and a landscape against further 'despoilation' (58). It is for the benefit of the environment as much as the non-indigenous psyche that their sufficient claim on the land is recognised. Jane Jacobs contextualises assertions such as Mulligan's in her summation that 'Australian environmentalists have long seen Aboriginal Australians as the original conservationists' (Jacobs 179): a positioning that has enabled a range of non-indigenous concerns to find restorative ground in indigenous cultures. Instructively, however, Jacobs cautions against a blanketing charge of appropriation which would privilege or isolate cultural 'predation' as 'the dominant power dynamic of cultural exchange in settler states and that this is only negative in effect' (190).

I take account of Jacobs' warning, and, as I will demonstrate, the conception of ecological relations that this thesis proposes can never assume a settling of exchange values and relations that would enable appropriation to become a fixed and clear force of extraction. There are always unsettling dynamics in an ecology that demonstrate the complexity of the notion of appropriation, or revelation, and I particularly explore this in Chapters Three and Four. Nevertheless, I argue it is necessary to highlight and challenge the precarious assumptions and implications, unacknowledged to themselves, of the perspectives I have discussed in this chapter, desiring a non-indigenous 'dreaming' for a rooted settler belonging. In doing so, I argue against the limits of the ecological shape

proposed in such holistic poetics, and instead outline the possibilities retarded by a belonging that is certain and claimed as total.

Excluded Dynamics in a Unified Ecology

In Flannery's address Aborigines can be included in nation on two counts: if they adhere to the 'important management role' (4) Flannery outlines, and when they provide, symbolically and pedagogically, the historical depth and continuity of 'good' environmental relations that non-indigenous Australians are seen to lack. With this grafted onto the non-indigenous self, Australian identity can be indigenised (Moran 111). Further, where indigenous approaches to land are couched in a value system that pre-dates non-indigenous settlement, the national form can be justified as having existing for tens of thousands of years, thus countering settler anxieties about a too-young and immature national culture. While this rhetoric of continuity is useful for settler purposes—adding depth to their presence in the land—it simultaneously highlights the disenfranchisement of the majority of indigenous people, politically and economically. The Native Title Act demands evidence of an unbroken link between Aboriginal claimants and their land, a task that two hundred years of non-indigenous settlement has made difficult to say the least (Moran states that this legal requirement has effectively 'cancelled out' [117] the land rights of ninety per cent of indigenous Australians). Flannery's emphasis on *pre*-contact environmental practices fits with the belief that current indigenous Australians have been irrevocably disconnected from their traditional cultures.

In addition, this isolation of pre-contact indigenous culture suggests that a 'correct' environmental order, in Flannery's sense of the term, existed prior to colonisation which alone instigated the makings of ecological damage. That is, before colonial arrival the environment was in its 'natural' state. Most contemporary indigenous Australians are implicated in Flannery's general condemnation of insubstantial environmental relations as the divide that he perceives between a well-managed and unmanaged environment no longer lies between indigenous/non-indigenous Australians, but between rural farmers and urban dwellers. 'I have no doubt,' he continues, 'that today many farmers are very far ahead of the majority of Australians in most aspects of environmental thinking' (2). It is these few Australians, therefore, who can claim an 'authentic' belonging to the land, although it is to non-indigenous Australians alone that Flannery speaks of the need for *national* re-making.

As his repeated references to 'our' and 'we' suggest (Flannery is non-indigenous), Flannery conceives of the dialogue in national terms but between non-indigenous Australians alone. The poetic power of divisive or inclusive national identity is attributed to the land. However, Flannery betrays his own argument when he excludes indigenous Australians from having a place in the nation he addresses. The 'natural' state of land is configured as without damage, and thus the eradication of (historical and environmental) waste through its tending, management and consequent control—if it is invested with meaning, it is no longer wasted—grants a pretext for 'real', non-indigenous belonging, while indigenous belonging, abstracted as it is by Flannery from its own 'natural' pre-contact times, is left unproblematised. National interest becomes non-indigenous interest

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since the terms for a sustaining and secure environment continue to circle settler belonging and authentication.

Flannery does condemn 'romanticising Aboriginal cultures', and advocates appreciation, listening and application as an approach to 'their skills and knowledge', 'vital to the continuance of the Australia we know and love' (4). However, in Flannery's view, as well as in the similar writings I have discussed, an unstable belonging falls entirely on one side of a divide left un-critiqued. On the other side of non-indigenous uncertainty is a simplistic conception of indigenous Australians and their place in the land. Non-Aboriginal belonging stands as a complex and pressing issue at hand—so pressing in fact that the future of national coherence depends upon it—while, as Beardwood writes on the continuing presence of this discourse, indigenous belonging is considered 'in an uncomplicated fashion, as if Aboriginal people have no more work to do on their relationship with Australian land' (10). This, he remarks, is 'opposed to the work they still have to do with the Australian government or law courts' (10)—a matter of state intervention, as such rhetoric would no doubt have this, rather than 'authentic' and more affective 'natural' connections.

Further, for the cause of reconciliation, imagined as the reunion of divided parts, the transposition of indigenous environmental knowledges onto those of settler Australians conceptually removes a sense of 'alternative and competing claim[s] to the national landscape' (Moran 109), stabilising non-indigenous anxieties generated by the spectre of Mabo. The Australian nation itself then becomes the sole occupant of the Australian

environment, with difference contained and homogenised within its boundaries. In an ecology constituted through stabilised place and holding relations, ecological units are configured as working together, ordered and organically justified. The Darwinian poetic of the wedge is useful for understanding this kind of discourse. For Darwin, an ecology is comprised of 'wedges [as species] hammered tightly in and filling…all available space' (Young 155). To gain entry into an ecological community, one wedge must displace another: ecological '[s]uccess,' in this view, 'can only be achieved by [a] direct takeover in overt competition' (155). Therefore the notion of ecological pollution is conscripted to define elements which do not belong, and cannot claim a place within this structure.

If the nation is configured in this way, as Flannery demonstrates, its 'natural' order is compromised by the arrival of outside elements—'alien' wedges disturb the balance of a coherent community. In a system of properly aligned wedges, acting as nuclear units in a holding collective, different parts of the whole work in accordance with each other's 'indigenous' interests, constituting smooth, unruptured environmental conditions. I want to argue that in Flannery's concept of 'surrender' which, like 'immersion', can be seen to represent the total dissolution of boundaries between self and environment, there lies an image of a perfectly fitted ecology with all its components in their rightful positions. The attainment of oneness with an environment suggests a 'fitting in': the self is no longer a jarring or abstracted force in a coherent landscape but exists in unity with its environment, around which boundaries that will hold this shape together are constructed. Consequently, 'surrender' is dependent upon an 'outside', regulated for a healthy ecology.

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What 'inauthentic' presences mean for a harmonious ecology is thus disruption and a negative intervention into future well-being. Flannery invokes this in his support for population control, specifically through the curtailment of further immigration to Australia which, he contends, is 'the great multiplier of environmental impact' (4). The implementation of an immigration policy would spatially regulate the nation, only admitting what a cohesive society and environment could sustain. 'Natural' limits can thereby be ascribed to a 'natural', holistic, environmental state. Recent responses to asylum seekers in Australia (and throughout much of the western world) utilise this approach, with an influx in immigration being represented as a threat to local prosperity, security and identity. Equally, the antagonism often shown towards feral or unruly (introduced) animals and plants in the Australian landscape which exceed the bounds of safe domestication can be interpreted in this way. Belonging 'uncertainly' (Muecke, 'Devastation' 127) in their environment—successfully adapted but illegitimately present—such species represent an incoherent ecology in which national identity is threatened as 'genuine' Australian wildlife become permeated by unrooted, and thus impure, presences.

Discourse such as Flannery's imagine a unitary space created through unitary values: an emphasis on the communal that still, even while it professes to decentre the 'I', centralises the self—and the clean, renewed self at that—as the 'good' national subject, sustaining and preserving its stage for instruction in a narrow vision of its own moral rightness. It is a metonymically constructed world that Flannery conceives. Unsettlement

is thus not an ontological reference in itself, and therefore a force for becomings, but is demonstrative of ontological division and the need for ecological re-ordering. For a future of homely unity, with ecological elements sustainably in place, the Australian citizen is charged with the task of curtailing both ontological and ecological disruption to a standard of inflexible and exclusionary cultural values. There are no ecologically informing dynamics allowed in the relations between, or oscillation of, different and transforming values and meanings. I argue that collective action compelled for the point of moral legitimacy and based on notions of the 'natural' indicates ideologies of sharp division—the kind of poetics that the unit is considered to transcend—and cultural privilege.

This is a concern for modern ecological criticism which often originates in western countries and imposes social and economic judgements and influence upon those not globally empowered in a capital and political sense. For instance, the '[d]emand…for higher wages or more rapid growth in poorer parts of the world', as David Harvey writes, is often countered by western ecological assertions that 'certain immutable laws' (342) of sustainability 'naturally' prevent such economic progress in these countries from occurring. 'The supposed sheer physical inability of the planet to support global populations with aspirations to the living standard of Sweden or Switzerland [has become] an important…argument' (Harvey 342) in contemporary global politics, indicative of geo-political self-interest in the west, rather than ecological ethics.

A liberal conception of the nation as being comprised of self-regulating units, and of the nation operating in the global as a unitary entity, informs this politic. As the maturing nation comes into its own on an international stage it is considered both self-sufficient *and* accountable to the forces of the global collective in terms of the right kind of self-regulation. Flannery indicates this is the case since his vision for a redeemed Australian ecology is underscored with the maintenance of 'our good reputation' (Flannery 5) amongst other nations. Harvey observes that this kind of global conscience, frequently mobilised towards such phenomena as global warming and rising global populations rates, is affirmative in terms of both a desired local and global belonging. The nation is configured and respected as a contained and containing structure, while acting for the benefit of 'the common interest of humanity' (Harvey 328).

Flannery is not entirely comfortable with this, however, and his appeal to the 'national interest' (Flannery 4) in his ecological view is couched in the imperative of security for Australian subjects. In light of 'a very…large and sometimes threatening world' (5), the local—as national—takes precedence over any celebration of global commonality. These apparently contrasting positions in fact sit well together in a liberal paradigm where the secure and certain nation progresses and matures on an international stage. Flannery's attack on the rapacious nature of economic development, degrading and destroying a national environment, can be seen as a critique of modernity and its blinkered drive for progress, irrespective of the damage trailed in its wake. This is a view employed frequently in nationalist discourse (Muecke, 'Variability' 58). Chapter Three examines readings of the global understood through modernity as perspectives that compound non-

indigenous and national 'crises', and Flannery also demonstrates his adherence to this belief in his representation of the global—while ideally holding nations together—as chaotically pressuring the local at this particular time. Thus, he concludes, it is necessary for non-indigenous Australians to realise in their current state of uncertain belonging 'that we have no other home but this [national] one' (Flannery 5).

And yet, despite Flannery's resistance to progressive modern forces, the arguments I have outlined that propound ecological harmony for non-indigenous belonging, including his own, all address a *future* Australian ecology through the invocation of its current disorder. The claim to ideologies that break from modernity are somewhat ironic as the progressive push forward—condemned as too-materially driven, too superficial, and devoid of holding capacities—is replicated in discourse that attributes damage to the past, and sees the future as promising potential for ecological remaking. Here, the present is overlooked, consigned to represent chaos alone as a saving future is pursued. This is the forgotten ground that Modjeska wishes contemporary Australian fiction would return to. As Rose explains, the idea that 'history, or society, is moving toward the resolution of conflict and contradiction…a future point to which our lives are directed' ('Dark Times' 100) figures strongly in modern liberal discourse. Flannery's reference to Australia's 'dark' past and its damaging consequences are framed in precisely such a way: for 'a long-term future' (3) and a 'new beginning' (1) for the nation, its damaging past must be overcome.

The notion of 'crisis' itself needs consideration here. I consider the discourses that invoke ontological and ecological disorder for the purpose of moving onto a future where order is restored and crisis allayed as perpetuating a forgetting of immediate conditions through the use of this terminology. Caught between the future and the past, and looking to these only, what is happening in the space of living, right here and now, is obscured, with 'crisis' configured as an aberrant and transitory moment. The paradox of this configuration is demonstrated by Slavoj Zizek in his analysis of the rhetoric following the terrorist attacks of September 11. The 'crisis' here was the immediate state of war that President Bush announced that day. However, as Zizek argued, '[t]he problem is that America is, precisely, not in a state of war, at least not in the conventional sense of the term (for the large majority, daily life goes on, and war remains the exclusive business of state agencies)'. Thus, he continued, 'we are entering a time in which a state of peace can at the same time be a state of war' (4). Therefore, what was presented as an eruptive and unusual state of disorder was, at the same time, the day-to-day living of a particular locality.

Crisis cannot be pinned down to a single narratable effect. Instead, its conditions are encountered and lived out in diverse, changing, and unordered ways—temporal and spatial. This perspective refuses to isolate one origin and meaning of crisis, but rather considers the dynamics of relation that operate in any discursive or actual occurrences of trauma or pain. Moreover, attributing crisis to an event alone overlooks the supra-structures that are lain across a shifting ontological ground. In the operation of such structures—governmental policy, the market economy, or regulatory codes, for

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example—loss and damage are everyday occurrences, prompting Kathleen Fallon to refer to a 'state of emergency' as a 'state in which we live'; 'not the exception but the rule' (26). While for Fallon, the 'moment I truly heard [the] word "boong" for the first time' (26) reflected an emergency state, this ontological 'crisis' can be contextualised in a history of racism in Australia where, for example, the practice of removing indigenous children from their family and culture was not a 'pathological event', but 'a regular official practice, decided upon and undertaken by elected governments at their leisure, and routinely administered' (Krygier 40).

The frequent identification of feeling in the making of 'deep' connections to place further deflects an assessment of present structural harms. This is particularly evident when feeling is attributed to the recovery or consolidation of commonly held values, and I agree with Leela Gandhi when she argues that '[r]arely does an ethical action or decision proceed from the dictates of a single imagination or a single set of feelings' (140). Further, as a political force or agent, feeling becomes problematic when it is equated to the parameters of the private, particularly when *non-indigenous* 'deep' belonging is given as the solution to *ecological* unsettlements. Such attention to feeling, or 'a moralized politics based on empathy' (Visser 216), threatens to obscure questions of legal and political power with questions of the hermetically configured self, alone. Flannery's emphasis on personal legitimacy garnered in the enacting of individual duty suggests that transformations in ecological relations can be reduced to this since his account takes in history, society, environment, and the politics of place. When harms are generalised or

conflated in this way, violences within the nation are reduced to issues of self-regulation—and non-indigenous self-regulation at that.

In the examples I have presented in this chapter, images of a chaotic and disabled Australia situate a national ideal beyond a split spatial, social and psychic landscape. Fractures in a national topology are seen as anathema to the promise of a united horizon. Binaries are substantively opposed, and yet, as I have suggested, their mobilisation is continued: surface is opposed to depth, light to dark, and redemptive harmony to crisis. To manage the past and clear the future of the Australian nation, as if it were now over its 'bad' and damaging times, a *terra nullius* is re-imagined, with an ineffective history and a smooth ground for national development. Indeed, imaging 'dark' pasts solely through the rhetoric of repression, forgetting and silence creates an historical vacuum where there was indeed, always, the noise of ecological relation. This again illuminates the operations of structural forces above a shifting, everyday ground. Schaffer's point on the Stolen Generation report is relevant here. 'These stories are not new,' she argues. 'Those who spoke them, albeit painfully and most often reluctantly, are not mute. Until very recently however, [they] had no efficacy in the public domain, no legitimacy within official discourses of nation' (4).

To conclude this chapter it is worth reiterating that the pursuit of a firm and clear ground for belonging—articulated in a poetics of wholeness and contrasted to division—will ultimately unground the self and its environmental relations. To be 'in touch' with an environment in the model of oneness, where the subject is held and self-possessed in an

ecological milieu, disavows the dynamics and inconclusivity that I see as constituting a touch that is grounded, incorporating in a non-conclusive way both proximity and distance, and responding to things in the midst of happening. Totalising touch is defensive and conceptually excludes the instances of meeting and separation that occur in an ecology where the subject seeks out the hold of security. Thus, the kind of encounter implied in sorting out a national 'mess'—as in environmental moralism: recognising its material presence, yet seeking to control rubbish in management practices—forbids complex relations between the self and refuse. Held in abeyance, now and in the future, the effects of waste as it exists in the world are circumscribed by the poetics of ecological cleaning and restoration.

The synonymity suggested in dominant environmental discourse between a clean national landscape and a 'triumphant...modal citizen' (Berlant 56) thereby translates the environmental transcendence of pollution and 'mess' to ontological recovery. As the land is smoothed over and made pristine once more, 'marks of hierarchy, taxonomy and violence' (56) are erased from the conceptualised collective subject. The evidence of waste, or 'bad stuff in the landscape' (Muecke, 'Devastation' 126)—what is scattered (since it is without depth) on the surface of nation—signifies 'dark' pasts and non-indigenous malpractice. Colonialism's 'mess' is the environment's disorder, and it must be cleared away if any 'real' non-indigenous belonging is to be achieved. Closed off in meaning and pushed out of a national self-image, this 'bad stuff' is refused a dynamic relation with those who pass through the landscape, and prompts the push to forget the ground of immediate living. In 'the assertion about the importance of waste, dealing with

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the shit-end of capitalist processes,' Muecke insists, 'an eco-fascist could forget the importance of life' (127).

In metonymic poetics, with waste no longer able to exceed its bounds, a future light can be admitted into a national landscape that represents the revealing of secrets—or total, encompassing knowledge—and the establishing of 'authentic', non-indigenous roots. Flannery in particular makes these metonymic links between waste and the past, and the past *is* waste in this way, recording 'bad' events and the damage they cause, without value to a culture that seeks restoration. The concept of waste land, endemic in acts of colonisation, sees a landscape without meaning and use in itself, but as necessary (and thus necessarily colonised) for the goals of development or progress. What is wasted initiates 'a scene of departure' (Halperin 6), and consequently the space for new, or originary beginnings, such as those colonialism fetishised.

I look to a different understanding of damage and waste as vital to a dynamic ecology and the self's ability to be grounded in this. Derrida's assertion that 'an inheritance is never gathered together, it is never one with itself' (*Specters* 16) is pertinent for the ecological and ontological shapes I argue for: shapes in which the past is not exiled from the present or future, but presences itself in a rough and unquantifiable dispersal of effects, without adherence to rules and values of order. '[O]ne must filter, sift, criticize,' Derrida insists of any approach to the past, 'one must sort out different possibilities that inhabit the same injunction' (16). 'Mess' is the disturbance between polarities, or the possibilities that Derrida refers to, and illuminates unsettlement as implicit in process: '[t]o each their own

junk,' Muecke writes, 'waste will return one day to fertilise knowledge' ('Devastation' 126). The moralising strictures of a healing ideology sharply exclude or wholly subsume difference, and poetically applied, the representations of a landscape in need of repair through eradication and transcendence preclude the ontological and ecological possibilities that come from disordered environmental encounters. Nothing surprising or generative (in a non-linear fashion) can poetically or literally occur in a world envisioned through clean and sharp lines.

It is 'the intervals or disparities between things', generated as they touch and become, that this logic overlooks: elements—'mess', waste, self, other—that connect where 'the whole is not given but always open to variation, as new things are added or new relations made' (Deleuze qtd. in Muecke, 'Variability' 53). In Chapters Five and Six I consider a relational ecology in which the 'mess' of the past is lived with and in unsettling relation to the self and its environment, rather than constituting a single and surmountable legacy of damage. In such an ecological model, a 'nearness which involves distanciation and difference' (Ahmed and Stacey 7) unlocks an ontology from a closed circle of holding, enabling the subject's relations with local conditions to participate in ontological becomings. Here, ontologies take the form of chiaroscuro, where dark and light move into shadow.

An environment is constituted in day-to-day living, and in the representation of an ecology the self can be grounded. If an unsettled culture is poetically conveyed so as to explore rather than alleviate unsettlement—or the metaphoric trembles of an uneasy

constituency of the kind Modjeska discerns—then an ecology in which events refuse order and control, and where relations cannot be gathered together or cleanly cut-off, is produced. 'To move over the ground,' according to Carter, 'is not simply to align oneself with the lie of the land; it is to be aware [of what] introduce[s] perturbations into the environment' (*Lie of Land* 357). It is also to relate the self to the land's rises and falls, its patternings and grooves. It means falling over, and re-negotiating a place on the ground. In Chapters Three and Four I apply to textual landscapes the implications of 'crisis', or apocalyptic ecological and ontological narratives, as well as the discourse of healing and historical transgression. I argue in doing so that the metaphoric inferences of shadow— ambiguity, mutability, becomings—are evacuated from an ecology when it is poetically conceived as either cleaved apart or restored as whole.

Chapter 3

A Land Irreparably Damaged in Thea Astley's *Drylands*

I raised the question in the Introduction of whether or not representation could itself be a mode of dynamic relation. Weather forecasting, for example, can be seen as a poetic discourse that utilises a technique of immediate climatic analysis *and* of prediction. In the way I have contrasted metaphoric and metonymic poetics, this understanding of forecast is significant. The desire to belong firmly and safely in place is a potent force behind metonymic representation, as is the pursuit of complete ecological knowledge. In the process of weather forecasting however, an environment is represented in the midst of happening: forecast must remain in touch with local conditions from whence its predictions for climatic transformations—which can never be totally assured or certified—are made. This interpretation of weather forecasting can be aligned with metaphoric poetics where a gap in conclusivity always remains. '[W]e who listen will forget a hundred days of accurate forecast but blame [the forecasters] for the one downpour that comes out of the clear sky', (33) Morag Fraser asserts. As much as forecasters are asked to provide answers and directions, their analyses can never be whole, and they are certainly not final. Weather, as an ecological constituent, is always in a process of becoming.

Subtitled 'a book for the world's last reader', Thea Astley's *Drylands* proffers its own forecast for the Australian nation in a suitably apocalyptic tone. At the end of the twentieth-century, the novel's apparent meta-narrator, Janet Deakin, is full of 'angry ideas' (Astley 3) and from the flat above her newsagency, with its racks of unbought

novels and yellowing cards, in the Queensland country town of Drylands, predictions are made: no rain, blindingly bright or darkly oppressive skies, and a world 'going to hell in a handbasket' (Goldsworthy 30). Janet registers the human and meteorological climate of the town as being symbolically connected. This is a place without hope, drained of good will and full of weary individuals disconnected from each another. Like a weather forecaster, Janet summarises the conditions of the Drylands' community while predicting an increasing spiral of social chaos and collapse. Her representation of Drylands is presented authoritatively for she is spatially and, in her mind, demographically elevated above the town. Still, Janet's narrative control is never totalised, and her authority is questioned and mocked throughout the text.

What I argue however, despite this suggestion of the forecaster's fallible gaze—inherent in prediction as well as immediate analysis—is that the text ultimately refuses the metaphorics of forecast that would render *Drylands'* representations ecologically dynamic. Janet's lack of authorial power is noted but lamented where a world lain bare by new technologies is seen to supplant the ambiguities and shadows that the process of forecast can admit to narrative. Paradoxically, Astley's depiction of this brave new ecology performs the non-relationality that she critiques in a self-obsessed and irredeemably fractured contemporary Australian society. Since she predicts apocalypse, with no way out of a current state of 'crisis' and damage, her poetics condone a vision that ends in terminal collapse. Complex relations, or what Fraser terms 'the abrasions of encounter' (34) that the weather forecaster can never narratively contain, are refused in this where, even in a place of violence and hurt, an ecology generates ontological

process. In *Drylands* I identify the motifs of division and flatness that I have previously described and in my examination of the text I argue that, given this mode of representation, Astley's textual ecology is fixed and contained by its disastrous limits. Here, 'mess' and the rubbish of lives and 'bad' pasts are placed out of touch with immediate ecological conditions.

Six individual narrations are framed by Janet's voice in the text, and in these her forecasts appear accurate. Drylands is a drought-stricken place of 'sapless weather' (Astley 11) and 'worthless land' (111): 'a town to escape to, rot in, vanish in...run from' (16) amidst a 'landscape whose gullies and small streams had almost forgotten the pollution that clogged them' (32). Any hope that a change in climate is imminent is erased for the characters whose lives are battered as much by the harsh and wasted environment as by their own lack of purpose and possibility. Under the mind-numbing whirr of ceiling fans, beating uselessly at the heavy heat, the stagnant town and community continues its demise. A sense of alienation infuses the text: this is a place people run to but also seek to escape from. Full of 'relict[s]' (6) and 'refugee[s]' (35), Drylands accumulates drifters and untethered wanderers who match a dispossessing landscape of unprofitable farms and barren earth.

Janet arrives in Drylands as a city-woman sick of urban alienation and with a romanticised view of an outback community that is tight-knit and supportive. She swiftly discerns her move to be 'a step into the dark' (6), 'admi[tting]...defeat' (14) in a broken-down society, no different from that of the urban world she left, but decaying under its

own peculiar weight of ignorance and bigotry. The newsagency in which she had once hopefully stocked the latest literary journals and literary fiction now sits amidst the decrepitude of the town's main street, a doomed enterprise in a streetscape of closed and run-down buildings. Janet's own livelihood dwindles as the population shrinks. Her books and journals become swiftly displaced by the '*unuttered* demands of local taste' (12) for the '"men's" magazines, the bosom-thigh buskers, [and] the car and gun monthlies' (7) [emphasis mine]. Absent or flattened communication is an element of the dispersed community. From her apartment above the newsagency, surrounded by her unsold library, time compresses into an unbearable yet ongoing moment of failure and unoriginality. In this place, she states, '(t)here [is] no[thing]…new under the sun' (5). Drylands is 'not quite hell' (16), but close enough to it.

Janet's elevated perspective confirms her outsider-ness in Drylands. It suggests her position is one of cultural observer which, even after ten years or so in this town, is still experienced and conveyed. Even as she watches the community die she feels 'alienated from [its] life-pulse' (290). She sees herself as 'useless' (3), sucked into the responsively deadened repetitiveness of 'the day to day to day to day' (285). Like every other drifter in town, without roots or purpose, Janet considers her lack of value to indicate her participation in a rubbished landscape, full of human and non-human debris. Her decision to write a novel is a redemptive gesture. She determines to make 'use [of this] place', and regain meaning in her life through a narrative reinvestment of value in the word and thus in the world. Self-positioned as 'a watcher rather than a participant' (14)—or a 'small lord' (Fraser 33) of forecast—Janet therefore seeks to document, from an outsider's

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perspective, the culture around her: writing a text, like Astley's, 'for the world's last reader' (Astley 6).

She is determined to 'achieve the voice of her times' (10), a view of a township—and a poetically configured ecology—'being out-manoeuvred by the weather' (287) as it moves towards a climax, the 'inevitable end' (288). Her vista takes in the rotational clock of Drylands. She watches the sky that sometimes, misleadingly, swells grey with clouds that never unload their rain over brown and thirsty lands. '[D]ying stocks and impossible debts' (244) inform the tensions behind the daily encounters of Drylands' townsfolk, 'a sluggish mix bubbling briefly, subsiding briefly' (17), and propel the exodus of ruined farming families in their beat-up cars, 'rattl(ing) away along the gravel roads until their petrol ran out' (245). Here the landscape reflects a cultural surface—'a skeletal' (286) community under a 'hard sky' (287), on 'flat' and 'lonely' plains (180). This is a 'cultivated *terra nullius*' (24), exploited by farming, denuded by weather, and tainted by the violence and hypocrisy that hangs heavily over the entire landscape.

Janet's observations expose various endings in Drylands, significantly the demise of holding narratives for the community and in particular the traditional rural mythologies of mateship, goodwill and interdependence. These virtuous and mythic foundations of national identity (as I have demonstrated them to be culturally figured) are exposed by the text to be perversely manifested or voided of meaning in the Drylands' environment. Through each of the stories in the text a cumulative image of corruption, physical threat and social dissolution is conveyed. Fear, persecution and exclusion blank out trust, care

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and reciprocity, while division and estrangement replace a cohesive and bonded collective. There is no redemption from hardship for *Drylands'* characters. 'False identit[ies]' (21) and shallow preoccupations dress a fragmented collective that meets primarily, as it is represented, in the hard-edged finality of violence and abuse.

There is a paradox depicted in this un-cohesive culture that demands sameness and rejects the unorthodox, while still positioning self against self. A monotonous hegemony of creed and opinion is demanded in Drylands, with difference met suspiciously or more often, persecuted. Franzi Massig is regarded with hostility when he first arrives in town, watched with hard stares by the men who cluster in proprietorial fashion around the Legless Lizard's front bar. Though he has come to Drylands to escape his past and find 'anonymity in anonymity' (24), Franzi can no more disappear here than he can blend with the landscape, barbed and littered with the failed refuse of industry. His first 'cultural mis-step' at the bar, ordering a pina colada, reinforces the rules of a place in which '(o)rdinariness is all' (42). 'Jesus!' Barney exclaims, as the drink is placed in front of Franzi. 'What's that pansy stuff?' (42). Thus, despite a doctrine of acceptance in uniformity—'Agree. Melt in. Be dull...[so] the town forgets you are there' (42)—the regulation of normality depends upon an inviolable social outside. After four years in Drylands, Franzi with his suspect German name ('you're half a Brit,' he is reassured. 'That's the main thing' [41]) is still 'a newcomer' (43), relegated to the edge of belonging.

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Racism and sexism divide the community. Evie, a visiting creative writing teacher from the city, is sized up as a meddling outsider by the patriarchal order that dominates the town. 'And who the fuck are you?', she is asked. 'Some two-bit bitch teacher from the city out to see how the other half lives' (90). In this 'two-cow town' (71), as Evie dismissively registers all the rural areas she has visited on her writing tour, her position on the outside of social codes is made clear. Shocked by a culture of domestic violence that appears naturalised in the town, Evie tries to reason with the women who have left behind their domestic drudgery for a day to participate in her class, but seem resigned to—even complicit in—their socially subordinate place. So used to such abuse, these women regulate their own self-expression, keeping in line for fear of moving too far beyond 'those sanctions imposed by the conventions of thinking acceptable for small-town wives' (85). In class they write 'pieces so polite, so tentative [that] they become mounds of indistinguishable dullness' to Evie (85).

The women's resentments and pain are kept unvoiced, registered only in the 'neat starched cottons, the shampooed hair, the vestige of makeup that reassured them they were not simply milkers, tractor drivers, cleaners and cooks' (87). While they are wholly aware of their disempowered place in this culture, Evie initially cannot bridge the divide that lies between the women and herself, and accept, let alone comprehend, a status quo of silent acceptance. When she expresses her disbelief that Ro could ever contemplate returning to her husband after his violent intrusion into their day, Evie is 'told [that] she didn't understand'. The women 'told her how small the town was. They told her the police wouldn't act. The police always took the husband's side in these matters. The

police drank with them. They wouldn't do anything to upset a mate' (93). The women's enjoyment at being engaged for the day in creative activities is underscored by a sense of 'hopelessness' (83) that closes in on them, even as they attempt, just for a time, to push it away.

Evie feels like an 'intruder' (80) as she walks along the sagging streets of Drylands, and the 'indefinable terror' (80) she senses when she first arrives finds its form in the domestic violence she witnesses. There is an 'ingrown self-sufficiency of secrets' (80) here that mirrors a sense of menace coming from the landscape, again homogenised in Evie's mind as she recalls the last rural town she visited and how its 'regiments of indifferent trees', frightening with 'their bony limbs' (80), sent her running, wildly away, in a spin of fear and panic. These feelings of disequilibrium are left unexplored by Astley's narrative which ominously translates this unsettlement in relation to the environment through the hard-edged realities of explicit social damage.

Astley plays with the mythology of a threatening Australian landscape—what Benny Shoforth calls 'scrub-scare' in the text, a landscape viewed as 'alien, spiky [and] unwelcoming' (182) by settlers—and critiques an urban view of any land outside the cosmopolitan in these terms. This is furthered when the text parodies representations of the outback as providing spiritual 'depth' and enlightenment to non-indigenous venturers. Drylands' only tourist attraction is a 'weird escarpment' upon which, 'at certain hours of the day in certain angles of sun and shadow' (46) an outline of the Madonna and child appear, inferring 'the divine irreverence of images' (Baudrillard 5) in a shallow cultural

landscape. Far from being shadowed and ambiguous in its 'secrets', Drylands is configured as a surface place, with violence and pain exposed in the 'eye-blindly bright' (Astley 80) world of unsubtle actions and devastating, irredeemable consequences. And despite Evie's examination of this culture—like Janet's—ostensibly from an outside position, she cannot avoid being implicated in it. No one is exempt from the impact of Drylands' devastation.

Consequently, before the 'expectant eyes' (81) of her class, Evie begins 'to understand the isolation of these places that drove people to seize any opportunity for escape from humdrummery... These four—these pleasant four...were fighting the darkness' (81). When Win and Ro's husbands intrude into the class' lunch break a 'flattened moment' (89) overtakes the 'bright air' (89) of the day. Sharp-edged damage is conveyed in the 'angry screech of rubber' (88) that announces the men's arrival, and there is 'threat and animosity in their stance' (89). The abuse, in words like 'chunks' (89), that flies from the mouth of Ro's husband—'soured from failure and a need to bully' (89)—represents this flattening effect, without relation beyond a one-way attack as Ro stands almost peacefully, 'a willowing saint, enduring abuse like a terrible balm' (89). His words are heavy, total and close-off response. Ro 'was not dodging but receiving' (89), unable to negotiate this humiliating monologue.

Evie experiences male sexual predation first hand when she is pursued by the travelling salesman she meets on the train into Drylands. In their encounter relations are, once again, hard and indicate decay rather than generation. There is a 'rotting emptiness' (74)

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between them. The justification given for his attentions to Evie relays a discursive banality in gender relations—'I've got problems. Problems. My wife. My kids. You don't understand' (97)—where the rhetoric of a 'natural' male disposition to extra-marital affairs provides a smooth layer of performance for the man, beneath which lies the unsettling force of sexual threat. Male sexual violence reappears repeatedly in the text, figured in terms of hunting and conquest. When Joss, whose narrative is the last to be told, is unremittingly pursued by two local men aggrieved by her 'rejection' of them, they smirk: '[s]he's a stuck-up bit, all right! Thinks she's something else... Kinda asking for it, aren't you?' (263). The notion of 'reckoning' (86) in terms of sexual scores to be made and accounts to be totalled, comes to characterise male attitudes towards women in *Drylands*.

The salesman's attempt at raping Evie is described in the same oppressive language as the encounter between Ro and her husband. The salesman blocks the door to Evie's escape, his gait filling her room with a 'strength [that] shocked' (97). When she finally reaches the train after wrenching herself free from the man, there is little difference between the urban Evie, stumbling and bloodied, and the rural woman represented by Ro who sits in an adjacent seat, 'huddled' and 'bruised' (98). 'Two of a kind' (99), the modern career woman and the country wife and mother flee Drylands together, to the shudders and 'dingo cry' (99) of the train's engine beginning to whir. Despite their escape from the town, we are left with an ominous sense of continuity in the Drylands' environment: 'beyond the shaken windows' (99) of the train, the landscape is blanketed in darkness, flatly and indistinguishably 'black on black' (99).

Through each of its narratives, the predatory tone of *Drylands*' conveys an unsafe world constantly on the verge of uncontrollable violence. The seven deadly sins, translated by Janet as 'hubris, criminal desire, debauchery, rage, greed, malice [and] torpor' (16), describe daily modes of living in Drylands, which are themselves reflected in a harsh and degraded environment. Perversely enacting Janet's theory of narrative, these selfish and destructive characteristics pervade and take over the town. 'A story should fester,' Janet argues, and 'should spread its attractive bacteria until it absorbs the whole body' (16). Being held in narrative takes on a particular meaning in this ironically charged metaphor of total infection. Despite Janet's insistence that the novel should uplift and enlighten, clasping the reader in the life of the age, the narratives that do take hold in the Drylands' community eat into and kill her idealised view. Condemned to 'short-lived encounters' (17), the population of the town is infused with cruelty and harboured grudges. Entrenched prejudice emphasises the infectious nature of certain social discourse passed on through generations as tradition and values, but revealed to be both wasted and wasting.

Jim Radley's story emphasises the depth of resentments that seem to brand this landscape with the same stigmata of failure he feels on himself. Worn out by years on his unprofitable farm, he attempts to resurrect both his hope and dignity in the fruition of his long held desire to build and sail a boat of his own. His dream is vandalised, however, and made more terrible in its nearness to realisation, by the sexually charged and self-obsessed Toff Briceland, the son of Drylands' most wealthy land owner. As if

demonstrating the perversity of inheritance, Toff is educated by his councillor father, Howie, in corruption and 'the finer points of rorting and living well' (140). Setting his sights on Jim's persecution for the single pleasure of expressing his own 'vile sterility'— 'He's never had a girl...He never masturbated' (143)—Toff sets Jim's boat on fire, watching it burn ecstatically in an 'orgasm of blaze' (145). Toff's damaging display 'shifted his hatred out from the centre' (141) of his intense narcissism, but in non-dynamic ways. Arson becomes a ritual of sorts as Toff performs a 'dousing...[a] baptism' (145), and the sadistic nature of this behaviour is thus additionally laden with the impossibility it signifies for Jim's own redemption. His future's desecration is Toff's 'baptism'.

As the boat tosses and rides its flames, making extreme Toff's triumph, the image of a rising phoenix is employed—an ironic motif that appears throughout the text—emphasising in contrast the destruction of any hopeful desire that is indicative of Drylands. Jim's 'glowing hulk would never rise from its ashes' (146). A narrative of inheritance is affirmed in Jim's reminiscence of the first and only raft he ever owned as a child being smashed to pieces by Howie Briceland and his gang. Toff's mean, 'raking' eyes (136) mirror his father's as a child, 'watching' (124) Jim's raft with the same kind of malicious envy, and waiting for his moment to destroy. Thus the perpetuation of some narratives and the exhaustion of others is realised in this story. Jim's hope is '[e]clipse[d]'—'Finished... Finished' (147)—and his exit from Drylands is marked with failure and resignation as he heads for the place of his spent desire, the now 'inevitable'

(147) rather than promising ocean. For Toff, there is no exit out of the cycles of violence and the behaviours learned in narrow isolation that consume his young life.

A consensus of prejudice therefore constitutes community in Drylands, even as it expels its failures. Toff's 'manic puritanism' (143), coming to light in his vilification of others, suggests once more the repression that lies behind a hard and damage-laden surface, on which relations are flattened and perceptions fixed. The dry landscape accords with this as it calcifies, resists deep engagements and displaces its elements, and Toff's description as 'grounded, literally, earth-merged' (144) suggests this alignment. In a co-existence of meanness, the boy's attitudes are written on the land, while the violent consequences of his sexual eruption suggest a broader situation of social anxieties released in mediated and unspoken ways, and are all the more devastating for this. Failed resurrection or redemption is a theme of the text, and in several instances characters profess a baptismal fantasy that is swiftly annihilated. Again, Astley makes reference to the empty mythos of an outback landscape that provides such renewal.

Benny Shoforth's story elaborates on the anxieties that motivate the persecution and bigotry of Drylands' inhabitants. Inherited behaviours closet historical legacies that unsettle the town and the narratives it chooses to tell about itself. With both non-indigenous and indigenous parentage, Benny is another character on the outside of the community, his background and indeterminate colour generating disquiet in a dominant culture that demands identity be certain and cleanly differentiated: '[y]ou'd have to peer closely to spot that touch of tarbrush. Was it the deep-set quality of his eyes? The bony

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angles of his profile?... Was he one of them, the skin-privileged, or did he deserve dismissive contempt? The very unsureness gave offence' (158). Benny is alienated for this ambiguity. The perverse nature of prejudice is demonstrated where Benny's unsettling difference is read into his equally 'offensive' neighbourly behaviours. His goodwill and gentle nature are mistrusted in a distorted perception of selfless generosity. 'How the hell do you deal with that?' (159), someone asks, referring to Benny's reluctance to accept payment for the odd jobs he does around town. The non-indigenous men of Drylands deal with this uneasiness by forming a 'tighter blokeship club' (158) within which they affirm social superiority.

Intolerance is once more depicted in terms of a hard, bare surface and the hostile insecurities that brew below it. The police who approach a group of Aboriginal men, with whom Benny is conversing, are 'casual over the inner threat' (161) that lies in their interrogating questions and racially privileged authority. Similarly, the white overseer of the property on which Benny's Aboriginal mother works speaks to Benny in a tone '[n]ot friendly...[n]ot unfriendly' while still effecting a 'warning-off sound' (163). Benny's youthful challenge to this culture infers a primary settler anxiety of an uncertain claim on the land that shapes non-indigenous relations to Aboriginality. When he rewords Dorothy Mackellar's iconic poem of Australian identity—'I love a sunburnt country. The land belongs to me. I'd like to see the whites strung up/ From every gidgee tree' (169)—and although his teacher is '[s]ecretly impressed by the neatness of his parody' (169), Benny is caned in front of his class-mates.

It is not just the threat of difference in the imagination of a mono-culturally dominant nation that causes insecurity, but what Ann Curthoys describes in settler Australians as 'a fear of being cast out, exiled, expelled, made homeless again, after two centuries of securing a new home' (Curthoys 17). Benny's ability to remake his home, time and again over his years of dispossession and persecution, provides a stark contrast to the efforts of settlers who, as the victims of ecological and economic adversity, are seen to continually 'lose' against the land and are threatened perpetually with dispossession, despite material and social advantages. This, Curthoys argues, is a favourite self-view of non-indigenous Australians in popular historical mythology, legitimating their right to be here (4). The home-in-a-cave far outside Drylands that Benny sets up, complete with lounge suite and bookcase, is an intolerable affront to settler security, parodying, as it does, white domestic culture in an 'uncivilised' context.

Yet Benny's ease in the landscape is conveyed as neither simplistic nor romantic, and his move to the cave is prompted by eviction and poverty rather than a desire to be there. He is slowly beaten, we are told, from the repetition of 'the way things were' (Astley 186): 'too old for fighting the system' (183), his resettlement in the National Park represents a final site of exclusion, from which, even here, he is forced to move on. Howie Briceland's determination to evict Benny from the park is reminiscent of colonial endeavours to hound out indigenous people from the land—clearing a 'wilderness', so to speak. Hunting provides 'purpose' (189) to Howie, yet it is for particular reasons that he seeks the persecution of Benny. In this, the oppressive layer of secrets that Evie discerns is specifically charged: knowing and 'pressing down the truth' (195) of his shared

parentage with Benny (they have the same white father), Howie's unease is glaringly loaded with the need to erase the evidence of this knowledge. The corruptive and deadening nature of secrets conveyed in Evie's narrative is therefore compounded. In his glee at hounding a peaceful man out of town, Howie protects himself with white authority and power, and a determined habit of forgetting that has been entrenched through generations of settlers.

Benny's father's ability to erase the traces of his illegitimate son from his life (having had him 'carried off to a reserve' [158] after his birth), and by the same token, his own crimes of exploitation and sexual abuse (Benny's mother was raped) demonstrates the silencing capacities of non-indigenous privilege. The 'family' values endorsed by a conservative mainstream and implicated in a rural tradition of 'close-knit' community (Goodall 31) and solid 'bush families' (23), are exposed as ungrounded in actual social experience, made all the more hypocritical in contrast to a system that separated indigenous children from their parents and that the construction of this mythology ignores. Despite the contact Benny initiates with his mother, it eventually 'seemed easier [for him] not to make the painful visit to the big homestead' (Astley 172) since 'nothing was able to dissolve the tundra of years that had separated them' (172). Reunited with her, 'Benny had never felt so lost' (173).

Narratives such as Benny's represent the 'sore places' of 'Establishment ground' (190), that for this reason are kept hidden and disremembered in dominant cultural narratives. As if wearing the silence of his story in official and popular discourse, Benny's

understated behaviour—like the women in Evie's class—also testifies to his understanding of these structures, and his 'reclusiveness' is described as 'pulled around him like a cloak' (178). This image of being shrouded, or confined by unspeakable things, suggests the strength of these social codes, and the damage and inequalities that exist behind a 'good' public façade. For Howie, Benny's removal from the National Park is like '[a] clearance...[a] purge' (191) of what taints his 'master-race assurance' (189). What Astley articulates here is the paradox of settler indifference to, and acute awareness of, the past, suppressed into forms of erasure and damage.

In the Drylands' environment, symptomatic of Australian (post)colonial culture, the perpetuated 'powerlessness of poverty and colour' (186) is also irredeemable. At the conclusion of Benny's narrative, a scene of hard edges and unbreachable divides communicates what, as the novel suggests, will always remain in this hegemony as officially unspoken. Standing up at the council meeting chaired by his half-brother, Benny rails against his persecution in the community and its wilful exclusion of discomforting knowledges. As he shouts out his anger—'I'm Kanolu tribe, you hear? His brother!' (196)—he is forcibly removed from the chambers, denied his long-desired confrontation with Howie. The doors of power and social belonging close behind him, while his words 'vomit' (196) out into the night over lands as hard and resistant as the people inside, and as vandalised and tired as Benny himself.

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A Bleak Outlook for a Modern World: Unoriginality, Technology and the Surface

It is Janet who apparently writes these stories from her room in the sky, elaborating a cultural text that is represented through, rather than finding defence in, a 'natural' text of environmental degradation. In this climate of drought and fracture, words 'thud...like small stones' (167), kisses 'drop...to the floor and fragment' (217), while '(e)mptiness puts its arms about you and gives a Judas embrace' (272). Here, 'spite has no end' (265), a 'grin isn't a grin...it's a slit in a cavern', and 'small spatterings of rain' are 'as offensive as spit' (287). Division is stressed between selves and figured in the impenetrability of dry lands upon which fragility and innocence are debased, ruined like the rusted 'cages and tanks' (32) that smatter the landscape of abandoned farms. This sun-scoured refuse of lives and profitability echoes the 'mournful tune of loneliness' (281) running through the town. What Sturken refers to as the 'nature story' (176) of social disaster, in which topographic and meteorological elements are blamed for human chaos, is consequently opposed in Astley's text. Without understating the consequences of drought and environmental degradation for both the rural sector, and the nation traditionally seen as 'riding on the back' of outback culture, landscape in *Drylands* is poetically, and powerfully, harnessed to ontological and ecological ruin.

Sue Kossew reads Astley's novel as representing Pauline Hanson's One Nation 'redneck' milieu, and the cultural shift towards intolerance that Hanson's popularity indicated in the late 1990s. Certainly, Astley's depictions concur with the contemporary image of One Nation preoccupations: the divisions between city and country; the economic burdens carried by rural populations while economic and social policy favours urban

dwellers; and a resentment towards difference and cultural change in favour of homogeny and 'traditional' Australian values. A critique of the 'victimological narrative' (Curthoys 4) that Curthoys identifies as a dominant presence in non-indigenous self-perceptions can also be seen in *Drylands*. Instead of non-indigenous endurance and suffering on the land being contextualised solely in terms of a hard and unforgiving environment, Astley depicts structural violence, individual implication and political insufficiency—'council waffle and postponed decisions' (Astley 286)—as culturally determining forces. The actual unsettlement that comes from bank foreclosures, social exclusion and intolerable climatic conditions, is compounded by the uneasiness that characterises Drylands' predominantly non-indigenous population, unsure of their tenure upon the land yet responsible for its destruction.

Evident in Astley's disparate and scrappy collective is a 'lack of feeling for sustaining myth' (Turner 20), necessary, as many commentators have suggested, for a cohesive society and a cultural body that no longer suppresses its past. In Stephen Turner's terms, Drylands would stand for a melancholic, 'inarticulate and conflicted' (37) place, 'constructed through historical experience' (37) and its own willed forgetting. A 'reactionary response to inarticulate history,' he argues, sees 'the unmediated return of buried cultural instincts in the form of...prejudice and enmity' (37). Equally, Gibson relates the 'bleak moods and psychopathologies in North Queensland' ('Quiet Suspicion' 46)—an example of 'badlands', his conception of which I discuss in Chapter Six, and a space the fictional Drylands could inhabit—to a culture of historical repression and an inability to acknowledge or reconcile 'the debts of theft that are the basis of colonialism

anywhere in the world' (47). The overhanging anxiety that is the mood of this place, speaks of, even as it officially silences, a legacy of denial, racial hostility and damage. The degradation of land and settler alienation from it are therefore seen as culturally produced, testament to the 'systematic denial [that] first blocked people's abilities to negotiate and imagine new ways of being in a ['new'] country' (40). In the absence of this dynamic relation, the environment is fixed, flat and hard.

These cultural frames prove insightful for *Drylands* and examples of 'red-neck' politics and the effects of historical suppression, prominent in the text, indicate a fundamental connection between civic disorder and psychic dis-ease. Even so, despite the novel's emphasis on perpetuated histories, and cycles of violence, there is a predictive sense in Janet's observations of a new and terminal cause for this falling apart. Significantly her narrative voice—'the constant among variables' (Astley 244) in the decaying town—is challenged in its authority as the text progresses. Her ruminations over the meaning of story and what it is to write, isolate originality, imagination and omniscience as key narrative qualities. The text is created outside herself, 'beyond the boundaries of what she knew and what could be' (244), and yet her gaze 'from above' conveys a protected totality as she takes in the world and its 'times', representing its truths from a seemingly objective position.

Janet's eagle-eye, however, is demonstrably fraught, and the sense of authorial security her elevated position confers is ridiculed when, looking out from her window, she is '[e]mbarrased' (200) to see a waving hand, down below, 'give her the finger' (200).

Further, it is common knowledge in the town that Janet watches and writes what she sees. Win Briceland makes reference to Janet 'writing away' and '(p)utting it all down': 'You'll have lots of time for that now', she continues. 'New places. New ideas' (291). With her 'sly look' (290) and superior air, Win confirms what Janet had previously suspected, 'that she was being discussed, talked about', subjected to 'the stray question cloaked in sympathetic interest: "Janet, wotcher do in the evening, love? Must get lonely, eh?"' (200). She is inextricable from a dysfunctional network of gossip and rumour, and implicated in the town's chaotic composition, no matter how her self-image portrays this to be otherwise.

This sense, as Kossew terms it, that 'even the watcher is being watched' (Kossew 178) destabilises the clear meta-narrative that Janet's voice purports to offer, and is playfully emphasised by Evie's decision as she leaves Drylands to 'write a story…about a woman in an upstairs room above a main street in a country town, writing a story about a woman writing a story' (Astley 99). Janet watches Evie as she scurries for the train station, intending to leave town, but equally Evie observes Janet, framed in her window, from the street below. Narrative control, and with it implied authority and authenticity, are thus opened to question in Drylands' crumbling social landscape. Franzi too, professes to be 'the watcher' (45) in his narrative but, like Janet, his position is destabilised when we discover that he is also being watched, shadowed by the man whose identity he has purloined. Issues of authenticity are again raised here as the 'copy'—living this identity for four years—and the 'original'—having been 'lost' and untraceable for a length of time—confront each other.

Janet's desire to write lives in her fictional landscape that are 'beyond' herself is relevant as it suggests a conception of narrative aspiring to 'a source beyond being'—'the "One" from which multiplicity itself is deemed to derive' (Gibson, *Postmodernity* 86). This, according to Andrew Gibson, is the literary inheritance of western philosophy (86). Her anxieties over textual originality also elaborate this, indicating a pure point of origin in which engagements with the world are anchored and from which they look out. Her novel thus seeks a return to this foundational ground, emerging 'from bud to fully formed calyx, sepals, corolla, biologically perfect' (Astley 199), and from where it can then transcend its individual ontology. Janet's attack on postmodernism's 'endless reactions, and possibilities of reactions…like some never-ending story' (4) reflects her dismay at the disordering of textual authority, and its infection with the inconclusive and the impure. What she desires to encapsulate from 'the themes of a lifetime [spent] reading' (10), is effectively a 'unitary base' (Gibson, *Postmodernity* 86) for knowledge and the production of meaning.

The correlation here between a textual stage, 'directed' by an authoritative hand, and Janet's pursuit of a totalising gaze reinforce her failure, especially since the audience to which she writes appears apathetic and disinterested, consumed with more temporal, flickering images of the world. When no one, she feels, is either listening or caring—or validating narrative in contemporary theory—the power of the novel to hold interest, let alone hold together a fracturing community, seems gone. She regrets the non-concreteness of meaning: how words are 'subject to tides, to misconceptions that insist on

clinging' (Astley 12), and considers the 'shadows of shadows of words' (199), uncontained and uncontainable, always gesturing in different directions.

The 'deconstruction' (293) of her novel, its pages left 'shuffled out of sequence' (293) by anonymous hands when her flat is broken into, parodies her attempt at—and the text's charade of—narrative cohesion and the search, either textual, cultural or geographic, 'for the ultimate Eden' (294). Confronted by the line scrawled across her page, 'Get a life!', and groping in her mind for 'the ultimate reply' (294), Janet collapses into the laughter of failure and loss, realising that she 'would never find it' (294). There are, she concludes at the 'end' of Astley's text, 'no endings no endings no' (294). This intrusion into Janet's watching and writing space emphasises her participation in what she spatially overlooks. She is a 'player' (244) like everyone else in this culture of breakdown. Indeed, her vantage point becomes vulnerable on the several occasions her newsagency is broken into: the crash of a body in the yard and the sound of disappearing footsteps together convey the threat of perceptible, but unseen and unarticulated, danger.

Already an admitted exile, Janet's seclusion becomes a confinement. Pressed upon by the proximity of invasion and violence, the 'peculiar sense of belonging' (153) Janet feels in the town, despite her outsider status—at times presented as a nostalgia for the way things were, '[e]veryone united by robust goodwill' (290)—suggests a perverse connection between her and Drylands' other residents, all commonly subjected to fear and 'entrap[ment]' (153). When she confronts a group of youths in the street, driving her 'crazy' with their 'meaningless' (287) noise, they laugh in her face and 'dance...about

her chucking the ball from one to the other…herding her away like dogs a sheep' (287). In their wordless and 'vicious' 'arrow-fast' (287) play, the youths enact a code of behaviour that terrorises difference and forces it out. Fleeing the scene 'giddied and befuddled', Janet locks herself away 'from what she knew to be an approaching terror' (287) and begins to contemplate escape. Given that her 'ultimate reply' is never realised, leaving is Janet's answer to this oppressive encounter: '[s]he had no idea where she might go. Only that she must' (289).

Therefore, even while inheritance is entrenched in these lands, there is a generational divide asserted in which the twenty-first century is heralded as an uprooting, alienating, and depthless future all of its own. Here, where narratives no longer hold, deconstructed to meaninglessness, a brave new world of digitally dominated, globalised culture frames Janet's forecast. While Astley attacks clichéd representations and understandings of Australian culture, she also mourns their loss, as the romance of 'open, sunlit plains' (Goodall 25), parodied in Drylands' cracked and embittered ground, is nullified in the image of a 'wide brown land' (Astley 240), drawn together by the spread of networks and cables. With Marshall McLuhan as her figurehead of global forecast, the battered stretches of rural Australia are redefined by Janet not as a space outside modernity and its effects, but as suffocating within it.

The incongruity of a town 'half-way to nowhere' (4) yet connected in McLuhan's vision to the global village—'the whole world united through long-distance communication technologies' (Ang 150)—highlights the tension between a critiqued nostalgic view of

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the country as somehow untainted by the cosmopolitan, and the processes of techno-transformation that, in Janet's perception, standardise global culture: '[t]his technological world was putting in a bite… It was starting to worry the very pith of her' (Astley 4). Damaged lands and a frayed community are juxtaposed with a 'blurred world of technobuzz' (9), as the town's entire population is 'tucked for leisure…in front of television screens…Internet adult movies or PlayStation games for the kiddies' (5). She imagines a globe 'full of people…glaring at a screen that glared glassily back' (9) and rails against what she considers to be the demise of culture beyond the isolated limits of a 'God-forgotten tree-stump of a town' (4).

The disavowal of the literary text in preference to the shallow simulacra of hyper-reality is her main point of attack as she protests against the death of the novel at the expense of 'the half-second grab of television, the constant flicker-change of colour and shape against a background of formless noise' (16). 'Out there,' she continues, '…was a new generation of kids with telly niblets shoved into their mental gobs from the moment they could sit up in a playpen and gawk at a screen, starved of those tactile experiences with paper, the smell of printer's ink, the magic discovery that black symbols on white spelled out pleasures of other distances' (240). Her anxieties give voice to the 'terminal living-condition' (Morris 163) that Baudrillard identifies in western modernity—the privileging of image over word, historical 're-enactment' as the only relation between humans and the past, and a reality-as-simulation that is 'unendurable' (Baudrillard 72): 'shadowless, depthless [and] invasive' (Morris 163). 'To simulate is to feign to have what one hasn't,' (5) Baudrillard writes. There is nothing substantial 'in the age of simulation' (Baudrillard

4), no anchors to truth or reality. Janet's authorial eye is consequently problematised in Astley's depiction of this pervasive hyper-culture, dissolved in its claims to survey and command.

The belief that 'television destroys the imagination'—as Morris intuits from Baudrillard's analysis of simulacra—since it imposes a 'regime of the all-seeing eye, the fully-visible space' and 'the inescapable network' (Morris 163) in a media-scape of postmodernity, is validated by *Drylands*. It follows then 'that criticism—at least in its traditional projects of highlighting "hidden" principles of organization, revealing faults and clarifying virtues, looking between the lines and behind the scenes of a text—has become a futile business' (Morris 163). In the too-bright light of Drylands there are no subtleties of meaning and everything is revealed even while the origins of the real are disavowed. This is paradoxically 'the violence of a civilisation without secrets' and '[t]he hatred by an entire civilisation for its own foundations' (Baudrillard 21). Faced with her own sense of repetition and the impossibility of the new, as she runs through and rejects ways to begin her work—'*onceupona* or *manyyearsago* or *inadistant* country. It's been done' (Astley 4) [emphasis in original]—Janet too performs this symptomatic, with the future apocalyptically envisioned as solely 'after-effects' (Morris 183). In this view, there are no temporal politics given to an environment, and no relation to the past configured except that of simulated experience.

Janet's resistance to this formulation of planar dimensionality in culture, devoid of meaningful and coherent narratives, positions her as an anachronism, 'assaulted' (Astley

288) and displaced as a witness to loss by the onslaught of vacuous and indeterminate technologies. The 'herding' mentality she initially scornfully discerns in cultural discourse—for example, dichotomised and homogenising representations of 'city folk' and 'country people' (241)—is consequently re-formed as a regret for what a globalised world will inevitably cement. Janet claims the necessity of myths that, despite their actual truth, mark an originary point for national identity, and considers the collapse of these categories—'Townies. Bushies' (241)'—to efface difference in the land, diminishing both national and local distinction. The meta-narrative of authorial control that Janet desires—with its imputed depth of meaning—is superseded in a fantastic and disconnective global culture. Franzi, already wise to a shallow, urban world in which corruption and the deferral of responsibility is not only normative but rewarded, refers to the pub's customers eating 'with eyes glued to the sports channel, hands moving forks automatically to gaping mouths' (47). Conversation is drowned as the 'television screeches above everyone' (41), recording disengagement and an ungenerative relation between the self and the television screen that, as Franzi argues, dehumanises and desensitises as it flattens out culture.

Postmodern theory, with its determination to 'avoid the narrative line like the plague' (33), is involved in this mono-tonal culture of unfulfilled restlessness and quick-ease solutions: 'Hey! Take a Nembutal!' (33). Narrative's unsettlement is rendered extreme by a society in which authority falls away to chaos and meaning is replaced with the single pursuit of self-satisfaction. Now, '*[e]veryone watched* [emphasis mine]: farragos of smut and violence, sexual thumpings...the sanctified brutality of war, the turn-a-blind-eye

indifference to the weak; the fat-bellied, narrow-arsed arrogance of political freaks who made rules for everyone except themselves' (10). Turned from the things that matter, according to Janet, Australian eyes and minds are now trained towards the shapes and colours of celebrity culture, the 'coiffures of starlets, princesses, rock singers' (11), while public apathy fans political and corporate self-interest.

The claims of postmodernism to have overthrown totalising narratives and hierarchical power are challenged as Astley represents the privileges inherent for a minority in a technology-obsessed society. Morris similarly professes a suspicion of claims that meta-narratives have seen their day, arguing instead that 'a wild proliferation of meta-discourses' is a 'striking' characteristic of globalised culture (183). Far from dispersing and putting to rest the 'grand stories of humanity's origins and destiny,' she elaborates, there are 'more of [these narratives] around' (183) today, not less. Indeed, the intention of deconstruction, as Mark Davis explains, to problematise and disturb 'regimes of knowledge, identity and speaking positions' (Davis 42-43) is played out in Astley's text as obversely silencing. Australian society (not specific to this rural setting) in *Drylands* is represented in an impasse from where no-one can speak at all, reminiscent of attacks on 'political correctness' and calls of 'going too far' in the dis-ordering of things. The meaning of Astley's subtitle is thus evident.

Janet wonders at 'some corrupt and deliberate policy…behind the system that produced school leavers and even university graduates barely literate in their own tongue' (Astley 202), as she exits the Legless Lizard in a blare of indecipherable noise that 'cracked her

head apart' (201). The power of words, undermined by 'television boom' (203) and sapped in a climate of introversion, is further debased in a contemporary political landscape that devalues and silences social debate, substituting 'anger, distress, shame, denunciation, ridicule' (Krygier 42) as the un-generative language of encounter and response. This is indicated by Benny's knowledge that 'words mattered' (Astley 172), even while his protests go deliberately unregistered in the council chambers. His voice and presence are seconded to spectacle, as speech becomes redundant in the face of hegemonic power and civic indifference.

Cultural degeneracy culminates poetically in the image of the silent youths who circle Janet, indicating the apocalyptic direction of society as control passes into the hands of the next generation. These youths enact a kind of tribal scene, connected by and privileged in their undecipherable knowledges, and heralding a social future from which she is excluded. The unordered mobility of their young bodies, spatially and audibly dominant in Drylands' main street, attests to something strange and threatening for Janet. A new division thereby emerges in the nation as the product of a broken-down sociality, intellectually demeaned and extra-nationally defined, and in which there seems no hope for Drylands' recovery.

In contrast to what Janet remembers as her 'personal dreamtime' (9)—her 'student days when she wanted to share with others the joy the books gave her' (9)—Toff 'doesn't want to go to uni' (291), and in a run-in with Janet professes to not comprehend written text, looking at it as if it were 'Sanskrit' (7). '(W)ho the hell could read these days?' Janet

wonders. 'Not the kids. Only old codgers like herself' (7). Toff seems to stand for the 'dominance of smart-arse technology' (9), separating the young from their elders, apathetic and yet because of this, disturbingly empowered by the currency of their knowledge: '[t]he kid raised his eyes to hers in a languidly calculating way and let his glance run down and up the tubby figure in front of him with a terrible calm' (8). Though inarticulate and only able to counter Janet's ribbing with the exclamation 'Oh piss off!', Toff and Janet both realise his cultural privilege. Astley's portrayal of youth culture participates in what Davis describes as the 'overwhelming rhetoric' (5) of destruction concurrent with postmodernity: a claim to 'all those things being taken away' (5) that resonates with Dixson's warning for the globalised nation heading further into 'crisis'. As an icon of cultural anxiety, '[y]ounger people, it seems, are some kind of trouble' (Davis 11), irreverent pall-bearers of a contrasting past now signified as 'pre-technology' (38).

In a recent article Hilary McPhee demonstrates this dichotomised view between the present and 'the way things were' with reference to her own place in a previous generation 'who thought we could do anything—and for a while, we did' (McPhee 13). Couched in a call for public voices who will 'cause ripples beneath the surface of our [current] complacency' (13), young people are positioned as generally ineffectual, now 'likely to be on the conservative side—or too distracted to care much either way' (13). McPhee's line is less that young people are 'a different species' (Davis vii) (which seems to be Janet's suggestion) than that they are nonchalant and lacking in socially responsive force or even consideration. Either way, a discourse of generationalism which adheres to these various constructions is evident, admitting an embodied future to be cast as

frightening and 'radically unknowable' (Davis 268). This, Davis argues, infers 'a logic of apocalypse' (268). In Astley's 'spectre of the "teen gang"'(Davis xii)—a well worn media cliché as Davis points out—'a climate of chronic social difference, fear, moral decline and scandal' (Davis 11) is effectively conveyed.

Thus the outback space, discursively circulated as metaphysically bereft through Australian cultural history, is self-consciously refigured as a signifier of the global market that cannot and will not hold. The death of the rural economy is taken outside the parameters of national-local negotiation and conflict (the traditional rivalry to which Janet refers, historically invested with economic imperatives as in, for example, the reaction of some pastoralists to the Mabo decision) and put in a context of multinational corporations, media conglomerates, and a bureaucracy that masquerades local control while opening its doors to lucrative buy-outs and corporate investment. Power is concentrated in fewer hands, while the notion of public and personal responsibility is diminished. Janet's inability to capture meaning in the novel flounders against the swell of multimedia-driven anti-narrative that still performs in totalising rhetoric a 'self-celebratory, high-tech' continuity, replete with fantasies of 'the unbroken vista [and] the smooth connection' (Morris 161).

According to Alan Atkinson, Australia in the 1990s—'when,' he writes, 'our new technology arrived for the mass of consumers' (42)—promised the 'world's first "postmodern republic"' and with this 'a new sense of interconnectedness among humanity, a new sense of closeness and moral pressure, a new personal accountability'

(42). Astley's novel, at the end of this decade, is entirely unconvinced of this possibility for a national utopia, however. Characters leave in *Drylands* and do not return. 'Nothing was okay', we are told (Astley 209). With the local exploded by the global, its fall-out chaotically spread across the landscape, a capitalist or Darwinian ethic 'in which only the strongest and most ruthless survive' (Haynes 194) sees the dream of a harmonious interconnectedness irrevocably displaced. The relentless nature of modernity in the text leaves devastation unchecked with 'illusory ideologies crumbled and [run] away like sand' (Astley 293)

The sea appears as a sign of false hope throughout *Drylands*, contrasting in its rise and fall, and associations of air, freedom, and expanse—something immense on the edge of self—with the bleak, hard outback lands and their overlay of techno-culture. Leaving her sandwich making, dressing gown-clad Lannie heads for the 'mesmeric sea' (208) and is 'lulled by the steady rhythm of water breaking on the sand below' (208); Joss, too, takes refuge by the coast, while Janet, contemplating the pain and decay around her—'Last month a brick had been put through her window' (245)—finds herself 'aching for the sea' (245). Yet the falling away of Janet's 'illusions' coincides with her remembering a house she once saw 'on the edge of a coastal lagoon... Its two storeys list[ing] towards the sea' (293): a memory kept over the years, held in both desire and promise. From this thought she turns to 'her own drunken room' and the 'idiocy of her wasted years' (293). Janet's past lies like ruins in her wake while the interminability of time in a present rushing mechanically into the future enforces 'the pointlessness of it all' (293).

Refusing closure, *Drylands* precludes the comfort of return and renewal, the fantasy of origins and its corollary of an authentic belonging, now mimicked in the television's 'symbolic hearth' (Spanger 2). The outback, with its legends of national founding, stands indifferent to such mythology in the text, its ongoing horizon continually receding. Even while the land and its climate uproot and dispossess, the spectre of not-belonging for non-indigenous Australians is embodied in these dry lands, as something remade and performed on modernity's surface. Flat, wide and fiercely lit, this environment relays the 'world laid open' (Atkinson 41) by technological change. As the clearing of ground smooths away ridges and folds, the new media-scape sweeps away pockets of ambiguous shadow leaving everything revealed to artificial light. Atkinson describes the associations between new technologies and the panopticon gaze—'like a house in which no doors can be closed for privacy' (41)—and the invasion of digital media into both the private and public spaces of Drylands reflects this concern. Who is watching and who is being watched cease to be distinct.

With individuals connected globally through the satellite disc and internet cables, there is no space for retreat from these modes of 'connection' as the polyphonous narrative of postmodernity is recast in a population tuned in, turned on, and beamed into twenty-four hours a day. This relation, like the hard and violent encounters between individuals in Astley's text, is sharp and un-generative, entailing the brief meeting and the swift retreat in a landscape swept clean as if 'nothing secret, mysterious, troubling or malcontent could find a space to lurk or hide' (Morris 162) within it. Again, if one evokes Baudrillard and his critique of the televised spectacle destroying imagination, these are

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lands cleared of complexity, unable to 'shelter enigma' or 'prompt speculation' (Morris 163). The ethical problematics of a medium that distances disaster and fabricates proximity in the space of the private, while unremittingly exposing its objects of focus, are not lost on Janet, as she considers the sight of broken farming families broadcast to the nation, and 'the cruel television coverage that stripped them naked' (Astley 245).

The shallowness of community feeling in Drylands, lived out with a comparable lack of depth in intellectual pursuits and rigour—this was 'a town that went for the most explicit of laughs' (4)—finds its corollary in the flatness of the screen, negating ontological interiority, and diminishing social as well as personal responsibility as it precludes dynamic relations. Effecting a safe and comfortable world that, Spanger argues, 'massage[s]' illusion (2), television culture in Astley's text presents a veneer of fantastic continuity while things fall apart. As Spanger suggests, order is thus fabricated, carved 'out of chaos in easily digestible bite sized chunks' (2). The complexity, even agency, of 'ordinary' lives is demeaned in this imposed culture of celebrity and spectacle, Astley insists, where the everyday becomes lost as all is exposed.

Drylands describes the paradox of everything and nothing brought into the light. While surface is privileged, laid open and bare, depth, along with the unsettled certainties of living and engagement, is kept out of sight. However, like the surveyed streetscape with its decay horribly on show, the only too evident violence that marks Drylands reveals the ineffectual, sanitised mask of the town, behind which anxiety is twisted into hate. Dissolved in the hot heat of day, the 'expectant' air of Drylands that Lannie notes in the

morning light—'as if maybe this one, this now-morrow, could hold answers' (Astley 210)—eventuates, always, as a surface championing neither questions nor answers. Franzi's summation of Drylands as 'a town with nothing to hide', with 'a simple and terrible honesty about the place' (55), attests ironically to this benign façade. He himself is bunkered down here, and 'dark secret[s]' (49) are suggested in everyone he meets.

Janet's concern for the diminished meaning of words in this culture synthesises belonging with located cultural knowledge. In this negative discourse of a globalised world, familiarity, security and 'deep' connections to place are impossible to realise. The global flow ekes away cultural capital and commonality—'"disembedding"…and hollowing out…meaning in everyday life' (Featherstone and Lash 2)—while divisions are asserted between those who will survive in this—the empire-building Briceland's, who it seems will be the last ones standing in Drylands' apocalypse, reaping the bones of other's failures—and those who will not. It is the calamity of cruel revelation and suppression as violence that Astley depicts in (post)colonial Australia. Her persecuted and victimised characters endure the public ridicule of what are personally valued knowledges or secrets—Jim Radley's boat, for instance, or the writing group's desire for independence and expression—while other, more disturbing ones like Benny Shoforth, as they challenge a nation's view of itself, elaborate the damaging consequences of unreconciled pasts. Repressed, value is reduced to waste, and as fragmentation transcends the national, transforming the place of community into the space of globality, a contradictory culture continues to wound and waste on the surface of its dry lands.

Millennial Australia is represented as unsettled in Astley's novel, with the unhoming forces of globalisation and the legacies of a (post)colonial nation given as cohabiting forces of 'crisis'. If we agree with Gelder and Jacobs' view of an unsettled state, 'where we can never completely disentangle' ('Uncanny' 161) one thing from another, then a tenuous belonging for non-indigenous Australians, and the perpetuated dispossession of Aborigines from the nation and the land, are articulated both alongside and through globalised culture. Yet Janet's condemnatory forecast in which this entanglement is read considers unsettlement as an effect of global and local interactions, not something that is dynamic in itself. That is, unsettlement is not considered a mode of negotiation or relation in an ecology. Rather, it signifies or is an outcome of crisis and emergency, evidencing wrong ways of being in a human environment. Astley does not explore unsettlement beyond cause and effect, and thus the possibilities for her poetics are limited to the allayment of crisis and the restoration of cohesion (respecting and inclusive of difference) or the irredeemable effects of devastation and chaos.

Despite the self-conscious irony of *Drylands*, a fact that Goldsworthy points out affirms with its presence—'If she really believed that the screen had horribly taken over from the page, would [Astley] have written a book about it?' (31)—and its sense, as Kossew argues, of 'engaging' (182) with the ambiguity of place in contemporary Australia, I argue that by representing unsettlement as a *product*, like a fever or death-knell, rather than a mode of living in the world, Astley overlooks the metaphorics of forecast in favour of metonymic dis/order. This is not to suggest that 'bad things' can, or even should be restored, and in Chapter Four I critique Nikki Gemmell's desire to redeem a national

landscape. However, in the view of a nation on a path to collapse, with refuse and damage piling up next to the highway of modernity, a narrow ecological view is propounded that sees effects as un-dynamic and final. I return to *Drylands* in conjunction with Gemmell later in the next chapter to conclude my argument against their poetics.

Chapter 4

Untethered to Place and Running from the Past: Nikki Gemmell's *Cleave*

The tensions between a 'traditional' life and the onslaught of modernity also inform Nikki Gemmell's *Cleave*, which depicts a displaced and disenchanted non-indigenous population, continually on the run. *Cleave*'s blurb announces a thematic narrative of 'women in tough places', and despite the packaging of a desert landscape on the novel's front cover, 'tough places' in the text extend to the Australian nation today, represented through the fractured family Snip Freeman must eventually confront. In this chapter I address Gemmell's representation of rootless non-indigenous Australians. Whereas *Drylands* articulates an only worsening 'crisis' in the contemporary Australian ecology, *Cleave* attempts to reconcile divisions and restore a (post)colonial nation to a harmonious and connected—to the land and to each other—state. Motifs of seamless resolution and unity such as I have described in Chapter Two are employed in Gemmell's bid to poetically configure a stable and 'real' non-indigenous belonging, and are contrasted to flatness and hard encounters between self and other. I critique this discourse of reconciliation predicated upon a dichotomous vision of relational modalities, particularly for what it means to the place of the past within an ecology.

Snip is introduced as an always-travelling young woman, who heads into the Tanami desert in central Australia, in search of her father, Bud, and the secret that surrounds his disappearance from her life. Never 'long enough in a place for it to seep through her and hold onto her' (Gemmell 67), she is described as a 'gypsy girl' (150), 'ferociously addicted to the new' and to a 'life of fragments' (25). She is characterised by a transience

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outside the conventions of housed homeliness. We are told the 'sheets of her swag are thin and had too many sleeps ingrained in them' (3). A wandering artist, 'she'd visit a place and find a man and a studio and a scrap of a job until the zing of uncertainty pulled her on' (3). Proud and protective of her independence, Snip revises the paradigm of gendered—or according to Gillian Rose '(hu)manistic'—spatiality in which femininity is identified with 'place/belonging/home' (Rose, *Feminism* 53)—and masculinity with mobility and space. Snip is 'muscular and ferocious' (Gemmell 21) as she cuts across the land in the style of her canvases.

Further redressing the regulation and containment of female sexuality in traditions of western thought—although this can be seen as a simple inversion of 'masculine'/'feminine' characteristics—Snip is sexually aggressive, self-satisfying, and unapologetic, 'tumbling' between 'the oblivion of sleep or the joy of a singing painting or the trembling sweetness of a very slow fuck' (3). Sex is tied into her pace and mobility, as she indulges then retreats, remaining only so long as her impulse allows. Behind her, there is '[n]o number' left, 'no forwarding address. A new town, another rupture'—'She always feels strongest when she's by herself, she always paints best when she's by herself in the thick of alone' (21). Her foot, pressed hard on the accelerator—just like her hands, later placed 'hard on her clitoris' (267)—makes explicit this sexual velocity, charging space with the possibilities of power, speed and climax: '[t]he ground flattens…and the sky expands', 'Snip want[s] to slice through it very fast' (15).

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Her will to keep on moving—written in her name, 'that careful, clean sound of resolution… Snip snip' (8), and the obvious implication of 'Freeman'—as she avoids the desires of others 'to pin her down' (3), equates stasis with routine and the loss of autonomy. Her unattached and self-detaching qualities are emphasised against Dave's, the paying hitchhiker with whom she sets off from Sydney to Alice Springs. 'He's got one of those faces that looks like it's never been anywhere' (156), Snip comments: he is a 'shiny happy chatterbox of a city boy' (19). Though she has shifted between towns and cities her whole life, Snip is defined as 'a country girl', 'a desert girl, sand is her dirt' (9). Thus the rural and the urban are contrasted spatially for what distinct subjectivities are produced by each. In this, Dave is place-associated and domestically confined: 'he's swamped by the attention of his parents and grandparents and mates and bosses and uncles and aunts', 'swaddled by love' (23). His talk is of 'his childhood of private schools and piano tutors and his mates…and his cricket run rate' (16).

Moreover, Dave is an archaeologist, someone who digs down into the past, 'scrabbling though dirt and peeling off wallpaper and pulling away bricks' (16), and Snip's criticism of his relation to the ground—picking through earth and domestic spaces—is tied to her imperative to skim, untied, across the land. While Dave 'chatter[s]' about family and the layers of his own life, Snip's blunt response reflects her need to move on without looking back: 'I don't remember no childhood' (16). Her face, we are told, is hard and lined, held out 'to the sting and hurt' (28) of wind and rain as they drive out of the 'city stop-start' (9) into the outback. While Dave is located in the layers of his years and memories, and aligned with containment or 'stopping' in place, Snip is a surface dweller, 'a lone wolf'

(21), all roughness and juncture in her meetings with others. Her words 'often come out bitten and jagged' (10). Engagement beyond these sharp encounters, with either place or individual, threatens Snip's mobility and as the outback space 'expands before them', 'the air...crisp and thin and vigorous' (15), she articulates her need for stream-lined movement, 'drunk on the compulsion of getting into the desert' (19).

In Snip's mind, the 'Big Smoke' (39) is alienating and confining, composed of boxes upon boxes with 'bars on windows' (171) and rooms that 'vibrate...with the noise of the street below' (345). Here, the night sky is 'always white-grey from the glow of the skyscraper lights'. In the city, 'Snip never, ever saw the stars' (345). The urban is configured as an artificial and paradoxically heavy space, tenacious in its grip upon the ground, while estranged from any kind of 'deep' or 'real' belonging to the earth on which it weighs. Signifying this, Dave's face is unpaintable, too clean and smooth for Snip, like the unambiguous lights that efface the darkness of night. 'She's used to shadows and shy eyes and hiding behind hands'. 'He's too glowing for someone like Snip' (20). By contrast, the outback is configured as unbounded and though also bathed in light, this is given as rich and authentic, contrasted to the bright fluorescence of urban vacuity. Snip's affinity with the outback space suggests her ideal relation to an environment: unappropriative and always transient. This is the 'place she never graces with the name home' but from 'where she launches her next venture in any direction' (44).

Snip is provided with a history in *Cleave* even while she resists the need to hold onto the past, and this provides the narrative context for her running. A lightness in place and the

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impulse to keep on the move, we learn, are her tactics for forgetting and avoiding secreted pain. Again emphasising through topographic contrast the possibilities of space against the limitations of place, the childhood home Snip recalls—away from which, in a sense, she is always moving—is the origin of her unsettlement. Set amongst the bleak mining regions of coastal New South Wales, this childhood landscape relays the estrangement from place Snip reads into the urban, a disavowal of modern living practices that offer only superficial attachments. Her house, we are told, 'didn't let in the sky': 'bunkered against the wind' and 'shut to the world' (81), it 'never celebrated the land it was on' (82).

This is compounded by the refuse of industry—as a sign of modernity—staining the earth with 'coal washes' left 'like watermarks on the cliffs that dropped down to the sea', and 'coal dust spilled across roads', coating windows and 'stain[ing] the blond sand of the beaches' (82). In these poetics, mining represents 'the direct domination of nature, the extraction of value from nature by alien means' (Sekula qtd. in McClintock 115), and the western 'scientific and philosophic' (McClintock 115) desire to master the world through technological process and ideologies of progress. The litter from the coastal mines, which are soon to close and quietly decay, relays the ecological damage occasioned by non-indigenous practices in the land. Unsettlement as uprootedness is therefore given wider application in the text, tapping into the politics of belonging in Australia and the apparent inability of the settler population to cleave to the land.

Snip's resistance to enclosure and her desire for space are thereby connected to her dispossession from place. Any romance attached to her nomadic life—a mobility celebrated by some poststructuralist theorists as 'a kind of critical consciousness that resists settling into socially coded modes of thought and behaviour' (Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* 5)—is undermined by her motivations: a mistrust of certain homeliness, and the damaging effects of not-belonging. The parcelling of the urban landscape into units of locality—the family home, 'a sacred site in modern Australia' (Gelder and Jacobs, 'Uncanny' 160)—here reflects a sociality that is as broken as it is oppressive. The nation, figured in the form of the family, cannot hold together in a damaged landscape, and Snip's journey in search of her father, and thus her encounter with the past, provides a pedagogical route to necessary repair. The gothic quality of her bunkered family home suggests secrets hidden away, and Snip's childhood memories continually circle this— unsettling suggestions of what only Bud, in his desert 'lair' (Gemmell 19), and her mother, Helen (who 'believed if you wanted a child to do well then you ignored them' [27]) know.

The desire to be held or to hold reciprocally through love (like Dixson's 'good enough' 'conditions of nurturance' [Dixson 5]) is depicted in Snip's familial relationships as chaotically manifested, wounding rather than productive and divisive rather than uniting. In Snip's retelling, Bud and Helen jostle for control over each other and their daughter, communicating in acts of taking and rupture, infliction and atonement. 'Made' into a boy by Bud, her hair cut and identity transformed—thus 'taking' Snip in the most effective and unsettling way he can think of—and fed ice-cream, yoghurt and soft white bread by

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Helen in a bid to re-gender her girl, Snip's body is marked and destabilised by her parents' anger and resentment. 'I reckon you mucked me up a bit, Bud, turning me into a boy', Snip later tells her father. 'Got my head all thinking the wrong way' (Gemmell 179-180). Inheritance, from parent to child, as in *Drylands*, appears in a causative chain: a legacy of 'lov[ing] too much' (238), damaging, and breaking away.

For Bud, love means possession and his attempted reclamation of Helen—who, full of the 'fear of stagnation, of complacency and routine' (173) has looked outside her marriage for satisfaction—is the extreme moment of devastation in the text, the secret for years unspoken out of which flows 'the mess of [Snip's] life' (172). Forcing his way back into Helen's body, as he rapes her with a screwdriver, Bud is irrevocably expelled from the family home ('I...drove as far away as I could, as far away as to be lost forever' [259]), and the tension between desiring and running that informs Snip's imperative for sexual freedom is founded in this legacy. Her need to run cleanly, away from the kind of connection that holds and thus threatens with damage ('it's like a blanket...smothering', 'love makes you weak and does you in' [176]), is counter-posed to this 'mess', 'the pull of her family' (131): '[s]he's drowning, she's wanting to run... She doesn't want the weight of it, it's too much effort, it always has been' (131).

Snip's way of skimming the land with a lightness of touch is therefore a means of escaping this weight, and her deliberate movements away from relations that will hold her down signal a wilful withdrawal from what taints the 'cleanness' (62) of 'her own way' (131). Her sexually savvy attitudes are further recontextualised in a narrative of

personal trauma and self-harm, an attempt 'to rattle [her] parents into showing...love' (169). Split and injured, her family unit is profoundly disabled and as she 'bash[es]' at what appears to be 'Bud's indifference' (169), consumed by his own injuries, 'a furious need to be touched...by attention, by love, by something' turns into a 'year as the town bike' (169) near Alice Springs. A further year as a call girl in Sydney follows this: time spent, we are told, 'to shut herself down' (169). Like 'a sea anemone', Snip 'draws the shutters' (41) on feeling and connection as a technique of self-protection and retribution. Her desire 'to scar [her] parents, to make them notice', and 'to ping Bud with tears', (172) thus gives voice to what is unspeakable for its perpetual ability to wound.

Fracture or division are equated with hard and sharp contact—hitting against, closing off, and the 'growls and the shouts and the stabs of words' (186). In brief moments of coming together, encounters end 'swiftly' (97). '[T]he put-down phone or the walk-out that snaps the conversation shut' (97) shapes Snip's relationship with her mother, while Bud and his daughter are figured as hunter and prey, circling each other warily in a pattern of 'holding off, assessing...and then sidling up and rushing headlong in' (72). Divisions are not reconciled by encounter, but neither is the pain of the past allayed in the break-off of contact and the act of retreat. While forgetting and silence frame these movements, it is suggested that Snip's 'search for the pieces of her family and for a permanence and a new home' (169) will be ongoing.

Snip and her family are not alone in their experience and *Cleave* is cast with a succession of non-indigenous characters who mirror the Freemans' modes of relation. The outback

space as much as the city, we learn, is estranging for non-indigenous people. Although Kevin jokes with Snip, 'Christ, what a family. They broke the mould with you lot' (121), her disordered family is paralleled with what seems an exodus of exhausted urban-dwellers seeking refuge in the country. 'It's the place for runners', Snip knows. 'The Territory's full of them, runners from parents and the law and cities and lovers and children and wives' (213). Unlike the indigenous Warlpiri, or Yapa, way of dwelling in the desert—'Four hundred or so Aboriginal people…liv[ing] on mattresses and blankets and bedframes around' a 'scattering' (52) of fibro houses and humpies 'touching lightly' (52) on the earth—the non-indigenous community here is locked away in houses elevated from the ground, behind 'barbed wire and mesh and bulletproof glass' (52): '"[w]ithin the walls of a house you cannot see far," says Queenie Nungala Mosquito, a person of this place' (52). The correlation between an inward gaze and disconnected living, as a trope of settler experience in the Australian nation, is made repeatedly throughout the text.

The grey bunker that is the local supermarket, owned and run by the 'sharp, suspicious' (146) Hazel and her 'red-neck' husband Merv, sits squat and windowless on the land around which Warlpiri women and children, hunting goanna, 'fan [out]…walking and digging and walking and digging' (73-74) in a different spatial practice. Encased by a 'silence like mould' (140) as if collapsing in upon itself, the house's unfinished back staircase hangs redundantly, 'a scaffolding skeleton to nowhere' (146). Similarly, the local church is 'closed off to the land' (73), small and mean in the 'thick of the…heat' (72). Architecture echoes community divisions, and racist sentiments cut through the air of social exchange. Non-indigenous presence is pressed upon, rather than in negotiation

with, the land. Snip's repulsion by Hazel's face, 'the skin across her cheeks that's tight and affronted and unforgiving' (146) recalls her own tightened lips, 'rolled in and bloodless' (15) when confronted with a waitress' caustic remarks on Alice Springs—'It's full of Aboriginals, lousy with them' (15).

Hazel's words are 'fenced…like she's surrounding herself with a boundary of no' (139), demonstrating Probyn's notion of 'the essential purity of the margin' (*Outside Belongings* 28), imagined and policed for the social regulation of inside and outside positions. Rubbish accumulates around her cyclone fence as if electrocuted in its attempt to move beyond this boundary, while inside the fence's parameters Hazel reads from a two-year old *Australian Women's Weekly*, identifying her lifestyle with a tradition of domestic homogenic culture, barricaded against change. Driving past her one night, Snip observes Hazel's silhouette, upright and gaunt, a cigarette held out fiercely before her, in guard of her place. This sense of ownership imposed upon the land is strongly aligned with colonialism which, in *Cleave*, leaves marks of damage, erosion and not-belonging about the environment. The 'wrong trees planted by Missionaries' (Gemmell 58), for example, and the 'scattered cattle bones [and] car parts' (162) which Snip observes, are 'wrong in the landscape' (162). Standing as signs of failed settler belonging, these talismans are juxtaposed with the stories of non-indigenous people and their empty attempts, in Snip's view, to claim the outback ground 'as if their rich record somehow justifies being in a place that isn't theirs' (111).

The 'barrenness thousands of cattle hooves have stamped' (153) into the earth conveys a 'meanness' (153) in the environment to Snip, a consequence of the way in which 'Europeans have overlain the land, how they've threaded it with bitumen and concrete' in the built-up spaces of 'whitefella world' (161). She discerns a 'hum of nothing' (234) that hangs in the desert, as stiffened hides and bleached carcasses shimmer in the sun. The 'death whiffs' (16) traced by road signs, 'Dismal Creek, Skull Gap, Dead Man's Hill' (16) reference the white imagination where it has encountered a land it does not know, but, moreover, speak of a settler presence that is destructive and deathly. The sense of inhabiting a place in which they do not belong relays a consciousness of illegitimacy for Gemmell's non-indigenous population, whose alienation from the earth is the result of their lack of belonging, expressed historically in damaging attempts to master and rewrite the space. As Carter's colonist distances himself from the ground in the process of clearing and commanding horizons, so Hazel's fenced-in block and her erect carriage inside it, is flatly out of touch with the land at her feet. In her defensive creation of place, she is affirmed as out of place.

Hazel's 'community cough', the 'scratch at the back of the throat some whitefellas have got when they arrive in an Aboriginal community' (139), suggests an awareness of this unsettled position, and a dis-ease amongst the non-indigenous community in the Tanami accords with discourses of settler anxiety in the post-Mabo nation. '[T]hey're in Australia', Snip considers, 'but they've entered a place where the culture and religion are alien and they can't read the paintings and speak the language and they don't have access to the intricacies of the law' (316). Dave's insistence that '[w]e don't really belong here,

Snip' (310), is re-articulated by Richard's question: '[d]o the Aboriginal people see them as homeless aimless drifters, do they think it's weird these whitefellas being out here, without ties to their own culture and community, away from their family and friends?' When Richard asks his non-indigenous companions 'what the Aboriginal people think of them', '[n]o one answers' (127).

For the non-indigenous community on the Warlpiri lands, uncertain place is amplified by a position in-between cultures, on the edges of both. While Richard insists, 'I have to leave, I have to. I'm losing my own culture', 'I want sushi and Saturday papers and talkback radio and cappuccinos' (125)—icons of the urban—both Shelly-Anne and Snip describe the impossibility of returning to this lifestyle without discord, or lingering unhomeliness. While non-indigenous ways of seeing are changed in this landscape—'Shelly-Anne tells them she can't stand her sister-in-law's flat down south because it's so stuffed full of objects, so thingy' (126)—transformation, or processes of adaptation, carries the threat of not-belonging. When Bud cannot remember his age, for instance, 'Snip tells him that's what homeless people do' (127).

Yet the desert offers both Snip and Bud a space, if not a place, of attachment and change, unrealisable in the urban lives from which they have both fled. Reminiscent of Gibson's 'premodern' spatial relation to land, opposed to its estranged position under modernity, daughter and father are 'made over' in the outback space, in some ways gesturing towards the notion of immersion. A synonymity between Snip's 'harsh' ways and the land suggests a mutable self that can shift and reconfigure like the 'colour-changing'

(162) desert earth: '[y]ou know, you walk as if your fists are clenched,' Dave tells her, 'but they're not' (29). Being 'stoppped up', we are told, is 'wrong' (10), and she 'unfolds and relaxes' (67) in the Tanami, her body in contact with and mirroring the outback environment. Snip's initial desire to plough through the land, sexually driven, is slowly dissolved as 'stop like a tonic flood[s] through her' (59) and the land begins to reciprocally enter her porously, like a layer of ochre over her skin. While her solo life—a 'Grand Canyon loneliness' (45)—finds reflection in 'the vaulting, hurting sky' (218), Snip's hands, marked by 'tough, dry grooves' (160), suggest the 'crust of a long-dry dam' (39) which, roused by Dave and the landscape surrounding them, melts 'under rain into a silky softness' (39).

Counter to her incessant running, Snip finds that, in the Tanami, '[l]ater later [sic] is the rhythm of this place' (55) , and the corporeal takes on this temporal property as 'changes' are pushed 'over Snip's body': her 'hair copies the colour of dirt' (78), while a 'hide is thickening on the underside of her feet… Her walk is dropping to a slowness'. 'It's energy stopping, she's been told, it's the Yapa way—the Aboriginal way' (53). Indigenous subjectivity is seen to be synchronised with the environment, and as she loses her resistance to the character of this space (unlike the holed-up Hazel) Snip becomes similarly related with the land. Bud also takes on the characteristics of the environment, 'a band of red dust…ingrained across the extremity of his white shirted stomach' (72), his smile 'slow, removed' (122), his face 'crumpled into old age' (130) like the ground-scape scoured by sun.

They begin to speak 'Yapa way' in accordance with the heat, expanse and spare nature of the land, economically '[d]ropping "and" and "the"... Saying little one, skinny one, cheeky one' (74-75). After twenty-one days 'in this place', Snip 'feels like she's lost the art of talk, dinner-party talk...as if the wind and dust and sun and stars have blown it cleanly out of her' (111). Here, a non-indigenous body can arrive and be made over, invested with a connection to country that is indigenously modelled, and for Snip the land is 'rich', 'singing' with what she otherwise lacks: 'spirit and community and family' (314). 'Nowhere else for her feels like this' (67). Thus, the Tanami is home for Snip in the sense that cities, or the house of the Wollongong coast are not. It offers familiarity—having lived here periodically since the time of her 'taking' by Bud—and a landscape she responds to. More than this, the Warlpiri community signify what home to Snip *should* be. While Snip has the provenance of space and mobility, the Yapa have both space and place at once.

Aboriginal kinships and social relations show a different way of being and belonging, juxtaposed with a repressed, disorientated and disordered settler society. Snip is considered 'a woman of value in this place' (55), accepted as someone who enters and leaves the Yapa lands, and appreciated for her 'bush-bashing car' (55) that can take the women out hunting. The nurturing offered to Snip by these women is juxtaposed with her own warring family stories, while the matriarchal figure of Queenie, in particular, gestures towards Snip's strained contact with both her parents, welcoming her as 'Napaljarri, my daughter' (56): 'Queenie tells her that she will look after her. That Napaljarri needs looking after, feeding up. That Bud won't ever do it, proper way' (75).

Snip watches a group of Aboriginal women and children drive past in the night, noting the care with which each child is held, 'tight' (79) and protected. Folded and tucked into fabric, wrapped up like 'gifts' (79), these bundled children suggest an alternative way of seeing enclosure: not unbearable and hurting, but warm and sustaining. Her resistance to the threat of being 'pinned down' by another—the need she feels to 'goug[e] Dave...out from under her skin', to 'drain from her veins the nag of him' (62)—is surrendered in this land, which Snip acknowledges (in the repeated and rather laboured poetic of love and connection in the novel) is 'under my skin' and 'isn't going to let me go' (311). The ritual of self-recovery that Queenie performs (her 'six children taken from her long ago by the government' [70]) articulates a connection between being with the land and releasing the past. Telling Snip how 'she went back to her people's way by one day going to the riverbed and stripping down and rubbing sand all over her' (72), Queenie infers the possibilities of self-renewal and 'fixing' (62) in this landscape, 'beginning a new way' (60).

The 'wind...in this place' and its significance to the Yapa '[w]hen there's sorry business, when someone has died' (60) is noted by Snip, scattering 'all tracks and all traces as it sweeps the spirit to the land' (60). Such images of restitution are significant in the text, and the 'payback' ceremony she witnesses from behind the bullet-proof glass of Shelly-Anne's house further denotes the distinctions between the non-indigenous culture Snip knows and the Warlpiri ways of life she observes. 'Payback', held on the local football oval, signifies both communal accountability and responsiveness to an act of wrong.

Rather than Bud's self-determined punishment for his violation of Helen, and its occurrence secreted away and made irredeemable—'I stayed in the desert because I had to... It's my punishment, I put myself on trial. I deserve this' (260)—'payback' is a necessarily public performance, an expression of collective belonging as much as individual and communal hurt.

As it is represented in the text, the indigenous elders act on behalf of their community in 'payback', hitting the offenders 'with nulla nullas and sticks' (76). The men are then speared in the thigh by the family of their victim, as the 'grandmothers and the aunties all beat...themselves' (77). Suffering and healing become constitutive of community, and are equally shared by all in attendance. The wounded body becomes a site of retribution and resolution. In contrast, the 'scarring' Bud and Snip inflict upon each other is emblematic of a disabled sociality in which hurt is individualised and privatised. Unlike the Warlpiri, it is suggested, non-indigenous people 'do not know how to weep for themselves, or their past' (Turner 29). The scars from 'payback' admit culpability and initiate mourning. They are exposed rather than hidden and included in cultural knowledge rather than excluded from it. Snip's summation that '[p]eople aren't meant to exist solely for themselves' (Gemmell 364) is matched by Bud's admission that he has done just that, telling her that 'people in underdeveloped worlds are never as lonely as those in developed worlds'; '[h]e tells her the wisest thing the Warlpiri have taught him is that the family, not the individual, is society's most basic unit and that for him it's too late' (359).

However much Snip seeks to be inside this knowledge, though, she can never access it in full, and despite the changes that occur in her speech and body, and her welcoming in the community, she still exists on its ambiguous margins, 'crashing like a bull' into what she will 'never understand' (56). Her hunting trip with Yapa women demonstrates the effects of unsettlement when the unfamiliar, or unknowable, comes out of a familiar and homely context. Inadvertently 'digging into the surface…of another tribe's land', Snip is subsequently 'frozen out' (55) of the community: 'the Yapa women didn't smile as they said goodbye to [her], they averted their eyes. It was three days before…Snip [was] told the reason' (56). Kate's insistence that '[t]heir lives and their beliefs are too complex and secret for me' (56), is re-voiced by Shelly-Anne in a reading of their own cultural strangeness in this environment, when she tells Snip 'she's heard the Aboriginal people say that whitefellas "do it like dogs"—about the way they'll fuck anyone. That they think whitefellas have no culture, spirituality, and are backward for that' (75).

Snip's and Bud's final running away from the community, and when—in a classic narrative of insufficient non-indigenous place on the land—they become marooned and then lost in the desert space, can be read as indicative of this unstable belonging that moves between homeliness and exile. When the ramifications of Bud's mistake (clearing away the cars holding 'tjukurrpa', or sacred items, 'Men's business' [128]) become clear to the group gathered over dinner in Shelly-Anne's house, the sounds of wailing, 'snatches of chants, many voices' (124) from the land outside create a frontier image beyond which are the operations of a different cultural law and Bud's inadvertently offensive behaviour against it: 'he's saying he thought he was doing everyone a favour,

getting rid of some of the old rubbish…he's saying he had no idea about anything secret and sacred being in them and Shelly-Anne saying oh shit oh shit, maybe he has to get out for a while…'. 'Maybe payback mate. Oh shit' (129). Rubbish or waste is thus shown to have mutable meanings, but Bud must leave because of his actions. The revelation of another's secrets disallows his place on this land.

While stranded in the desert, Snip and Bud discuss words with two opposing definitions. *Heimlich* is Snip's favourite: something that 'is homely and comfortable and familiar, but also something which is concealed and inaccessible and unknown' (179)—although the latter is *un-heimlich* in the Freudian sense. As an obvious symbol of their ambiguous place in the Tanami, *heimlich*, or unhomeliness, configures in uncanny terms Snip and Bud's unsettled belonging—as much as they feel at home in the land, and are imprinted by their encounters here, they also do not. Thus, when she returns to the Tanami, recovered, but with the 'sun's deep stain' 'branded' on her body (337), Snip 'knows she has no right to a permanent place in this community' (315). Gemmell appears to validate Muecke's cautionary approach to the appropriation of sacred symbols—or 'strange power' (Gemmell 149)—to form the 'building blocks' of another's 'new order' (Buck-Morss qtd. in Muecke, 'Devastation' 125). While her indigenous characters suggest a belonging unachievable through colonial practices, and a relation to the land that decentres place and thus locates it in space—a home that is, as Jacobs writes, 'a part of, and at one with' (Jacobs 171) the environment—the direct translation or secondment of this to an alienated settler population is problematised in the text. Snip's 'desire for one

[world] cannot exclude the effect of the other' (Nettelbeck 114). Each culture is historicised and for this, made inseparable from the politics of colonialism.

As Jacobs writes, 'concepts of interconnectedness can stop short of incorporating the uneven histories of global capitalism' (Jacobs 174), and *Cleave* would appear to affirm this. However, the text ambiguously shifts between an acceptance of a non-indigenous belonging that can never be like that of indigenous Australians, and its negative representation as insufficient, self-consumed and harming. The motives behind Snip's running suggest an ecology in which environmental degradation, or the litter of colonialism, stands for unsuccessful settler belonging originating in 'bad' pasts and the methods of repression, disremembering, and erasure that non-indigenous peoples historically—and continue to—employ in their quest to claim 'home'. The 'land she grew up in feels like corrupted land to her,' we are told, 'because it's been swept clear of the people who told stories about it over thousands of years, it's been swept of the people who sang for it' (Gemmell 314).

I want now to turn to a discussion of the models of redemption and smooth reconciliation—with no gaps or roughness—that *Cleave* offers to a fractured, forgetting and unrooted non-indigenous population. Gemmell attempts to breach the inconsistency between her conclusive and un-generative poetics of settler subjectivity and a recognition of difference between indigenous and non-indigenous ways of being on the land. While Snip and Bud flee the community lands—their predicament in the desert suggesting the danger of being out of place—the possibility of overcoming their alienation, or inability

to be settled in place, is presented. Delirious, badly burnt and severely dehydrated, Snip, with Bud once more disappeared into his 'prison of sand' (284), is lifted and revived in the desert by indigenous hands—hands that know and can operate in this landscape. This reconciliatory image—such as Pierce advocates (see Introduction, page 26)—is also renewing. 'Saved' from a symbolic space of non-indigenous unhomeliness, Snip attains a new awareness of the cultural insufficiency from which she must make a break.

Therefore, once again, unsettled belonging is not considered a complex modality of ecological living, but as something to be overcome. It is not enough to be uncertainly in place. Re-entering consciousness, the sensation Snip has of 'no fear, just a deep restful trust' (274) amongst the Yapa community's 'river of voices' (274) jars with the reassertion of white knowledge she experiences when she fully wakes up in the closed, controlled environment of an Alice Springs Hospital. 'Welcome to the real world, Miss Freeman', she hears, as 'the white man takes over' in a 'place seared by white' and overhung with 'the smell of bureaucracies' (276). Her discomfort in non-indigenous urban spaces is attributable to what she recognises has been lost in their making. Helicopter, the man who rescues Snip in the desert, tells her that 'the old fellas say when they see the mining mob ripping up their ground, it's like their arms and legs are being ripped off' (318). Snip's preference for the outback asserts her need for presence over such absence in an environment that is lived amongst, respected, and alive with cultures and voices. This landscape is not an 'untouched' place—as the pieces of colonial refuse also attest—but is tracked with stories that are neither denied, nor necessarily comforting.

In contrast to the Warlpiri cultural practice, presented by Gemmell, of sweeping away pasts, the clearance tactics that Snip reads in settler histories are figured as destructive, oppressive, and dispossessing for both indigenous and non-indigenous peoples alike. This is an ecology, because of its past, broken-up, scattered, and full of 'missed lives' (46). Queenie's advice to Snip's own hauntings—'[t]hey have their own journey now. Let 'em go, Napaljarri, let 'em go' (66)—indicates a way out of her emotionally arrested state which can be transposed to the nation itself. The tendencies of the text's non-indigenous characters to suppress 'bad things', and to cut off from connection—running from, rather than confronting, these memories and consequences—represents the crux of national disability. It is therefore in the course of Snip 'scrubbing her life clean' (67) that a wider sense of redemption is proposed. While indigenous practice provides a point of contrast and is subsequently instructive to Snip's way of living, her preclusion from belonging can only be amended in relation to her way of being in an environment: '[s]he's made up her mind. She has to find her own country' (316). Thus while Snip and Bud recognise their unhomeliness, or uncertain belonging, this, the text indicates, must be ultimately transcended for ontological recovery.

Clearing a Space for Non-Indigenous Belonging: Snip's 'National' Renewal

In her commentary on the theory of nomadism, Rosi Braidotti expresses the 'nomad's relationship to the earth…[as] one of transitory attachment and cyclical frequentation; the antithesis of the farmer, the nomad gathers, reaps and exchanges but does not exploit' (25). Within this frame, memories of the past that tie a subject to a particular foundation represent an arresting of nomadic possibilities: 'a stumbling block that hinders access to a

changed present' (25). The repetition of working over and over the same ground—when profitable—(as the figure of the farmer suggests) symbolises a static relation to the past which only hovers as a spectre of nostalgia and 'unreachable horizon[s]' (25). Dave's marked opposition to Snip in *Cleave* initially represents this distinction between the nomad and the farmer. His archaeological or digging techniques seem the antithesis of Snip's unbounded mobility, and as I have referred to in the symbolics of mining, suggest his one-way relation to the ground—extracting value as he stops in place and cuts through layers.

Their physical ways of relating to the earth—such as Braidotti indicates—reveal different modes of dealing with the past, and Snip's alignment with indigenous culture further exacerbates the apparent dichotomy between them as Dave remains true to his 'city-boy' character through their growing relationship. Braidotti describes the city as a place constructed for the 'sedentary stocking and cumulation of riches…opposed to…open space' (25), and Dave reproduces the attitudes of fixity and enclosure that both Snip and Braidotti resist, translating his 'love of permanence and preservation and stone' to his desire to 'hold onto…Snip' (Gemmell 310). Further, in the Tanami, 'his hungry visitor eyes' (316) take in the 'stink of the place, the sores on the kids, the dripping noses, the scraps of houses and dogs, the wife bashing, the grog' (311). His 'closed-off walk' (321) and 'need for certainty' (313) alienate him from the land that the Yapa people, as he states, 'touch…too softly' (313), contrasting unfamiliarly with his life of excavation and hard archaeological processes. Under his gaze, what Snip sees as a landscape full of 'something unique and good' (311) becomes a worn out place read as ruined and wasted.

As if performing a narrative of settler nightmare, the desert encroaches rather than restores for Dave, and in the frame in which he sees, '[t]he wind has blown the desert into the towns they pass through, coating the signs and windows and benches and poles. It's a town that clings to its Woolworths, following the local mine shutdown, a town fighting the seep of the sand. It's not winning' (323). His eye infers the objectification, or fixity of gaze, that the clinical technique of peeling back layers of earth, revealing and hauling the artefact out of its spatial and temporal context, employs. His camera lens which Snip grabs away, 'annoyed at him for seeing it all as a spectacle' (305), is trained on the community as if affirming his location, like a tourist, voyeuristically outside their cultural difference. Dave is connected to the pursuit of discrete information, authoritatively recorded and dissected through these technologies. In opposition, Snip's own proclivity for collecting is associated with the private and fragmented: the things she encounters without rupturing an environment, scattered on the surface of the land—'the jawbone of a brumby or a hat from the 1940s or a metal "K" from an old cinema sign or the feather from the wing of a wedge-tailed eagle' (42).

His interest in excavation, revealing domestic or unofficial narratives to public view— 'pulling away bricks in convict quarters and barracks and mansions and stables and sheds...[and] houses' (16)—stands counter to her own position as 'listener, the master deflector' (17), hiding behind hands and keeping things to herself. She is 'an archivist carefully cataloguing talk'—the kind of lost privacy that Janet in *Drylands* yearns for— 'transfer[ing] sentence scraps and sketches into the blank pages of her journal at the fag

ends of most nights' (16). Ultimately, however, neither practice of Snip or Dave is privileged over the other, and the two polarities are brought into a harmonious and reconciled coexistence. The reconciliation that Gemmell gestures towards in her redemptive desert scene is therefore brought to fruition. It is not just between 'black' and 'white' that unification must occur, but within a non-indigenous ontology itself, split between the desire to forget and the imperative to claim.

As Snip learns through her experiences and reflections on the insufficiencies of her past behaviour, her eventual alliance with Dave signals the potential for reconciliation between them and the modalities of spatial relations they each signify. This, Elizabeth Graver suggests in her review of the text, represents an attainment of 'balance...[in] a fractured and difficult world' (2). Snip must learn, Graver continues, 'accommodation' amongst her 'defiance' (2), and certainly the more she realises her affinity with Bud, both of them running, hurt from a past they consider irredeemable, the more she concedes the necessity of changing her ways. The restorative nature of the desert scene is compounded by the revelation of what has prevented the settling of Snip and Bud, brought to the surface from its psychic depths. Here, their years of running conclude as, physically worn down and stripped of clothes in the heat filled space, they experience a simultaneous evacuation of repressed pasts.

Dave's techniques of mining through the ground to a time and a place are echoed by Snip as she and Bud dig down to their disremembered 'bad things', cutting into the 'foundations and brickwork' (Gemmell 161) of a causative moment. The importance of

uncovering the past, and bringing it to light, is asserted in this narrative. Bud's insistence that 'you can never have any idea what's in another person's mind. All the deep-down secret stuff...no-one else can ever dig...out' (255-256) is met with his daughter's recognition that 'there are some things she has to know or they'll rattle in her head and give her no peace until she dies' (241). Snip's 'rattling' is explicitly related to her unsettled state and the anxiety of being ungrounded. 'I'm rattled by what I'm leaving behind me,' she later admits, 'and I'm rattled by what's ahead' (332). She must approach the past in order to find her place. Her mother's insistence that '[w]e forget catastrophes, the worst that has happened to us. Alright?...[w]e filter the remembering' as a 'survival instinct' (97) is deposed in Snip's mind by her realisation of the need to unearth buried memories. Forgetting and running are tantamount to a 'wrong' (58) way of being.

The tin building that 'locks away [Bud's] secrets just as he locks away his learning in books,' for instance, speaks of a life without value in its social isolation—'it's all of no use to anyone but him because it's never been shared, and that, Snip realises is what sums up his life' (300). It is a 'temporary' (298) construction emblematic of his unrooted existence. To finally overcome not-belonging, remembering is vital. Thus, Bud's revelation means a release for Snip, a common history opened to touch and recovery. '[H]e's letting her in,' she narrates. 'And it could be a way out' (250-251). The potential for healing and transcendence is therefore conveyed: the end of one thing, and the beginning of the new. The sky above the desert in which they uncover hidden pasts 'is stained an eery, apocalyptic pink and the desert holds its breath before the dust storm smacks into it' (195), evoking reckoning and rebirth. There is a 'fermenting dread of

something coming to an end' (253) in the tradition of outback mythology, a space, as Paul Longley Arthur writes, 'where experience is [considered] extreme or ultimate', 'in some way the end or the beginning of the world' (138).

However, the inconclusivity of what can be known and revealed is also inferred. Bud's house, even after his surfacing of the past, 'tells [Snip] everything and nothing' (300), and as she wakes the morning after their confrontation to find her father gone, both the incomplete and dangerous nature of digging down is made clear. The truth, hauled up, is never whole, and cannot in, a physical sense, reverse damage that has been done. Though the traumatic event has been exposed, hollowed out of its depths in the ground, the earth around it still maintains inaccessible pockets, hidden and dark. The image of an excavated minefield, 'where, even today, unexploded shells lurk' ('Not all Tomb and Gloom' 30), correlates Snip's intervention in a hurt-filled past with her corporeal vulnerability in the desert space. Precariously near 'the end', she is eventually retrieved, emerging from this ordeal as clean and clear, 'as if layers have been scrubbed from her' (290).

Snip's acceptance of what she cannot know thus shapes a philosophy of the past in *Cleave*. Her recognition that 'there are too many gaps' (362) in her father's story lets Snip consider her need to unbury forgotten things outside absolute terms. 'It's all half-truths and speculation and misunderstandings, fumblings and blunders' (362), she says of the past. In this reading, excavation does not directly yield meaning or suggest a crystallised artefact, untainted and true, but instead enables the approach of light into

dark, damaged places. In an archaeological dig, Snip realises, not all parts of the object will be retrieved. The traces that are found, or the pieces that survive, can be encountered and restored, 'nurture[d]...back into life' (344). Dave's hands on her body, as if he's sifting through a ruin 'to save it, to peel back its layers and dig out its history' (344), repair in just this manner. With him, Snip knows, 'she wants to settle'; '[s]he wants to begin a new way' (295).

Reconciliation is configured in the text as the location of 'neutral territory'.'[T]hat's what we need," says Dave, '[a] place new to both of us' (343), and it is in the attainment of such a 'new place' that Gemmell envisions a non-indigenous settled belonging—a place that is founded on the 'letting go' of the past, or what cannot be wholly brought together or known. Transcending damage and the scraps that will not be ordered in meaning, the self can begin again in a renewed ecology. It is as if the acknowledgement of what evades total understanding and smooth reunions deposes its effects. The incomplete and partial are thus renounced as Snip releases herself from the urge to attend to the irreconcilable points of difference that re-wound, 'unclean [and] simmering' (97). Homeliness opens up to Snip as her acceptance of the past and all its gaps solidifies her ecological place.

The 'new home' (343) that Snip and Dave eventually settle within is poetically significant. This is a landscape of neither city boundaries nor propulsive horizons, but the water-heavy, 'deep earth' (347) of Tasmania. A symbol of 'violent national beginnings'—a 'traumascape' (Tumarkin 205) of incarceration, indigenous dispossession and slaughter—Tasmania becomes a pointed focus for the text's climax of ontological

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and national renewal. It is a land 'soaked in blood,' according to Snip, 'a ghost-land—beware' (Gemmell 342-343), and once again she comments on the absence she feels in this environment: 'smug' (344) English-style towns and names cover over a history of indigenous decimation. However, it is in this landscape that Snip finally finds the ability to stop, to rest, to be in place, and I argue that in this her ontological strategy is transposed onto the state of the nation itself. In 'our' 'worst place', national redemption must be found. '[S]he has to leave Bud behind,' Snip emphatically decides, 'to move on. She has to move on' (336).

In the Tasmanian landscape she is awakened to the 'cleanness that's newly in her' (290), where she 'feels like a sea anemone uncurled, soft and silky in the water' (292); 'she's sick of the jagged fraught life that she's led' (334). Implicit in her unravelling is Bud's own restoration: as their unsettlements are interconnected, they both require the experience of transcendence and healing. Consequently, when Bud joins his daughter in Tasmania he 'touches the earth lightly' (350), a sign now not of displacement but of belonging—the acquired capacity to start 'a new way' (60). As the Yapa spirit is swept to the land, with tracks cleared and things renewed, Bud's swim out to sea at the novel's conclusion represents this renewal and the instigation of beginnings. It also confirms his disavowal of the alienated (dis)order of western modernity.

Baptismal imagery asserts his remaking, as Bud (for many years a preacher in the Tanami) tells Snip that he has 'given up on churches… [he] tells her God is in his heart and in the land but not, for him, in the walls of a building' (357). With his daughter

watching from the shore, Bud 'dives his bulk at a small wave, as if his body is falling into it' (363), suggesting a surrendering of the contained and ego-centric self to an unlimited and overwhelming space. '[J]ust a speck now in the vastness of the ocean...a swell rises above him and he's gone for a moment and bobs back' (364), his hard edges dissolved in the fluidity of motion as the 'remnants of waves rush over [Snip's] toes' (368)—indicating her renunciation of holistic knowledge. Bud's swim out to sea, presumably to his death, mirrors his physical evacuation: emptied out to be refilled. Snip notes on this arrival in Tasmania 'the scars of his journey. Sharp cliffs in his cheekbones. A scalp fragile and pink... And something missing' (348). They are implicated in this re-birth together, and as 'the bay sings with Bud's spirit', Snip 'feels free and scrubbed, as if a great weight has been lifted from her' (368).

To be always in touch with the past is to be 'imprisoned' (367), the text suggests, and thus Snip reconfigures the deathly silence and emptiness of the Tasmanian landscape into the 'stillness' (345) and quiet of a recovered ontology upon which the past no longer has any effects. Here, ghosts are released and sent on their way. Bud's fluid movements through water and Snip's metamorphosis expressed in her work—with 'light in the colours and serenity in the strokes' (373)—depicts the subject free from constraints and able to merge into land. 'Removed, floating, all-seeing' (364) as she turns her back on Bud in the swell, Snip articulates a sense of immersion that is simultaneously restorative, free from the urge 'to scratch at the scab of her wounds' (367). 'Let's go home,' Dave tells her (370). It is, of course, not *to* Tasmania that Snip, Dave and Bud belong at the text's conclusion, and the poetics of the ocean as a not only unbounded but a different

topographic zone altogether—some place that is not land—proffers a particular meaning of belonging for non-indigenous Australians.

Malouf's previously mentioned reference to non-indigenous Australians as 'sea-dreaming' (8) people, bringing an island vision to the continent and its 'land-dreaming' (8) populations, is pertinent here for, like *Cleave*, it suggests a settler subjectivity informed by the act of arrival from outside, straddling a liminal position of looking both to the shore and back to the sea. The image of 'the every shape-shifting seashore' (Message 167), Kylie Message argues, celebrates this liminality, and a margin constantly in flux that denies 'the dominance of the absolute boundary, border or demarcation' (167). For Snip, however, it seems untenable to be ambiguously caught between two positions. Through the text's poetics, an unsettled self, neither one thing nor the other with any sense of certainty, is reworked to form a new, originary ontology. The purgatorial journey of Snip and Bud, incurring suffering, loss and self-confrontation in the desert, finds its reward in the watery space of foundational narrative. Her prize-winning picture that 'seem[s] to float from the canvas' (Gemmell 373) is fitting for the novel's final image; unloaded, untied, unburdened now, Snip's 'own country'—her belonging—is gained through a reunion of divided parts, and a redemptive return to beginnings that are the origin and end of unsettlement.

Bud's moment of passage from paralysis to mutability harnesses the cleansing force of water as if washing away the ghosted blood on his hands. Previously, locked into exile by his guilt, he holds his hands 'trembling…caught by the sight of them and he doesn't

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know what to do next' (259). The imagery of hands in the text juxtaposes their capacity to do harm and to heal, and this theme of duality and paradoxical meaning again (like *heimlich*) suggests the co-habitation of opposites within the one. The novel's title participates in this, and as Bud and Snip further discuss words with two meanings, 'cleave' comes to mind, meaning 'a splitting apart or a binding together' (178). A 'strong biblical word' (178) (thus enhancing the baptismal quality of this resolution) 'cleave' encapsulates the central notion of the text: in the ecological view offered by Gemmell, relations of unity or division confer a firm or disconnected environmental place for the self.

The text thereby precludes the uncanny possibilities of these opposites dynamically 'co-habiting' (Gelder and Jacobs, *Uncanny* 24), or oscillating as inconclusive relational modes. Just as Snip determines a 'right' from a 'wrong' way of being in the world, a split or fractured social state is held against an image of seamless interconnection, and thus rather than the incomplete or the fragmented admitted as relationally active, these elements are cleared out of her ecological image. Unsettlement must be undone to enable belonging, and in the smooth passage from splitting to merging the stability of the ground is restored. Gemmell's concern for the released subject, newly re-filled, evokes Janet's similar desire for the 'beyond'—a recovery of the ontological whole, prior to symbolic entrance and fracture. Snip's 'odd pattern of her life, coming and going and coming' (Gemmell 369) describes her resistance to spatial limits and the finality of an arrival that would mean an entrance to the symbolic, articulating 'the exploring body,' as Amanda

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Nettelbeck writes, 'presented on a threshold of uncoordinated space' (105). Yet it is in this life that she is disabled, and when settled she locates her originary place.

Indeed, Sneja Gunew's reading of the scrapbook—which is Snip's preferred narrative form—as the manifestation of a nostalgia for unity, or the authenticity of memory, sits hand in hand with this, as within its pages fragments are given an order and a place within linear narrative (Gunew 38). Snip's ordering of the past into a narrative of renewal posits the significance of origin as the place of return for ontological meaning. Weighting origins in this way distinguishes a heavy and shut-off past, from a light, revelatory one. The idea that pain or loss can be accessed in an originary place disallows promiscuity in recall, certifying beginnings as certain and whole. Thus, instead of estranging, the event becomes orienting and locating—'a happy reunion' (Probyn, *Outside Belongings* 112) of all the fragments that alienation from place is seen to occasion.

The notion of a cleanly remade body is entirely problematic, suggesting as it does the possibility of recuperating beginnings exclusive from ecological relations. Nettelbeck argues against such a notion when she proposes that a subject can 'never transcend the politics of culture,' as much as 'the body's retrieval of a seemingly natural state can never be socially or sexually uninformed' (111). In this light, she continues, reconciling fractures for the dream of the whole is predicated on compromise, inevitably 'dependent upon what [the imagined union] represses or excludes' (111). Wholeness represents healing in *Cleave* (in the simplistic binaries that the text works through), and consequently I contend that the text's apparent call for revealing and confronting what

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has been configured unspeakable is overruled—and their own politics and dynamics left unexamined—by these dominant poetics. The act of clearing away the past for the purpose of moving on, nationally and ontologically, is tantamount to its conceptual reburial. I argue, therefore, that the novel embraces the same colonial clearance tactics that it ostensibly condemns, smoothing out the roughness of an environment and the self's place within in it for the benefit of comfortable and securing narratives.

Though Gemmell resists a straightforward appropriation of indigenous practices, the re-making of imbalanced belongings in Australia through the correction of a disordered non-indigenous self allows a gathering together of singular pasts and their effects in an image of a future prospect for all Australians. The repetition of 'cleanness' in the text as an ideal ecological and ontological state, and its opposition to the 'mess' by which Snip's past is described, posits the healed national subject as conclusively purified—evacuated and re-filled—as if, through the transcendence of damaging pasts, 'final and total justice' (Moran 109) will be achieved. There is no account taken of the past as an ongoing presence. Whereas 'mess' stands for hard, sharp and balled up relations in the text, a clean subjectivity is imagined without tensions or irregularities.

Further, the centrality of personal experience in Gemmell's narrative, coupled with Snip's condemnation of Bud's singular life, without accountability to the community/family, suggests that national or ecological damage can be resolved through individual acts of redemption. Timothy Murray argues for the productive capacity of this strategy in which 'the pathos of the personal is intermixed with the trauma of the social'

(Murray 105). Here, 'critical energy' (106) can be generated in a collusion between the two. However, the images of a reconciled nation that Gemmell's text offer settle, rather than 'mix', the personal and the political in dynamic ways, imputing a single national body for which new foundations can be set down. If the nation can survive its fractious beginnings, it is suggested, then a national belonging is offered to all, as Gemmell's emphasis on communal responsibility and sharing for a healthy ecology indicates.

The reconciliatory imagery and poetics of the text connect morality (Bud's 'wrongness', for example) to legitimacy, thereby invoking the notion of a 'right' Australia that has made up for its past. While Gemmell insists upon distinctions between non-indigenous and indigenous historical experience, in her final image of recovery and the attainment of home differences are obscured under the sign of national healing, a transcendence instigated by the no longer guilt-locked and repressed settler subject. As the desire for a clean, unmarked body in a context of 'bad' and 'dark' national pasts implies a fantasy of national renewal in this way, sufferance and ruin are linked to the promise of ontological re-birth. Narratives of settler struggle and survival, as mentioned previously, feed a legitimising discourse of non-indigenous claim to the land, and although Snip professes to distance herself from these self-justifying stories, Gemmell's text can be seen as re-employing this tradition. Curthoys points to the currency of pilgrimage narratives in contemporary Australia, taken symbolically for a nation in the pursuit of reconciliation. Given the epic proportions of battle, survival and atonement, official reconciliation itself is frequently endowed with the properties of redemption and healing for the national body (Curthoys 3).

Moreover, while Snip attains the promise of the future, her redemption is wholly self-contained, perpetuating a mode of individual response and responsibility that is uninformed by, and secured from, the 'millions of vibrations or elementary shocks' (Probyn, *Outside Belongings* 118) that I argue are ecologically constitutive. This ordering of the past can be related to the process of ordering the self that Hawkins identifies in her reading of waste and its lack of conceptual place in the world. '[W]e expel and discard,' she explains, '…in the interests of maintaining a boundary between what is connected to the self and what isn't. Waste management in all its various forms and historical mutations is fundamental to the practice of subjectivity' (Hawkins 8). Since waste is conventionally seen to be *without* place in a well-ordered home/nation, when it exceeds its boundaries it becomes 'unequivocally bad', or 'matter out of place' (Hawkins 6).

The measure of goodness and order that *Cleave* establishes affirms Hawkins' reading of a dominant moral register in social dealings with waste, through which individual conscience is mobilised for a greater social good. In this, she argues, a cycle of shame, self-reproach and anxiety structure the imperative to dispose or expel waste from the space of the private, and in a broader sense, the national environment or 'home' (Hawkins 7). Yet the contemporaneity of Gemmell's runners and the colonial litter that she describes in the landscape infers a further impulse behind Snip's desire to put the past to rest. Counter to the insubstantiality of waste, Snip's renewal provides her with depth. Her attempt to dig down and unearth what is locked below an unhomely surface offers a way out of a disordered ecology as in the ground, the text asserts, roots are located— stories of 'being here' that are implicit in, yet obscured by, a culture of shame and

forgetting. Anxieties over a superficial settler identity are thus put to rest through the provision of depth and value to non-indigenous relations with land. Extracted from a morass of 'bad' memories, and with the event named, packaged and given a single meaning, Snip is isolated like the event itself, cut off from 'mess' and fantastically untouched.

Challenging Astley's and Gemmell's Conclusions for 'Mess'

Thus, for Snip, the corollary of establishing depth, value and assurity in non-indigenous relations to land is a salve for the unsettling feelings that, in turn, preclude a sense of belonging. A relief from anxiety that is the recovery of order insinuates chaos as moral decline—'primordial threat to the drive for wholeness' (Hawkins 15). *Drylands'* representation of relations as closed off and wounding, with the damage of irresolution and uncontained hate testifying to social degeneration—Benny's 'vomiting' protests; the radiating effects of Toff's puritanical vitriol—does not offer Gemmell's redemptive ending, and the poetic role of the ocean in each text indicates their distinctions. However, the poetics utilised by Astley and Gemmell mirror each other's: waste is opposed to health and cohesion, surface to depth, and alienation to belonging. These oppositions do not move together in either text but are maintained as separate and distinct, standing for the 'crisis' of breakdown or the remaking of wasted and useless ruins. Significantly, as much as apocalypse signals disaster or endings it is also a referent for renewal and discovery—vital, Andreas Huyssen points out, to modernity's 'myth of radical breakthrough and the emergence of the "new man"' (21), clean and clear, into the future.

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Both Gemmell and Astley disavow encounter beyond the disconnective propulsions of sharp-edged relations or cohesive reunions, and amidst Drylands' detritus (human, mechanical and environmental) no generative engagements occur as ecological elements come into contact. Gemmell's approved, unfolded self and Astley's condemned world-laid-open thus come together despite their differing implications. Flatly surfaced, the poetics of each text efface any sense of rupture, crease or shadow in their metonymical views: the one assumes access to a core of being, or foundational origins; the other outlines a terminal ecological and ontological dissolution through the eradication of temporal and spatial distinction. There is no place in these poetics for an ambiguous and shifting ground.

It is useful at this point to look at Hawkins' reasons for challenging the 'essentializing move [that is present] in much moral judgement' (Hawkins 7) in relation to waste. In the view that 'renders rubbish always already bad' (7) there is an imposition of closure and ontological totality which not only allows the self to be imagined out of touch with what is deemed bereft of value, but also denies the complexity of relations between subjects and environments. For Hawkins, it is impossible to ever distinguish the self as 'whole, separate, untouched, purified' (10) in its environment. What characterises being in the world is an unending process of 'unsettling impacts' (7) that define an ecology. If the event is given as the directly accessible base of ontological making then these impacts go unaccounted for: impacts as effects which—as Probyn contends—'encourage forms of becoming' (*Outside Belongings* 113). For Probyn, the 'past is not there to explain the

present' (113), but to initiate movement, ambiguity and possibility for the self in the world.

Hawkins demonstrates the negations inherent in an ontology defined through interiority and cohesion as she applies Deleuze's theory of enfolding to her discussion of waste. She reads Deleuze's fold as a force of 'subjectivation' that works in 'the interstices of guilt and conscience' (Hawkins 16), and conceptualises the subject 'in a relationship of tension and negotiation with other planes and dimensions of being' (16). Consequently, the fold articulates ethical models rather than moral directives, 'afford[ing],' Hawkins writes, 'opportunities for reflective modification of the self' (7) that morality's codes and doctrines prohibit. The enfolded subject has no interiority but becomes in relation to the world, incorporating proximity and distance. Thus, it can encounter and 'incorporate' an other 'without totalising', and 'internalize without unifying'—a self that *is* surface, open to neither archaeology nor one-dimensional readings, but constituted instead through 'spaces…flows [and] layers' (16). It is precisely from the encounters that unsettle the self in place that new identities and ethical relations are generated.

Snip's secret, as an artefact, or event, hauled up from the deep, obscures in its isolation as origin all suggestions of the other planes and directions that Deleuze's fold initiates. If transcendence is conceived as a floating above ground, a leaving behind of an unsettled state, then the desired surface of the earth is made out as passive and passable, to 'be skated over in any direction without hindrance' (*Lie of the Land* 2). This calls up the romantic image of the nomad, and the anthropocentrism of the coloniser. The danger and

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unpredictability of memories and secrets—which Snip herself admits—are then contained and forbidden an active and dynamic role for ontological and ecological becomings. The self is removed, kept safe and clean from unsettling encounters. Yet behind this mobility which problematically infers 'no sense of illegitimacy in entering and then leaving someone else's country' (Cowlishaw 41) is a ground neither flat nor even, but shaped through the roughness and junctures of earth that reference the simultaneity of secrecy and disclosure, presence and absence, proximity and distance. The 'shared', communal space is never totally revealed to all who traverse it for, as Gelder and Jacobs propose, a 'secret which is shared…[is] as all secrets must inevitably be: closed yet open' (*Uncanny* 108).

I take up this argument in Chapter Five, elaborating Deleuze's fold further, and explore alternate models for representing belonging, relation and the effects of the past. An approach to Gemmell's and Astley's texts from this theoretical position enables a gap in their conclusive poetics to be discerned. Astley fears for the loss of privacy and shadowed corners of retreat in a globalised world, and thus imagines a surface of total revelation and creative evacuation. I argue, however, that the admission of dynamic relation into this image highlights its ambiguity. As much as the 'Internet revolution…changes the angle and the degree of intimacy with which we look at people' (Atkinson 41), such intimacy—or proximity—is never whole or consuming and, seen through the Deleuzian fold, encounters without devouring. Thus, Atkinson insists, 'in spite of appearances to the contrary, writing is mainly a private, contemplative medium' (44), in both negotiation and tension with a world laid bare. Drylands' harsh sunlight, like

the television cameras which are unremitting in their exposure of failure and pain, equates modernity with forces of environmental erosion and the collapse, or dispersal, of community. Technology is given the power of revelation but also of forgetting: a signature attributed to late capitalist media culture and its substitution of the 'real' by commodification, spectacularisation and technical reproduction.

While Gemmell returns to origins, it seems Astley mourns the *original* and a space outside commodity culture. The reduction of subjects to waste within this logic reflects a transformed temporality brought about by technological change and shifts in consumption, work and mobility patterns. Hawkins explains this as being characteristic of seriality in the commodity form with its industrialised mass production: 'consumption,' she explains, 'depends on widespread acceptance of, even pleasure in, exchangeability; replacing the old, the broken, the out of fashion with the new' (Hawkins 9). Janet's regret for the loss of community responsibility and care can thus be tied to an explosion of commodity fetishism that looks only to the immediate and the disposable in terms of satiation and meaning. 'Because we have no idea how commodities come into being,' Hawkins notes, 'their life after we've finished with them is also of little or no interest. The magical quality of the commodity can obliterate their origins and their final destination' (9). Both Gemmell and Astley critique a contemporary culture that evades certain memories, and I do not disagree with the structures of damage and social inequality they illuminate. It is their poetics I contest. Hawkins' reminder that '[o]ur relations with waste cannot be so easily severed' (Hawkins 10), despite the appearance or fabrication of this, highlights the shadows and possibilities of presence that these texts'

portrayal of sharp relations and disconnections—and Snip's escape from a waste-heavy past—deny.

Karyn Ball describes the concept of 'destining' (taken from Heidegger) as providing a means to understand technology's ambiguities, and I find this a relevant idea with which conclude this chapter. Destining is 'a catalyst that determines the essence of history' (Ball 21), that in the process of revelation makes the historical accessible as an object for analysis and discursive understanding. Linking this to modernity, Ball reads the conditioning qualities of modern technology as 'teleological and effective causes that propel a result-driven logic' (21): a need for understanding that is rational and intelligible. This imperative is then seen to delimit—or 'enframe'—the 'principles of selection and organisation that give the real a presence' (21), and thereby formulate or control revelation. This is a concern, and yet as Ball argues, the dynamics of destining allow for a 'saving power' (22) to be discerned within this. The role of revelation in 'bringing-forth' (21) conditions of intelligibility does not preclude ambivalence or inconclusivity when considered in a poetic mode. As such, Ball continues, *poiesis* is a 'materialist principle that enables the interpretation of existence without preordaining or compelling it' (22)—that is, in the act of revealing, technology (or its 'poetic essence') 'let's Being be' (Heidegger qtd. in Ball 22) amongst the workings of overdetermination and commodification.

Destining thereby 'grant[s] and preserve[s] the freedom of the real to remain obscure in the course of revealing it' (Ball 22), and connects 'the danger of technology with its

generative and preservative powers' (23). It is the negation of this ambivalent revelation that permits—as much as it sets out to confront a kind of automated denial—a securing of categories by which memory becomes static, and enables the productive tensions of openness and containment, with neither one fixed or dominant, to become defused. In Astley's dichotomy between modernity and tradition this is particularly notable: historically inextricable from the culture of progress and industrial development, the rural is still 'revealed' as alienated through this—an indication of ambiguous and unsettled categories, rather than distinct and nostalgic polarities of rapacity and collapse. Heather Goodall points out with relevance to this point 'that the impact of modernity is as much rural as urban'; '[f]rom the 1840s, new technologies supported the relentless innovation required to meet the demands of the global market' (22).

Therefore, the relation between subjects and technologies is neither fixed nor categorical, and to consider the self in land, or positioned in place, a conception of ecology needs to accommodate this. Whereas Astley suggests a belonging impeded by the disconnective effects of digital media—alienating and displacing from the real—the negotiations of subjectivity and media-scape in terms of meanings and their making reconfigures technology as something that works in the production of place instead of seeming imposed, destructive or intrusive to it. As Ien Ang points out, dominant understandings of media reception are 'still governed by the unhelpful dichotomies of passive/active, manipulative/liberating, and so on' (141), within which apocalyptic views of technological transformation homogenise experience.

Janet's concern for lost originality in cultural texts—the substitution of 'signs of the real for the real itself' (Baudrillard 4)—without concession to the possibilities of becoming in the relations between subjects and technologies, are thus framed by 'endism' (Davis 263), a vision of change through the rubble of culture. Instead of these divisions, I advocate an approach that considers the intersections, movements together, and the cohabitation and oscillation of 'the diverse and the homogenous', 'autonomy and dependency' (Ang 143)—'the multiple contradictions,' such as Ang affirms, 'that are at play in any local response to global forces' (147). While the notion of 'play' is validated in itself by some commentators of digital media reception—a way, Richard Lanham writes, of 'redeem[ing]' the 'machine culture' (39) and recovering human agency in the interaction of technology/subject—I argue for a critique of techno-determinism that still retains an awareness of the structural forces and their containing and dividing capacities, but allows for dynamic ontological and ecological configurations that refer to the experiences of living in touch with an environment and refuse to subscribe to structural orders.

John Fiske's defence of the 'metaphor of the couch potato' (22) commonly applied to consumers of popular culture and digital media, compliments this view when he challenges the idea of the simply commodified consumer in favour of an inter-flow of production and consumption between media and audience. In this he highlights the tensions of homogeneity and heterogeneity as a way of reading society and thus cultural texts. Our attention is, again, drawn to the coexistence of revelation and closure in an unsettled state. 'The text is no do-it-yourself meaning kit from which any meaning can be made,' Fiske insists, 'nor one from which all meanings are equal' (28). Thus, as the text

'delimits the arena within which this production of meaning occurs' it equally 'offers its "weak points," its contradictions and gaps, its heteroglossia and multiaccentuality, which presents opportunities to resist or evade its own control' (29).

This belief in textual uncertainty is what also informs Ang's view as she counters the belief that global media, while effecting local meanings, cannot control it. Such an image of the local constituting and reconstituting itself 'through concrete reworkings and appropriations' (Ang 155) of the global, offers negotiation rather than transcendence (or indeed capitulation) as a model of both analysing and living out the consequences of global technologies in a way that I see as evoking the Deleuzian fold of process and becoming. Davis' critique of generationalism, figured as a divided logic—the old replaced with and at war with the new—fits within this thinking as he presents 'eras, or groups of people' that overlay, overlap and 'interact with each other' (Davis 266). The meanings and actualities of public and private lives—inclusive of responses and responsibilities—are thereby reworked (rather than collapsed) through such recognition.

As a further example, Winka Dubbeldam describes electronic space as mutating the 'former wall-as-barricade between public and private' (Dubbeldam 6) into a device of communication rather than protection or segregation. Here, communication takes place in 'a soft zone, a crease allowing for slippage, leakage and errors' (6). 'Not unlike cartilage between spinal cord fragments,' she continues, '[the crease] allows for flex and…adjustment' (6), such as the fold initiates. Even as media technologies can be charged with a smoothness of gaze and as mechanisms of distance, their proximity to

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subjects—as either 'participants' or as 'viewers'—disturbs this, suggesting their unstable and continually shifting relation. 'The living animate the media event by ignoring its critical limits' (185), Morris maintains: a proximity that is never wholly redemptive—'there is depression, oppression, indifference, and lies' (186)—but challenges the making of terminal narratives, of absolute and always ruin and waste. This is where environment and ecology seek a re-evaluation.

The striation of global media across the land can be perceived as an additional sign of non-indigenous not-belonging Australia, or the nation's ability to cohesively form—out of touch with the ground, propelling rather than settling, and estranged from depth in a superficial place. To see this, however, requires a reliance upon a dichotomous rendering of relation that considers separation in terms of sharp social fractures, and looks to connection as affording a total reconciliation of divided parts. Lost in this, and to return to the weather forecaster's fallible gaze, is the complexity of relation and the processes of becoming, un-orderable and uncontained by linear logic. I argue that the subject is both politicised and (re)made in its ecological relations and the past is an irrevocable environmental factor within it. The 'real'—or an intuition of the world around us—is thus produced in 'the interaction between a subject and an environment' (Ryan 13), not located as the corollary of a surface façade, secretly and deeply encased in the earth. 'Human reality, if it could be mapped,' Marie-Laure Ryan writes, 'would be the sum of all the possible selves that we create in all possible situations' (13)—a 'sum' that, I contend, is incomplete and unquantifiable, never reaching resolution. It is here that I turn to these possible becomings and examine how, poetically, non-indigenous belonging can

be grounded without discursive recourse to ecological and ontological security or collapse.

Chapter 5

A Haunted Culture: Temporality and 'Bad' Pasts in (Post)colonial Australia

I begin this chapter by examining notions of time in non-indigenous discourses of the past and, with reference to Chapters Three and Four, consider the temporalities inferred by Astley's *Drylands* and Gemmell's *Cleave*. How does the configuration of time effect ecological representation, and is a particular temporality required to poetically convey dynamic relations? Snip's desire to transcend her history by its effective exorcism suggests a lack of place for the past in an autonomous present and a clear future. For her, the past's secrets are anachronistic: accessible and open to (partial) revelation, but, to use Derrida's phrase, 'out of joint' (*Specters* 3) with chronological time. They must therefore be put to rest and left behind in order for individual and collective progress to be made. *Drylands* also harnesses a particular notion of time and place comparable to Snip's, as Janet and the technology/culture she represents is surpassed and supplanted by the new and fashionable, a reference to the veracity of the market economy's ceaseless movement *onwards*, discarding in the ethos of disposability what is rendered old and out of time.

An ethos of the 'current present, the wealthy, sunny, gleaming world of the postmodern and…the new world system of late capitalism' (Jameson 39) is conveyed by Astley in a simulacrum reality of barren surfaces and tarnished facades. Just as Gemmell's text condemns western individualism and the refuse of industrialism while endorsing linear temporality and utopian transcendence, *Drylands* describes the nihilism—the 'end of history, [the] disappearance of the past' (Jameson 41)—of a deconstructionist techno-modernity, trampling and denigrating humanist concerns. Commonly, both texts view

time in Australia as damagingly caught by a culture of deliberate forgetting that precludes social cohesion. Locked in this, even while the capitalist system shoots on ahead, there can be neither social cohesion nor any movement out of a divided and emotionally dry national ecology.

It is useful to consider this representation of arrested temporality in terms of haunting which, according to Schaffer, is 'one of the most often reiterated responses' (6), or discursive constructions, evident in narratives of a 'crisis'-ridden nation. The refusal to acknowledge the secrets of 'bad' pasts, and the perpetuation of damage occasioned by and through this—to both the personal and the collective body—authorises silence on the historical record. These silences are what 'haunt' a national conscience, 'made more salient,' Schaffer argues, 'by the partial and tentative legitimacy' (6) given to the voices and witnessing of its forgotten others over recent years. The desire to eradicate the 'ghosts of the past' (6) in this discourse of nation then positions a new future and a clean national landscape—without the miasmic residues that haunting occasions, and a concept I will later discuss—as the identified goal.

As I have argued in my analysis of *Cleave*, Gemmell's representation of a nation's disorder, as it fails to address this historical haunting, proposes just such a release from the past. With damaging events put well behind the subject in her ontological passage, and thus given as the past's rightful and productive place *for*, rather than in, the restorative present, the future can unfold with unsettlement—articulated in the uneasy effects of haunting—corrected. What is established here is the negation of the past's

ability to 'return', or have presence in the present. The relation between unsettlement and haunting can thus be partly understood through a non-linear temporality, and how this disrupts the conventional chronology favoured by Gemmell and Astley. Appearing in the present, what has been considered as dead, gone, or over, is a ghostly phenomenon that disregards the temporal structures of an ordered past, present and future. A haunting culture in these terms not only cripples the confidence and future—as Gemmell suggests—of a cohesive, holding nation, but further, fundamentally challenges the ontological security that linear narrative can convey.

In modernity, the privileging of linear time equates material presence with life and absence with death: an episteme central to the imperialist drive and reflected in the prevalence of taxonomic organisation in western (post)colonial culture. Carter examines the (post)colonial museum as emblematic of this conception of time, and argues that, typically, the museum space establishes a present-ing of the past (through collection and artefact) in a context of silence and linearity, staging a 'throning' of authorised histories in an 'illusion of seamless continuity' (*Lost Subjects* 3). This is a theatricalising of the past commensurate with the theatre of the colonial *tabula rasa* onto which one voice—the voice of 'true' history—is projected. Theatricality allows for the unity of the stage, or the ground on which the coloniser stands, and the imposition of authoritative narrative.

Here, 'nation-making…discourse'—'heroes, frontiers, divine providence, progress' (6)—proliferates, dependent upon an audience that cannot answer back or 'talk amongst itself' (7). Their speech, as 'unwanted sound' (9), would threaten the material or symbolic

presences consecrated in the museum. Where the museum is concerned with history, the past is not denied within its walls, but instead is valued for 'elegaically represented' (9) absence, and thus the presence of the past is defined by its passing. The spatial stratification of the ground invested in an archaeological approach to history (such as Dave's)—the past as buried, or layered beneath the surface of the present—endorses this practice. Digging down uncovers and highlights descent, explaining current presence and giving an ordered genealogy to place. Carter's experience with the ideologies of museum culture, when commissioned to install an artwork in the newly-built Museum of Sydney, confronts these politics of memory-archaeology. Built on the site of Sydney's first Government House, and uncovering the house's foundations in its processes of excavation and construction, the Museum's building buried over these ruins, while "'commemorat[ing]'", in doing so, 'the site of Sydney's lost origins' (Emmett, Foreword to *Lost Subjects* v). Lying beneath the new, the old was already in its 'rightful' place: remembered but without presence in a distinct living present. To commemorate the past successfully then, the foundations of old Government House had to be interred for 'all time', as a fetishised origin and an immortalised end—out of touch in a re-created space.

Carter thus exemplifies the installation of temporal continuity in the museum space, where what unsettles this linear tracking of the world is subsumed and controlled by narrative order. That is, old Government House came before, and must be made over for, the new buildings on this site. Yet what Carter perceives as a desire for continuity in time, Rose articulates as a *discontinuous* view of the world. Like Carter, she sees the epistemology crucial to western concepts of being as relying on sequential temporality:

the following—consecrated as logic—of past, present and future, discrete from, and thus discontinuous with, one another. Rose argues that discontinuity fosters the belief that 'the past is finished' ('Dark Times' 98), enabling a resting of ghosts and the uneasiness of haunting. Despite their variant mobilisation of dis/continuity, Carter and Rose work together in a critique of this point. Calls for the nation to 'forget past injustices' (Rose, 'Dark Times' 97) mobilise such discontinuity, suggesting that present (social, economic, political) injustices are in no way related to those in the past; that the past is no longer effective in the present; and indeed—at its extreme—that injustice no longer occurs, but is what occurred *before*.

By tracking this temporal configuration to pre-Christian Europe, Rose identifies western preoccupations with progress as an isolation of present time compressed between two forces of 'ontological significance' (100). 'Shrunk' into a 'moment of transition' (100), a fleeting station between where we have been and where we are going, the present is devalued to the precedent imaginary of 'future achievement', and a continually generated sense of what is 'almost, already in the past' (100). Invested in this is the proposition of progressive sequence by which, Rose explains, conclusive ideals are fostered—of 'building a better world, of a war to end all wars, of the end of poverty, ignorance, superstition and the like' (100)—and the immediacy of the living postponed from contemplation or confrontation. '[T]he past is not so much that which has already happened,' she continues, 'as it is a label to be applied to that which we wish to finish and forget, or from which we wish to differentiate ourselves and thus to absolve

ourselves from responsibility' (101). To this extent, ghosts are exorcised even while the meaning of the present is anchored in the past from which we are always moving away.

The obfuscation or deflection of responsibility at the centre of Rose's argument against this construction of time, highlights the issue of damage and its relation to the self that is implicated in social harms and personal, as well as sovereign, violences. If the present is continuously passing, then the 'power to insulate one's self from the damage one causes' (103) is attained: violence will always precede the living subject's place in this temporal chain. In the push towards the *next thing*, the denial of continuities of damage and inequality—or as Rose states, the 'denial of injury [that] amplifies the pain' (112)—excludes what exists from 'the past in the present as present wounds' (112), and the presences in the past (and their place in the present) that fall outside authorised memory. Such presences are what 'slip...through the net' (Carter, *Lost Subjects* 1) of the taxonomic venture.

The containment of damage in a linear temporal structure, and in Rose's conception of discontinuity, leaves effect similarly circumscribed, with no radiation from an event admitted outside a chronological progression, and 'mess' or disorder excluded from ecological relation. The nuclearity or unification in the self assumed in the concept of being-as-presence (and in which there is no ambiguity between presence/absence, life/death), thus becomes the premise of chronological history, formed in a linkage and progression of nuclear fact. The problematic nature of Snip's isolation of the event, or origin, in her personal—and through this, national—trauma lies in her conscription of

these modalities, despite her evident intentions to condemn and escape colonial pasts. Her construction of a foundational narrative in which the originary point of damage is identified, invokes a particular meaning of historical connections which enact the clearing-space of imperial time.

Carter further argues that the ascription of linear chronology to temporality enables the construction of founding narratives from which a subject or nation can garner legitimacy in genealogy. This is evident in claims such as Pauline Hanson's (see page 75), that her presence on the land for a life-time, in the same way as her forebears, makes her claim to belonging and ownership inviolable. 'Holding' stories thus realise their ontologically containing power when they convey this genealogy through an unruptured chain of events and narratives that secure an authorised place in history. As Greg Dening writes, '[t]he great temptation of foundational histories is to claim the last...the "real thing"' (Prologue xii)—the official story—on which the present and future rest. Such foundational ground is considered solid, firm and autonomous, and is not open to ambiguity and unsettlement.

Therefore, an attempt to clear away the past by returning to founding, or originary, events, signifies an un-dynamic view of time: while the self can return to uncover its past, signified by Gemmell as an experience of 'crisis', the effects of this past are forbidden a similar capacity for activation and contemporality. The past itself cannot return, while authentic beginnings, as they are excavated and released, are thus precluded from inconclusivity. Sharp and heavy, these foundations speak of ends such as the '"fatal

impact" of settlement upon native peoples' (Neuman, Thomas and Erickson, Conclusion 241), or the dystopian apocalypse of totalised loss. With foundational narratives offering the direct source of temporal and spatial contexts, roots are established and a homeliness conferred that determines a resolution for what challenges an assured ground, and a 'natural', continuous unfolding of the future. The application of dis/continuity to the western rhetorical structure of time and space by Carter and Rose discerns the discursive connection between origins and futures within which the present moment, as it is happening, is evaded in preference of a limitless and unbroken expanse of a linear horizon.

Rose describes the significance of foundational narrative to colonisation in a way that echoes *Cleave*'s clean conclusion:

> The white settlers' frontier is a Year Zero: a period of transfiguration, portending fulfilment. Imagine the frontier as a rolling Year Zero that cuts an ontological swathe between "timeless" land and historicised land. Consider, too that whatever happens within that Year Zero will be disjunctive with what follows as well as what existed before. This is a moment of transcendence. ('Dark Times' 9)

In this understanding, if origin is considered the 'zero-point' (Dening, Prologue x) of presence, where, so to speak, the foot is placed upon the ground for the first time in a space now made into place, the frontier in official Australian colonial history signified the beginning of the future. Rose argues against assertions of settler ambivalence (at least in a temporal sense) to their arrival in a 'new' land: their 'presence, like their terminology ("new worlds"), signalled their sense of themselves as agents of disjunction' ('Hard

Times' 5), she asserts, with the colonising project itself—a leaving behind of old origins in the establishment of new—clearly articulating this awareness. The palindromic shape of the Christian calendar is Rose's template for colonial constructions of 'pre' and 'post' contact or settlement. In this, 'the destiny of history' (9) is configured as the new rightfully replacing the old, and thus frontier narratives in palindromic mode 'define what exists on the "other" side as awaiting transformation' (10). 'The land will be domesticated', as Rose reads into this logic, '…and the people will be civilised. Both will be made productive, and thus time, history and culture will be transformed' (10).

As the coloniser pushes back the frontier—in an equally linear conception of space—non-indigenous presence is installed where absence was read and simultaneously, indigenous presence (read as 'pre') is placed in the land as somehow past (now disjointed from 'post'). The rhetoric of bringing light into perceived 'dark' lands is, as we know, based on this temporal structure. By forging a break between before and after, the frontier's 'progress'—which leaves settlement and cultivation in its wake—positions everything else as 'behind'. The frontier waits, in effect, 'for the rest of the story to catch up' (Rose, 'Hard Times' 13).

In these acts which visually and conceptually render the landscape smooth and clear, enabling and legitimising an expansion of the frontier, place is equalised and the land reduced to sameness. Snip's sense of a dank and empty Tasmanian landscape, emptied of its indigenous life, performs this palindrome, exchanging non-indigenous presence/life for indigenous death. This finds repetition in the legal demands that continuity be

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demonstrated by indigenous claimants in their practice and knowledge of land tenure, from 'pre' colonisation to now ('post'). Because of the understanding of temporality implied in this—which enables a culture to 'die out'—the notion of continuity represents a 'gap between contemporary social structures and the proposed model' ('Hard Times' 17) for Native Title. And yet the discourses of Official Reconciliation continue to harness imperial concepts of time, invoking a clear future and a new nation that is beyond its past tensions and damage. The desire for firm and assured national origins can be compared to this process of clearing and compacting the environment into a space for non-indigenous reinvention. It is important at this point to critique the configuration of an originary ground as being necessary to a cohesive ecology, and I do this through various theoretical perspectives on the implications of identifying and isolating a single origin and event of history to which all subsequent ecological relations are tied.

Isolating the Origin and the Event

To critique origins or foundational histories is not to deny their existence but to question the ability of these foundations to access a past in itself, assumed whole, complete, and assuring a future. In the western philosophic tradition of truth as solid, incontestable, and 'emergent dazzling from the hands of a creator or in the shadowless light of first morning' (Foucault 372), the origin is significant, and this is highlighted by an analysis of architectural ruins and their historical interpretation in western culture. Dening explains that two models of traditional western thought—Classicism and Romanticism—best express a cultural predisposition in the west to view foundations or, poetically, the crumbled ruins of previous times—in terms of cultural progress or collapse. In a

Classicist view, the decaying ruin signifies inevitable loss, while the Romantic tradition positions a poetic return to the ruin—that is, 'accessing' a previous period in current time—as an entrance to enlightenment (Dening, Prologue xii). Thus, from either perspective of progress or degeneration, the ruins of the past 'speak' of tomorrow. 'When we contemplate ruins,' Christopher Woodward insists, 'we contemplate our own future' (Woodward 2).

This direct connection between past and future suggests a chronology in which, and underneath the ruinous site of 'transience and vulnerability' (Woodward 23), the ground is conceptually solid and firm. Yet Woodward's further claim in his study of classical, western ruins, that 'no writer saw the same colosseum' (23), 'you can never step into the same ruin twice' (53), suggests the inability of the ruin to speak in any way that is total or whole. That is, an origin is only ever singular and moreover, cannot be charged with a chronological weight. While the ruin can be traced to its point of construction through time and events, contact with the ruin (as the past) is situated in a present that initiates continually changing forms of relation to it. Every experience of meeting with the ruin will involve a reconfiguration, or an 'upheaval in relations of proximity', that, for Probyn, 'any account of the past produces' (*Outside Belongings* 113).

The notion of an accessible real or authentic past, contained in foundations, is implicated in Freudian psychoanalytic discourse and its equation of the unconscious with the truth of self. An unconscious that is originary and pre-historical, and yet resides as a 'forgotten genesis' (Britzolakis 81) in conscious life, suggests a coming into being that depends

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upon a debt to beginnings. Further, the role of the unconscious for Freud, that of substantiating an anterior kernel of being (Parkin-Gounelas 128), enacts a spatial configuration that aligns depth, or what is buried below the ground, with presence, imputing subjectivity '[as] a closed interior' (Probyn, *Outside Belongings* 102). The ego or consciousness, in this view, is the envelope of the unconscious, folded around its kernel. The alignment of archaeology with psychoanalytic practice was, according to Woodward, made by Freud himself when he argued that 'stones speak' (Freud qtd. in Woodward 55), wherein 'every fragment must be uncovered, studied and analysed as a piece of evidence in a larger meaning' (Woodward 55). Implying layers of the self structured in hierarchical form, the psychoanalytic subject is seen to be in a process of overcoming a disunity within these layers, restoring fragmentary narratives to an articulate whole.

Psychoanalytic discourse's interest in the event, or—as Ball puts it—'the scene of the crime' (17), where the protective barriers of consciousness are first broken through, constructs 'an etiological reading of identity that is built around the concept of traumatic origins' (Ball 17). This suggests that 'everyone must be equally traumatized as the bedrock and result of socialization' (40). In the place of origins, and to dispel the weight of foundational narrative, however, Probyn presents the concept of 'suspended beginnings' (*Outside Belongings* 96). Rather than invoking a fixing or freezing of time around the origin which such terminology could convey—such as Woodward's claim that in 'ruins movement is halted, and Time is suspended' (36)—Probyn works against a rigid

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chronology and the narrative elevation of 'the beginning' to suggest an endless production of points of ontological departure.

Her examination of childhood and its cultural currency as a time 'to remember' in life, offers an understanding of origin—or the place from where one came—as never directly accessible in memory. While chronology demands a solid foundation for descent, Probyn's childhood does not ground being in a firm and irrevocable context, but considers it as an event in a Foucaldian frame, where empirical fact and the phantasmic are drawn together. Foucault resists the philosophic assumptions of linear history—'that words…kept their meaning, that desires still pointed in a single direction, and that ideas retained their logic' (Foucault 369)—and argues that any attempt to approach the past as concrete or empirically contained will be confronted by a phantasmic reality: as Probyn, describes, 'images that carry childhood into the realm of the pathologizable, images that float as memory (which are, or course, incorporated as fact, proposition, observation, and experiences)' (*Outside Belongings* 96). Childhood as an event, Probyn insists, is a 'multilevel production' and 'a tangled discursive skein' (95) that cannot be gathered together as a totalised, universal experience.

The place of childhood beginnings is therefore understood as consisting of multiple strata, non-ordered and without hierarchy. Probyn's theory of reconfigured beginnings, in conjunction with Carter's reading of the ground, have significant implications for the past in an ecology, and an ontological model that is always becoming. If considered through Probyn's perspective, the 'myth of common origins' (Carter, 'Where the Ground' 23) that

Carter argues is the legitimating tactic of colonising nations, is confronted by an unstable milieu of singular experiences where stories are to be *found*, rather than founded. Carter's study of temporality in the early days of colonial Sydney demonstrates Probyn's point that an isolation of origins will always be disturbed by the generation of other ontological possibilities. Carter uses the temporal implications of space to highlight the irreconcilable imperial narrative of order and progression in the colony with what was 'in fact a polytopic collage' ('Footings' 60). While the colonial endeavour constructed its chronology of settlement, exploration and claim, empowered to cement the foundations of the 'new' world by the vested authority of the 'old', its isolation as a colony meant that the formation of an historical record for Australia was, from the first, characterised by duplication, interval and disjuncture.

The further away the Empire moved from Britain, the more extreme the effects of distance became. Carter puts it this way: '[a]s stories radiated from their points of origins they suffered a growing timelag—and as communications far away from Europe were slower and rarer, this timelag accelerated towards the peripheries of the Pacific' (58). As it received stores and 'news' from the ships arriving in Sydney Cove, the colony constructed a local chronology based only upon the arrival of information rather than the actual 'originary' time of its occurrence. Thus, the creation of an official historical record meant a coming together of 'disconnected, mutually indifferent scraps of information received casually, partially and intermittently' (60). The colony was already out of step with its own linear narrative. By comparing the 'birth' of Carter's colony with Probyn's view of childhood outside the 'status of guarantee' (*Outside Belongings* 96), I argue for

an unsettlement of time that is structured through beginnings and end. In this, the event, while seen in singularity—no two events are the same, no event takes precedence over another—is never complete or solid, but opens up to gaps, cross-connections and mismatched records.

Both Carter and Probyn gesture towards relations with the past that neither monumentalise, order, nor bestow 'primary ground' (Probyn, *Outside Belongings* 97) in the act of remembering. The past does not certify meaning—the *one* meaning or truth—and evades capture. Birth and origin, Probyn tells us, 'must be pried from their position as individualized and precious possessions' (*Outside Belongings* 97). In these poetics of the ground, there are no solid platforms of self-evidence from which to speak. Like Carter's figure—the child, the old man—rolling or reclining with the lie of the land, the historicity of one event indicates an uneven surface tracked with the discontinuous lines and traces of others. The longing for lost origins as a legible and logical ontological base is tantamount to the (colonial) need for straight, sharp lines and smooth surfaces. Carter's analysis of chronology posits continuity not against Rose's critique of modernity shrinking the present, but aligned with her imperative to admit excluded voices amongst the linearities of progress. His desire to represent historical experiences 'non-theatrically, without behaving like the theatre director who single-handedly...orchestrates events' takes account of—and responsibility for—'discontinuities...[and] offstage points of view. '[I]nstead of a single narrative voice', he argues, '...substitute a crowd of voices, sometimes in dialogue with one another, sometimes talking past each other, sometimes frankly indifferent to the other's point of view' (*Lost Subjects* 3).

According to Carter, this admission of different, often inaudible voices, into an understanding of the past does not represent the substitution of one genealogy for another. What it denies is the invention and preservation of 'a mythic line of descent' (*Lost Subjects* 13), encrypted and rooted below the ground. Carter's installation work, *Lost Subjects*, sought to tune into the noise emerging from the unofficial tracks and inversed roads that passed across and alongside 'the high-road of colonial progress' (14-15). In this, stops and starts, fragments of conversation, slang, calls and 'babble' are what speak the history of the museum's site. Carter configures the colonial space as one of radiation and convergence, where global and local forces cannot be cleanly distinguished. As colonial power radiated out, for example, 'through usurpation of Aboriginal land, its clearing and cultivation', 'historical vectors of global significance converged (industrialisation, utilitarian penology, …[and the] struggle for…trade routes)' (3).

The official record of national history imposes historical and environmental silence in its formulation of linear time, as 'ordinary "noise"' (9)—representing disorder, discontinuity and threat to central authority—is deposed and wiped out. It is this logic, and in a frame of unfolding events, that configures the ruin as a sign of loss or collapse alone. But by working against foundational narratives and the vertical structure of progressive time, Carter situates his disordered voices on the surface of the ground, representing a spatial liberation of 'noise' to the flows of radiation and convergence. Thus, in keeping with his attention to the lie of the land, I propose a conception of the historical ruin as an ecological constituent similar to these partial and fragmented snatches of sound, signifying neither cultural progress nor disaster. Rather than a discrete entity subsumed

into a narrative of western power and self-destruction, the ruin speaks of 'fleeting encounters' (*Lost Subjects* 11) and 'dialogue[s] across difference' (12), echoing with 'the deviation of voices into each other's path' (13).

Perrie Ballantyne's study of ghost towns in Australian culture describes ruins as traditionally signifying to the non-indigenous imagination either 'evidence of [its] own vanished empires...[that have] left the impress of the past on the land', or discomfortingly, the ineffectiveness of settler imprints upon the environment. In this case, the ruin appears as a 'pathetic' 'blight...on the landscape' (Ballantyne 2), and these are the eyes with which *Drylands* and *Cleave* represent evidence of an out-of-place settler culture: rusting fences and cages, wrong trees, and decaying buildings. Antipathy to the presence of feral animals, introduced species, and the desire to 'remove the imprint of modern man' (Morton and Smith 159) from an Australian 'wilderness'—like the construction of wilderness itself—relies on the separation and isolation of tracks in the land, refusing to see where they cross over or peter out, and reform elsewhere.

To articulate alternative ways of reading loss and destruction is not to endorse environmental or ontological damage, but neither is it to supplant destruction with therapeutic restoration. Carter's noisy ground is where destruction and construction co-habit and oscillate, and it therefore recognises 'a still-contested place of meeting' ('Footings' 57) in an environment otherwise condemned as irrevocably vandalised. Indeed, as Denis Byrne points out, 'erasure by substitution' ('Archaeology of Disaster' 18) is the danger of restoration discourse, just as the clearing away of waste or 'mess'

involves the removal of stories articulated by these fragments: a valuation of 'pure' or holistic narrative over miscegenation. '[T]here is something shameful or unfortunate about the presence in the landscape of the traces of a "mixed culture"' (22), Byrne argues. '[W]hile presented as being a reinstatement of something lost, [restoration] might alternatively be seen as a "burying" of traces' of what circulates as a 'problematic historical episode' (17). The sublimation of the entropic for the fantastic attainment of a clean history or environment—and to facilitate a single narrative of nation—suggests the precedence of continuity in an authoritative non-indigenous imagination: a continuity that resounds with the status of colonial power and damage as purely a 'structure rather than event' (Wolfe 97) in the national record.

While the colonial frontier was 'shifting, contextual, negotiated, moved in and out of, enacted and suspended' (Wolfe 95), the structural existence and discursive continuity of binary positions in contemporary Australia demonstrates the imposition of linear narrative over an uneven and mutable ground, with its positions of inclusion and exclusion, privilege and prejudice, and its 'logic of elimination' (97). It is necessary to acknowledge this structural force. However, an environmental poetics that admits the movement of ecological elements across and above the single planarity of imperial order challenges the efficacy of chronology and spatial stratification to be ecologically instructive. What I want to propose is an ecology defined as moving and (de)forming around these linear shapes, shadowing their certainty with the play of absence and presence. Not only do the echoes behind the authoring voices of the historical record find

ecological admittance in this, but the distinction or feared demise of local and global specificities is expanded to a different understanding of time and space.

The Surface *is* the World: Probyn, Deleuze and Foucault

The concept of the surface that I will now explore is central to my argument, since it reclaims the meaning of the term from ontological and ecological discourses that oppose it to depth and the 'authentic'. Probyn's notion of suspended beginnings elaborates a non-dichotomous state of the surface where she argues for the discontinuities of foundational ground. Working from the claim of 'the worst thing' in individual memory, she mobilises her understanding of the event without coherent foundations to suggest the uncontrollable nature of recall. With the act of remembering unable to hold or contain an event in a linear chain, 'the worst thing' when it is recounted in memory 'can't ever really be past' (*Outside Belongings* 98) since it has no fixed place in the subject's story. That is, remembering involves not a direct re-tracing to the past, but 'a deeply disturbing experience in rearranged proximities' (114) that occur in the present. '[F]ar from being reassuring', Probyn continues, 'the retrieval of the past into the present is profoundly dislocating, disorientating. Bringing forth beginnings results in the loss of bearing'; 'the past is bent into strange shapes so that what should be farthest away is in fact the closest' (114).

This conception of the self's relation to the past as *always* unsettled in the act of recall, relays a foundational ground that is similarly unstable, and in terms of belonging this is significant. If there is no ontological solidity, no firm ground from which to be rooted in

the course of one's life, then belonging in a paradigm of depth, solidity and authenticity, is necessarily challenged. Probyn invokes the distance and proximity that constitute touching on the past; a dynamic relation, opposed to Astley's generational divides, where the 'intermingling of time and generation' (*Outside Belongings* 120) configure an environment in which the self is situated. The surface, in Probyn's understanding, is a milieu which denies interiority and the sharp edges of separation. The surface is where ecological elements move and fold together temporal distinctions, as 'lines of remembering...jostle' (112) without interiority, informing her theory of 'outside belonging' (9). Here, 'different distinct elements' (6) are in touch but are never absolute in their difference, and their relations cannot be ordered. Proximities and distances on the surface are constantly changing, opening new possibilities for the self and environment. It is these complex relations that enable an ecology to be configured as a surface. Ecological belonging, or locating a place in the world for the self, is thus given as singular—for 'each point is distinct' (Foucault qtd. in Probyn, *Outside Belongings* 11) in this ecology—but also mutable and continually negotiated as relations expand and contract.

Probyn's interpretation of the surface is drawn, in part, from Deleuze's anti-interior understanding of becoming and the enfolded self. In his model of the rhizome which takes the form of the surface, Deleuze considers an ecology of relations in which the individual and embodied subject is 'demassified' (Probyn, *Outside Belongings* 49), without solidity and certain boundaries. As Deleuze describes, the rhizome is heterogeneous, 'composed not of units but of...directions in motion. It has neither

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beginning nor end, but always a middle [milieu] from which it grows and overspills'
(Deleuze, 'Rhizome' 36). Within the rhizome, the subject, itself without concrete ends or
beginnings, becomes as it encounters diverse and heterogenous movement forms, that
reference other bodies, times and presences. '[A]ny point of a rhizome can be connected
to anything other, and must be' (29), Deleuze asserts, articulating an ecology without
sharp divides or total enclosures. There can be no exclusions in a rhizomatic account of
the world. On the surface, Probyn argues—thus suggesting the unpredictable force of
these relations—'one would trip over points of interaction. Or they would trip you up'
('Eating for a Living' 1).

Since becomings mean process rather than progress—with its implications of a straight
path forward—the rhizome moves in a non-linear way, but initiates relations through and
across an ecological space without bounded limits. Catherine Driscoll points out that
Deleuze does not propose a decentred subject in this view of surface becomings, but
understands subjectivity as never centred in the first place (77). Thus, while relations can
diffuse and discontinue, they can never support taxonomy, dichotomy *or* totality. Desire
is described as being central to this as, according to Probyn, it is through and with desire
that the subject moves into different positions of relation. Desire is propulsive. The desire
to know the past, or conversely, to desire its forgetting, can be seen in this context of
process and becoming, producing 'new relations and relationships among individuals,
groups…' and consequently precluding the 'categorical order of things' (Probyn, *Outside
Belongings* 14).

To translate this conceptual surface to the materiality of Carter's ground, the passing of feet, the spatial disorientation of shadow, and the roughness of the lie of the land, all indicate the continual makings of place as subjects and environment 'fold and twist' (Probyn, *Outside Belongings* 20) together in infinite configurations. Carter's emphasis on fragmented voices and unbalanced dialogues suggests the rhizome as he insists upon the necessary incompletion of narrative in the process of constructing and recounting the past. 'Bodies, and desire, are only of interest inasmuch as they engage with others', (*Outside Belongings* 49) Probyn similarly writes, and the same could be said for narrative voice. Stories also become and operate amongst 'networks and milieux of bodies and things' (49).

In such environments 'qualities, substances, forces and events' (Deleuze qtd in Probyn, *Outside Belongings* 49) are all part of an ecology: both material and immaterial presences are relationally active. Suggesting this ecological model, and refusing to exclude damage from becomings, Muecke likewise contends that human cultural environments are produced 'in energised articulations with landscapes, animals, bedrooms, kitchens, computer terminals and other machinery. There is fall-out and loss, waste and despair, but there are also florid imaginings, sudden flares of discharge in the meaningful and feelingful encounters of bodies living in environments' ('Archaeology of Feeling' 5). Feeling in this context is taken as engagement, an ethical practice that confronts ontological limits and conceives of being in the world as a continual experience of surprise and encounter—the unpredictable flares that Muecke suggests. Therefore, the imperative for belonging that isolates feeling as a deep point of connection for the self in

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place, and that equates depth with the real, is challenged. As Carter writes, 'a depth of feeling does not depend upon a depth of character (and its myth of a unified psychological history) but resides in the spaces in-between...without ever coming to the point, or settling down' (*Lost Subjects* 14).

Therefore, seeing the ecology as a surface, without depth or interiority, overturns the psychoanalytic dualism of psyche and social, and the humanist (or post-humanist) dichotomy of thought and feeling: one can not be privileged over the other. Without such hierarchies and sharp separations, meanings are made and belongings informed by friction or tension rather than in the reuniting of parts into a totally comprehensible and authentic whole. For Probyn, unsettlement is the '*frisson* of surface rubbing surface' [emphasis in original]—the generative charge of 'tectonic plates moving' (*Outside Belongings* 121). The retrieval of the surface from its opposition to depth forces a re-evaluation of the approaches to narrative meaning implied by an archaeological poetics that seeks to exhume the past straight from the earth—an 'authentic voice' speaking to the present. An archaeological view to the past, as an event out of touch with others and considered static and knowable as a core of information, assumes a direct line to meaning and a wholly revelatory relation to the past. The unknown object is drawn up and exposed on the landscape's surface, without distance or ambiguity admitted into its presencing.

Foucault's discussion of language as representation is relevant here since it asserts the impossibility of ever knowing and telling the historical event in total. Poetics, he argues, are unable to breach the gap between the signifier and the signified and thus 'discourse is

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annihilated in its reality by entering into the order' of the latter (Foucault qtd in Deleuze, *Foucault* 52). We can only relate to the past in the context of the present, for it only has discursive meaning within this time. An 'age', Deleuze explains, 'does not pre-exist the statements which express it, nor the visibilities which fill it' (*Foucault* 48). Foucault conceives of these discursive constructions—always emergent from a present—as historical strata, invoking an alternative archaeological image of layers as 'words and things that build up and over' (Marks 246), and yet constitute, the events of the past. Furthering this metaphor, Deleuze appeals to the necessity of 'break[ing] open words, phrases or propositions and [to] extract statements from them' (*Foucault* 52-53) as a way of relating to, but not claiming coherence from, representation. In doing so, the singularity of discursive stratum can be realised: its meeting points with other stratum, its articulations and, what Deleuze terms, its 'visibilities' (53), which 'allow a thing or object to exist only as a flash, sparkle or shimmer' (54).

Importantly, these strata are not configured in a linear fashion and refuse the dichotomy of surface and depth. Such layers operate in an immediate ecology rather than inferring a plunge into historical ground. Foucault's image of the subject approaching the past through discursive representation invokes a rhizoid shape of relations that occur through and across space—disordered and non-linear—instead of straight up or down. A conceptual ordering of the world entails a dedication to one discursive stratum alone. However, a movement in fluid motions through discursive layers resists this order that would lock in the world and demand one truth. Deleuze's emphasis on visibility in his explanation of this theory affirms messy relations, not abstracted perceptions, as a tactic

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of knowing, and his discursive penetrations allow movement and kinetics—the 'frisson' that Probyn suggests—to articulate an event outside totality.

Deleuze writes against a view that 'the "World speaks", as if visible things already murmured a meaning which our language had only to take up' (*Foucault* 55) and there is, in his reading of Foucault's archaeological poetics, no one voice of history to hear and no originary experience of the world that would enable a subject to speak. Rather, a subject's relation to the past is particular and the subject constantly shifts between two 'possible positions' (55) in its articulation of events. Therefore, alongside Carter's echoic, entropic voices that create the unsettling '"hiss" of History' (*Lost Subjects* 15), the past as discursive strata effect 'an anonymous murmur in which positions are laid out for possible subjects' (Deleuze, *Foucault* 55): it is a murmur that alludes to the instability of knowledge and the always changing referents for the self touching on the past. Importantly then, both official and unofficial histories are without centre, or a holding core of truth, and in Deleuze's terms are thus deterritorialised. As discursive strata is moved through, public (official) and private (unofficial) memory meet and interact.

Deleuze invokes the problematics of leaving buried representations unapproached, which would enable historical narrative to remain unquestioned on one stratum alone. He argues that without connection to the present, the past would 'surface…in the shape of personalities which are independent, alienated…and in some sense embryonic, strangely active fossils, radioactive, inexplicable in the present where they surface, and all the more harmful and autonomous' (Deleuze, *Cinema 2* 113). There is no way to relate to the

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damage these fossils create since, closed up in themselves, and out of touch with other events and stratum, present poetics cannot account for the presence of these 'personalities'. 'Such traces are inscrutable on their own,' Laura Marks comments on this point, 'but when we cut through the different layers and connect them, they tell a story' (253). Deleuze's reference to harm in a radioactive model emphasises the volatility of the past, and its capacity to revive or ghost unconxetualised, disconnected or repressed pain. Yet as Marks expresses, this elaborates the 'productive minefield' (Marks 257) that is our engagement with memories, events and their recall in narrative.

This is the difference between the pain caused by what we choose to ignore and the possibilities that come from relation to damage. Both Probyn and Marks explain this in similar ways from their respective perspectives, where mutability rather than certainty is the characteristic of narrative engagement. Marks' study of cinematic images through Deleuze's theories enables a 'participatory notion of spectatorship' (256), whereby the private memories of the viewer inform and generate new meanings from what is presented on the screen, while Probyn's mobilisation of the surface for the reader of a text both welcomes and produces interruptions since 'the reader...[brings her] own examples, connections, and reconnections' (35) to the consumption of narrative.

Memory is therefore deterritorialised from an official paradigm, and cannot be held or claimed as solid and true. This further resonates with Probyn's understanding of relation where, on the surface and 'at the edge of ourselves', 'we mutate; we become other' (*Outside Belongings* 34). Her expression of the unsettling effects of the retrieval of the

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past calls up Deleuze's dangerous fossil, and yet the act of connection, of cutting between sedimented histories posits unsettlement as a generative thing, and as part of a process of the self's becoming. This cutting through does not establish relations of proximity and distance, which exist and transform prior to their recognition, but counteracts the threat of the past when it is isolated and contained, and therefore placed out of touch, by the perception and living out of sharp disconnection. The unsettling, or dangerous effects of pursuing an originary point, or a time in the past to access as if it remained in stasis, do not arrest the desire for this. Yet, the impossibility of tracing a linear line to an event as it presences itself as 'a heterogeneous ensemble of discourses and relations' (Probyn, *Outside Belongings* 116) ruptures and affronts the pretence of its single truth. Thus, desire itself 'wanders', '[a]s it moves between present and past...[and] produces its object...scrambl[ing] any sense of a fixed beginning' (116).

The Radiation of Ecological Effects

Just as the meaning of the past cannot be made firm, I argue that the effects of the past are also uncertain and similarly defy conclusivity. This is one of the significant points that I identity in the third novel to be discussed, Chloe Hooper's *A Child's Book of True Crime*, where the past and its presence, in contrast to *Cleave*'s representation, can never be put to rest. Before I focus on Hooper's novel, however, I want to discuss several models for conceiving effects—which need to be considered in terms of the past and how its 'bad' things are positioned—that oppose the final and discrete, and argue against a view of linear cause and effect to propose a reconfiguring non-indigenous unsettlement in reference to the past. I particularly want to explore the metaphor of radiation which, in

light of Deleuze's reference to radioactive harm, is a powerful poetic for representing a disordered and uncontainable image of events and their effects, stemming from the belief that there is no one originary or single causal moment for transformation in ecological living.

Howard Zinn demonstrates the consequences of linear logic that would see past occurrences as over and done with. He elaborates on this with reference to the social, cultural and environmental damage that is justified in the western world (his focus is on the United States of America) as 'a necessary price to pay for progress' (9) and rhetorically left at a safe and comfortable distance from the present moment. The assumption in such discourse is that effects are ended by the will to move on, and responsibility curtailed by the suitable remembering—equal to forgetting—figured in a balance of 'moral proportion' (9). Expelled from any relevance to the present other than in its chronological relation to the future, such discomforting events are placed, in a Deleuzian image, beneath 'a mass of other', more palatable, 'facts' and abandoned just 'as radioactive wastes are buried in containers in the earth' (Zinn 9). Like Deleuze, Zinn's employment of radioactivity for the dangerous but obscured results of selective narrative and the resistance to excavating discursive strata, evokes the temporal structure of radiation for effects that do not adhere to chronological constructions. His metaphor, I contend, further demonstrates the operations of use-value that demarcate waste from the productive in a dominant cultural paradigm.

As the counterpart to the commodity that operates and has value in a system of exchange, waste speaks of the residue—or what cannot be contained in official narratives—that which remains when value is extracted by those empowered to do so. In Zinn's case in hand, the 'necessary' atrocities which are seen to attribute value to the future— 'Hiroshima and Vietnam to save Western civilization; Kronstadt and Hungary, to save socialism; nuclear proliferation, to save us all' (9)—consign the uncontainable to a deceptively dormant and extracted state. 'Wasted' materials, lying about or hidden below the landscape, suit a narrative of linear time and a discrete story of cause and effect. However, as McClintock writes concerning dirt (a materially present and visible product), and Barbara Adam argues of radiation (materially present but visibly absent), waste constantly challenges both moral and economic values, asserted as effective 'memory traces' (McClintock 154) of what the rational principles of the market economy and traditional formulations of time exclude. Outside the narratives Zinn makes reference to—saving the world, saving ideology—is the fall-out that oversteps these chronologies as it seeps through and has effects on the surface of things.

Adam asserts that radiation 'poses problems for traditional ways of knowing and relating to the world' (138). She considers the west's reliance on visibility in recognising the real as a need for material 'evidence' that is linked to classical science and its reliance on regularity, order and solidity as truth. Positivism, or a structure of indisputable fact, erases the debatable from conceptual ground, dividing being from non-being and shadow from light. Chronological time, cause and effect, proportionality, the isolation of process and its breakdown into 'component parts and functions' (140), are identified by Adam as

dominant ways of seeing in western culture informed by a positivist tradition. The mechanisation or quantification of social and natural spheres—themselves divided and rendered discrete—abstract subject and object from their embodied, spatial contexts where observation is centrally valued for its perception of truth. Adam describes the positioning of self and other in this system of knowledge, wherein visual apprehension and the image of a detached, neutral and disembodied observer equalises space while detemporalising time.

Such a gaze 'views the world at a distance, fixes it with its stare and separates observer from observed in an absolute way' (142). Here, the extraction of information is privileged, as the viewer/spectator is positioned outside a horizontal plane/frame of reference (for there is only one ground of the real in this logic), 'transforming [him] from [a] temporal participant…at the centre of things to [an] externally constituted observer…of a universally valid spatio-temporal reality' (142). Importantly, Adam writes, such 'observers cast no shadow' (142), suggesting the perceived inviolability of this order to unsettled presences and ambiguous ways of seeing. This is Astley's world laid open, where 'contexts, bodies and sensualities are lost to irrelevance' (Adam 142). What Adam emphasises in this epistemic regime, however, is its refusal of relation in preference to exchange, linking but not initiating beyond 'give—and—take' (142). With the parts in a whole separated and broken down, and the observant self shielded from contact by the 'window' (142) through which it views, the workings of linear thought dismiss 'complexity…disorder…and creativity from the analysis' (141).

Adam looks at nuclear energy and its 'mistaken' release as radioactive presence to argue for the insufficiency of classic scientific thought in conceptualising what radiation signifies. Radiation eludes visual capture, and, vitally, cannot be measured for its effects in an ordered, equalised quantification of damage. Exemplifying this with the Chernobyl nuclear explosion, she traces the instability of temporality that nuclear disaster reveals, highlighting an event as uncontainable in traditional understandings of time and space. The 'mutual implication' (148) of past/present/future, rather than their distinct separation, is evident in radioactivity which is both irreversible *and* elastic. Hidden from view and out of linear time, its effects are nonetheless there. Radiation 'disperses systematically, permeating the material and living world invisibly, and it materializes as symptom in un/predictable temporal and spatial positions' (150).

The directive that time should be disconnected from place, as de-contextualised observation would claim, is challenged by the implicit relevance of unique place, time and effect in the aftermath of Chernobyl. Adam relates the dispersal of radiation from its nuclear centre as inequitable and unpredictable. Variations in intensity and the speed of the radiation's 'arrival' in areas across Europe—'radiation "hot spots"', for instance— 'means that there are differences not just between farms but even between single fields and areas within [these]' (149). Further, the global media that reported on this invisible and, for many parts of the world, abstract event participated in its recognisably material constitution. Beyond the local level of lived experience, those 'further afield', Adam explains, 'live with the words and their effects: agriculture destroyed, animals

slaughtered…livelihoods threatened'; '[d]epending on country and location within, the effects are interpreted differently and tied to widely varying policies and dictates' (146).

Consequently inter-implicating the temporal and spatial, Adam argues that there can be no position outside such disaster from which to contemplate an event securely 'from some no-time, no-where, no-body position of historical and scientific objectivity' (149)—a necessary revision for a globalising world. Further, the permeation of the body by radiation and its activation in living cells disregards a demarcation between taxonomic elements and, as it acts and impacts upon the material, radiation makes itself evident eventually and at dis-junctured times. There is no one discernible point of origin or contact that can be identified by all in an ecology: the half-life of radioactivity, and its ability to produce death 'in degrees' (144) rather than in one cataclysmic swoop, reveals diverse 'life-cycles of decay' running 'from nano-seconds to millennia' (138) that distend a linked chain of causation. As the effects of radiation are unquantifiable they confront the sovereignty, or containment of the self—as well as species, nation, ecology—as it is understood in modernity, preventing an 'unambiguously clear answer to the question 'where and when am I?' (146).

The dispersal of radiation throughout the bodies of all life forms—entering waterways and seeping into the ground, or hanging in the air to come down as nuclear rain—evidences the relations between materially visible and invisible elements (thus traditionally considered immaterial, or unreal). This significantly confronts the discourse of returning the Earth to a 'pristine' state. The notion of reversibility mobilised in

environmental discourse becomes illusory since the touch between the body/environment and radiation cannot be turned back, even while its effects are mutable. I see radiation poetically at work within a relational ecology. Indeed, just as all kinds of technologies and their products effecting beyond their intended uses demonstrate (global warming and chemical emissions, for example), the 'pure' categories of nature and science are undercut where what is understood as 'nature' takes on the effects of technology, and technologies' effects continually reconfigure the environment.

What Adam represents in her metaphor is that the context and temporality always informing an event with 'complexity and implication' (147) cannot not be reduced to totalities or dualisms. How an event emerges—its construction by discourse, its duration and effects, and the differing responses which meet a 'crisis', locally, nationally and globally—is never contained by the identification of 'initial conditions' (151), or one measurable, track-able point of beginning. Whenever containment is mobilised, be it rhetorically or physically (a delimitation of effect, for example), there will always be a remainder that falls outside. Moreover, this remainder is far from inert, and as radioactivity aptly demonstrates, what is 'wasted' as either the undesired products of products, or as matter out-of-place—radiation-effected land, now 'useless' for cultivation or habitation—is relational to the self.

Adam's emphasis on the effects of radiation as the by-products of an unstable event—its discursive construction and un-unified source—invokes Probyn's articulation of surface relations as a tensing of elements, where an even network of joins and connections (a

harmonious image) is disavowed, but nevertheless relation occurs. Direct *affect* (something 'done' to another) then, is not privileged as a mode of implication or relation. Adam's are incommensurable and irreducible effects, occasioned in the un-orderable and also inequitable movement of materials which do not belong together in a chain of cause and effect, before and after.

Radiation avoids both division and assimilation, disturbing the quantification of danger or risk—its predictability, measurability and know-ability. When contained force and affect are demonstrably inappropriate ways of conceiving damage, 'either-or assumptions' are unsettled as 'nature and culture, safety and non-safety, contamination and non-contamination, knowledge and ignorance shade into each other' (Adam 153-154). The subject and the event, temporal and contextual, relate in a contingency of 'attachment and detachment', where the desire to put something outside brings it into proximity in a 'process of assemblage' (Driscoll 79). Effects continue to matter; radiation moves outward from the already-unstable event, and there are no means of leaving it behind. This, I argue, is what so unsettles a society desiring to clean up and order its past.

Morris refers to the 'disturbing possibility' ('Panorama' 177) of matter out-of-place, time out-of-sync, that appears to haunt a culture invested in chronological grounds. In her view, notions of the past returning to the present—'incursions from some "Other" zone in space'—are seen as unhealthy potentialities, revealing 'a Darwinian…anxiety about a deep interlocking of heredity and "inheritance": the taint of "bad blood" and bad deeds reappear[ing]…to forecast the death of the future' (177). By implication, ordered time is

healthy time: without returns, repeats and a clear survey of what lies ahead. The unhealthy, or the unclean, invokes the 'miasmic marshlands' (Taussig 19) in which the ground cannot be solidified nor stabilised and where memory-traces, as the immaterial, unsettle the place of the visible and assured. In miasma, Michael Taussig tells us, a 'fermenting mix of composting life we choose to call corruption' (9) transgresses a line between the real and unreal, life and death, and I take Taussig's view of the ghostly traces and the 'mess' of waste that, active in the present, constitute ecological effects.

Meaning, in its Greek 'musty origin[s]', 'a contagious and dangerous pollution...and more recently...an infectious or noxious emanation' (10), the miasmatic is dystopic and phantasmic, and but also messianic in its associations with life *after* death, and the power of preservation. Like the word 'sacred' which simultaneously inhabits apparently conflicting meanings, miasma is both 'holy and accursed' (10). The revelation of 'bog bodies' from marshland exemplifies for Taussig the tensions inherent in this double implication. Described as a 'two thousand year old slice of past-time leap-frog[g]ing into the present', the bog body evokes telescoped time, 'a dreamy other-worldly feeling...complete with its messianic standstill' (14). Out of joint with the present, it is both archaic and sacred. At the same time as the bog body is drawn up into the light its transient qualities are evidenced: flesh, bones and 'an always there of immanent decay' (14).

What is considered to be polluting about the marsh, however, are the effects of death in life as time becomes something no longer suspended. That is, the ethereal qualities

bestowed upon what is located deep in the ground—'saturated with the bodies of saints and martyrs' (14)—are somehow indicative of a past made pure and distinct from the present except as prophetic anachronism (a sign of the fall, or human fallibility, for instance) challenged by miasmic release: 'all that rot the bog burbles on with' (15). Taussig's poetic invocation of this unsettled brew brings the bog body into relation with the ground in which it is found, giving rise to its proximity with 'people walking or mowing the grass, doing something ordinary' (14). These bodies refuse a frozen configuration that would make them adrift and dangerously powerful, isolated in a modern world of crumbling traditions. Seen as a relic invested with what Anthony Giddens calls 'formulaic truth' ('Post-Traditional Society' 103)—heirarchised knowledge, truth accessible and invested in structures of wisdom or privileged expertise—the past event is divested of its discursive strata and is seen as having 'no effective connection [to] the area in which it exists'. It is 'produced [solely] as a visible icon for observation by whosoever happens to wish to visit…' (103).

However, to place the miasmic trace in touch with the self means to put it into question, to ask for discursive scrutiny and in this process, implicate the self in a relation of effect. There is thus no unbroken dialogue between the self and object—a meta-historical connection that would allow the relic or fragment to take up a place in a chain of time, speaking to the future and communicating its truth. Instead, on the surface, as bodies, in whatever state, encounter each other, an unsettled ground such as the marsh—'hover[ing] ambiguously between the solid and the liquid' (Carter, 'Turning the Tables' 30)—models

the shape of discontinuous dialogues, snatches of voice and uncontainable, un-chainable presences.

Buse and Stott argue that ghosts are familiarly invoked in contemporary western culture when the boundary between the real or unreal, authentic or inauthentic is disturbed—consigned, as they write, 'to the task of representing whatever is not to be believed' ('Future for Haunting' 3). The 'place' of ghostliness is perpetually out of the present, associated in post-Enlightenment logo-centrism with irrationality, the uncertain and anathematic anachrony. Ghosts signify the pre-scientific, or the messianic powers of the pre-modern past, and challenge the interior self of modernity which is equated with reason and truth. As I have argued, the demand for solid and contained knowledge in the tradition of post-enlightenment thought favours the visual and material as evidence of presence, and therefore in turn, of being. For the 'true' and 'authentic' to be settled in this paradigm, the 'shadowy others' (Buse and Stott, 'Future for Haunting' 3) of reason's light must be expelled, consigned to binary and dichotomous logic.

The precedence of chronological time, which conceives of a progressive unfolding of presents as the future is moved towards, invests ontological security in the maintenance of clean divisions between life and death, presence and absence. Linearities are protected from contamination—and thus value-given—by unsettled relations or reversions and repetitions in time just as the ground is cleared of the 'debris of the past' (Giddens, 'Post-Traditional Society' 73). Derrida's substitution of 'hauntology' (Derrida, *Specters* 10) for ontology is an attempt to work against both origin and presence as a desired precondition

for the certain and real. In his understanding, haunting is not a question of belief or disbelief in ghosts: it is a conception of time that—as radiation invokes—is temporal and indeed 'untimely' (4). Hauntology is offered as a challenge to ontological foundations and a historiography that solidifies the past. '[H]aunting is historical, to be sure,' Derrida writes, 'but it is not dated, it is never docilely given a date in the chain of presents, day after day…' (*Specters* 4).

It is in an image of a past that returns to the present that Derrida locates his understanding of the untimely: a configuration of temporality suggested by Freud's theory of repression and the unconscious in which the 'repressed may be gone, but it also comes back' (Stott and Buse 8). Banished from the conscious self like the ghost from the rational mind, the repressed object in Freudian psychoanalysis is similarly uncontainable. There is no single gesture of repression that keeps the object permanently at bay: a return is inevitable, and moreover, 'indispensable' (Stott and Buse, 'Future for Haunting' 8). In Stott and Buse's interpretation of Freud, the inter-implication of past/present/future in his theory of repression both facilitates repression and ensures a re-emergence of the object, transformed and effective as ontological anxiety.

The intention of Freudian psychoanalysis, however, to reveal and heal the repressed memory or event distinguishes itself from Derrida's haunting which eludes settlement, introjection and the notion of restoration. With the repressive subject as guard to the 'crypt' that is the 'sealed-off psychic space…in the ego' (Parkin-Gounelas 137), and protective of its deeply buried objects—what cannot be expelled; inheritance; the

'illegitimate or taboo past' (136)—Ruth Parkin-Gounelas sees the ghost as an intrusive 'other', a figure of inheritance/the past 'of which the self as cemetery guard is not the proprietor' (137). Whereas in Freudian psychoanalysis the encrypted object is brought to light, with the secret expunged and time restored, the ghost figured here refuses its own absence.

Thus, as non-present presences, Derrida's spectres move on the surface, bringing into relation the material and immaterial, the real and the unreal as simultaneously operative and effective states. Derrida critiques presence as 'the heart of Western onto-theology' (Montag 70) and through his concept of *différance* opposes the idea of an already fully present object of knowledge. In this, 'the production of meaning is never simply [a] re-presentation' of this presence, but rather it is a 'movement of difference and deferral in which every origin is constituted retroactively…an origin never present except belatedly' (Montag 70). Derrida's proposition of a deconstructionist 'grammatology' as a way of configuring language and meaning is traced in his hauntology whereby the binding of signification to an originary place of its emergence and the isolation of historical foundations proffer the same delimiting project of containment and binary opposition.

Derrida considers the objectification of the past in historical practice—like Adam's window of observation and linear distance—to avoid spectrality, locking the ghost into foundational ground where its 'inauthentic' and 'false' condition is determined. Yet the structure of hauntology disallows dichotomies: not present or absent in ontological terms, the spectre relates to both past and present, but inhabits neither. Important in this

elaboration is the 'nature' of the ghost which Derrida conceives as paradoxically perfoming initiation and repetition. That is, there is an originating time of the ghost—when it first appears in the present—even while it is out of time, anachronistic and a re-representation of itself in the present. '[I]t's first coming is already a return', Montag explains. 'It is…irreducible to a present or presence which might become a past or absence: its very non-contemporaneity determines the possibility of its persistence' (70-71). Again, evidencing the ghost of grammatology in Derrida's theory of spectrality, the smooth division and independence of presence and absence, being and non-being is destabilised as, in his concept of the trace, each term 'can be shown to possess an element…of the term that it is meant to oppose' (Buse and Stott, 'Future for Haunting' 10). '[E]verything…comes back to haunt everything,' Derrida explains, 'everything is in everything' (*Specters* 146).

The trace, as Derrida describes it, is 'that which does not let itself be summed up in the simplicity of a present' (*Grammatology* 66): it is not a product of a whole, or an embodied non-trace, but is 'the repository "of a meaning that was never present"' (Montag 74). Similarly, the trace is neither material nor immaterial, but suggests an immaterial (or invisible) materiality, an exterior interiority, or, to return to Probyn, the space of the outside. The trace admits the effects of a past whose origin is never firm, and whose events can never be known or held in total. What falls away from the gesture of ontological containment is thus the trace that is both a first time and a return. Therefore, the 'end of history' as a deconstructionist view of the postmodern market economy's endless series of presents—the collapse of materialism and humanism in favour of

scepticism and relativism—is revised by Derrida when he defends in the figure of the ghost the impossibility of separating or collapsing either time or space.

Derrida points out that the return of the spectre is both temporal and spatial, and as Probyn discerns in her articulation of nostalgic desire, the memory of an event and the desire for its return (re)initiates unsettled relations of proximity and distance between the object and the self. Indeed, the spectre of Marxism itself—pronounced 'dead' by much contemporary critical theory—returns in Derrida's text to confront apocalyptic readings of capitalism's ceaseless drive—inclusive of globalised technologies—towards its 'inevitable end' (Astley 288). Such narrative eschatologies invoke the last and the final: the danger in which is a retreat of responsibility and the disavowal of relation and implication, where—as Virilio writes—the 'acceleration of the reality of time causes revulsion at the being-here-present' (xiii): 'history has just crashed into the wall' (xii). Stephen Turner makes a similar comment when he declares that 'the Western notion of history is perhaps the deepest form of forgetting, a self-constructing form of repression' (35). A perpetual present is invoked here, disconnecting and locking away in denial what would threaten a rapid unfolding of time. The ghost can be seen to question the finality of this forgetting.

Freud's understanding of repression and the return is articulated in his notion of the uncanny, generally interpreted 'as a dominant constituent of modern nostalgia, with a corresponding spatiality that touches all aspects of social life' (Vidler x). In Freudian terms, the uncanny can be expressed as the familiar present becoming unfamiliar as the

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past repeats and erupts 'at unexpected and unwanted moments' (Vidler 5). Connected to the repressed, 'primal scene' of trauma—an originary moment of disconnection or crisis in the subject—the uncanny presents the self-in-the-world as unhomed, shocked and disturbed by the sudden perception of this world defamiliarised and derealised. The attribution of uncanny experience to modernity—a 'modern disease' (5), according to Vidler—interprets the modern in a frame of subjective disorder and automation, unsettling the certainties of history, nature and place through which the self was previously conceived.

The rejection of premodern traditions in modernity's race to disinter and evacuate 'old bones', according to this theory, involves the repression of such things as 'animism, magic [and] totemism' which in a rational, scientific narrative were 'no longer believed in as real' (Vidler 79). 'Examples of such a form of the uncanny,' Vidler elaborates, 'would be the return of the infantile belief in the omnipotence of thoughts...or the seeming return of magical properties to things long divested of their magical significance' (79). With the pre-modern associated with the secure and the rooted, offering what the post-traditional society has fragmented, the uncanny in these terms elaborates what is considered to be lost in modernity: in the case of psychoanalysis, the unity between the unconscious and conscious self. Further, Freudian psychoanalysis considers the return of repressed infantile complexes, such as the fear of castration and the fantasy or nostalgia for the womb, as producing the uncanny. Whereas the former (the premodern re-arising in the post-traditional) induces a crisis in the ontologically real, this latter confronts 'the status of psychical reality' (Vidler 79).

Unhomeliness, or the split subject unable to adhere to the ground, can thus be related to the Freudian uncanny in its yearning for tradition in a modernised world—the pursuit of beginnings and a nostalgia for the past that seeks out the traumatic point of initiatory estrangement. The role of technology and automation within this then, simulating and substituting the real, is to haunt as it mimics phenomenological depth and presence, and this is important in light of Astley's charge against a technology-driven, 'crisis'-laden world. Technology is seen to estrange the subject from its bodily and locational referents, and is implicated in the loss of, or disregard for, tradition and a spiritually lacking or historically and emotionally 'shallow' culture/nation. Seen as enforcing a chain of presents, forward-looking and reducing the past to waste, the image of an 'evacuate[d] earth' with humans reduced to 'useless, dying bodies' (Luckhurst 172) in a technological culture, invokes a relic-laden ground, voided of power and abstracted from its environmental context.

Yet as Freud himself suggests, the traditional and the modern cannot be separated in this way, with the empirical associations of modernity and the transcendentalism of the totemic interacting in the return of the repressed. His aim to assimilate, heal and thereby settle the disturbances of this entwining in the ego, still ascribes aberrance to unsettlement and psychic disorder. However, in Freud's evocation of the unhomely, Derrida's hauntology can be readily situated. In what Derrida calls the 'visor effect' (*Specters* 7), the ghost, 'hovering between', defies holding and knowing, proffering instead an 'insistent gaze [that] cannot be returned, and cannot be placed in the reversible

circuit of subject and object' (Luckhurst 172). In Roger Luckhurst's words, a 'terrifying openness [thus] renders the [self's] relation to [this] other' (172). Consequently, in an alternate reading of modernity, technology inhabits the place of the spectre that destabilises time and distance—an ether-operative equivalent of the miasmic marsh. Bringing into dynamic relation, rather than separation and distinction—the human and the technological conceived as 'co-extensive, co-dependent and mutually defining' (Bukatman qtd. in Luckhurst 171)—the techno-spectre unsettles the opposition between human and non-human, and attributes environmental effects to the subject's constitution.

In the same way as Goodall identifies the implications of modernity in what is isolated and nostalgically desired as 'tradition' in Australian rural communities, Steven Connor points to the reliance on materially-based empirical methodologies—'the rhetoric and practice of unveiling or revelation' (Connor 204)—in spiritualist practices that determine to transcend the material world. Carter similarly considers nineteenth-century spiritualism in these terms, whereby an interest in séances and other forms of communication with the dead gave 'participants a sensation of getting in contact with what was missing from their lives' (Carter, 'Turning the Tables' 25), in a time of high empiricism—what Carter suggests was the unconscious. This desire to 'connect' to the immaterial, and its taxonomic identity as primitive, sub-rational, and other, demanded in its practice evidence of presence. That is, contact was invariably 'inquisitorial' (25); spirits were called upon to materialise, and 'like natives, were endlessly being asked their names, as if their existence were in doubt' (25). 'Like circus performers, conjured to occupy the

debatable land between being and non-being, they needed to mimic the spiritualists' melodramatic imaginary if they were to ring true' (25).

Haunting demonstrates not just the uncontainable character of time, but also the impossibility of ever concretising, or making certain, the categories and tools of any analysis of the past. All approaches to knowledge are haunted. For Derrida, the spectre of Marx, who so emphasised materiality and the real, haunts deconstruction which defies its own attempt at totalising an 'interminable self-critique' (Derrida, *Specters* 89) of deconstructability. Indeed, as Jameson points out, Marxism is itself haunted by the intractability of commodification and the projection of use-value onto objects in past societies read with a nostalgic eye to pre-market 'simplicity' (Jameson 55). Equally, '[e]nlightened notions of modernity…are haunted…by the return of premodern, animistic or magical modes of thought' (Britzolakis 72). As any gesture of containment leaves a remainder, and for deconstruction in Derrida's terms this remainder refuses to deny singular, historical experience, and the 'undeconstructibility of a certain idea of justice (disassociated from law)' (*Specters* 90). 'The remainder left when one subtracts almost everything from everything', Montag explains, 'is what Derrida "will never be ready to renounce"' (Montag 72).

This remainder is significant and relates to Derrida's argument, raised earlier in Chapter Two, that inheritance, or what is seen to be legacies from (in a contemporary Australian context) 'bad' pasts, cannot be gathered together and reconciled with a view to its transcendence. As these examples of radiating effects have shown, the presence of the

past in the present refuses containment and totality. Effects are ecologically dispersed in un-orderable temporalities and spatialities. They should be considered as part of ecological relations necessitating negotiation *and* surprise for, as Luckhurst indicates, an openness of meaning in relation, or the unprogramability of effects, characterises the arrival of the spectre. Luckhurst also contends that the spectre does not just initiate and repeat the past in the present, but exists as an unforseen arrival 'from the future' (Luckhurst 173). This is the spectre 'yet to come', whose appearance in future time 'cannot be expected or pre-programmed', but represents only, in present awareness, 'the flicker of the event' (173). Like the re/emergence of effects, an anticipation of the future is unable to control, grasp or time the ghost's presencing. Both radiation and the ghost have no proper (that is, chronological) temporality.

Technology's implication in both 'announcing' the death of Marx and heralding an interminable market-economy—creating or programming the 'real' as a simulacrum experience—connects it to the model of the spectre in this regard. I want to conclude this chapter by considering how this model of spectral effects can be harnessed to an understanding of technology that defies discursive representations of a chaotic world overlain with impassive, unfeeling and unreal 'wires' of connection. As a non-present presence, technology is ghostly and, within this, refuses a chronological unfolding, the desire to produce knowledge 'by steps' (Carter, 'Footings' 68). In Carter's writing on narratives of place in the early Australian colony he counters an autochthonous vision of events through the implications of technology. News coming in from different places at different times, 'knotting...looping, framing' (68) and out of time with a linearity of

cause and effect was the characteristic of the new colony's connection to the rest of the world. The radiation of an event through different spaces and temporalities elasticises a narrative line wherein 'what mattered was less the event than its report, less what happened than what it portended...reports were notorious for echoing, setting up reverberations no-one could control' (69).

The implications of 'misreporting' (Carter, 'Footings' 69), disjointed accounts and the polyvocality with which an event—and the officially disremembered 'non-event' (72)—transforms or becomes in narrative, invest the media of report and communication with the dynamic movements of rumour. In this, 'mobile patterns and mechanisms of exchange'—inclusive damage and violence—bring places 'into being' (74), rather than linear events, unmixed and out of touch with each other. Derrida's own critique of unmixed and self-sufficient phenomena returns to technology in the image of this knotting and entwining. Buse and Stott's summation of this point, that 'all committed attempts to lead us '"towards an impossible exhibition of a site and an event" can only ever stumble into iterative movements that the event has produced' (11), invokes technology's deferral from the source of the real, a distancing that could seem ungrounded, out of touch and 'antenna eye[d]' (Carter, 'Turning the Tables' 30). Yet Carter's appeal to take all surroundings into account as the lie of the land—'a spatio-temporal calculus capable of registering what happens as opposed to a chronology of events' ('Footings' 74)—necessitates bringing technology into complex relation with an environment. To return to Ball's understanding of destining, technology hides even as it reveals, and through this interplay touch is invoked: a touch not about reciprocity (in

phenomenology's model of touching/touched) nor irrevocable transformations (the 'end' of being-as-presence, for example), but as something in which distance cohabits with proximity.

Luckhurst conveys this ambiguity of technological touch when he invokes both contact and 'meddling' as types of relation. Where 'meddling' suggests the unsettling effects of proximity, it also refutes conclusion and overrules sharp edges. There can be no 'notion of a "proper" destination' then (Luckhurst 178) in this configuration of ecological place: 'it is precisely…*touch* that meddles with [the] apparent opposition of the "who" of the ghost and the "what" of the simulacra' (181). Thus, rather than an image of smooth networks domesticating time, restructuring the social and disabling the autonomy of the self to an ontological catastrophe, technology can be seen as 'always, already…caught up in tele-effects', destabilising the temporality of the 'first' or 'last' (180). That is, technology offers 'another relation to Being' and not its 'radical rupture' (180). Configured on the outside, technology refuses interiority—'"the so-called monologue" of Being dialling itself'—'"the other is hooked up somewhere on the telephone"' (181). It is this touch drawing together closeness and distance, revelation and closure, in dynamic ways that spectralises the techno-system, and as a 'secure' destination for the self is disturbed, the possibility of gaining 'openness to the other, and to the event,' becomes a 'more difficult and more urgent'—and never completed—task (182).

With this dynamic relation in mind, I contend that 'wasted' technologies, rendered anachronistic by progressive time, maintain an always reconstituted place in a complex

ecology, with all 'its pollution and its exhilaration' (Gibson, *South* 225). Non-present presence is ecologically active, and within an environment can never be cleanly separated from what realises presence materially. A world wrapped in wires such as *Drylands* depicts, poetically fractured, does not mean a conclusive end or an infernal purgatory. What it realises is a living condition always negotiated and therefore unsettled, and it is from this position that I want to now consider *A Child's Book of True Crime* to argue for a poetics that takes account of, instead of rejecting, these mutable relations between time and its traces. Hooper's book demonstrates the conventions of colonial Gothic (McCann) as described through an uncanny paradigm. While this frame offers much for articulating a contemporary and historical situation in Australia of forgetting while secretly consuming forbidden and 'bad' events, I argue that the text itself counteracts this reading, and provides for an alternative insight into what an uncanny or unhomely occurrence can represent on the surface of an unsettled nation.

Chapter 6

The Unhomely and Chloe Hooper's *A Child's Book of True Crime*

In this chapter I read Chloe Hooper's novel, the most recent of the three texts discussed, as a depiction of 'badlands': an expression used by Gibson to elaborate non-indigenous dis-ease in contemporary Australia. Drawn from a North American colonial context which referred to its 'wasted' tracts of land in these terms, 'badlands' are taken to historically reference 'a dreadful sense of insufficiency felt by Europeans forging into the more "savage" parts of the "new" world' (Gibson, *Seven Versions* 13). What could not be conquered and domesticated either economically or ideologically by colonial industry stood for the inability of settlers to make their new country into an ontologically secure shape of home. In Gibson's revision of this term, he analyses the significance of 'bad' Australian landscapes—tracts of country that become popularly synonymous with violence, unpredictability, excess and fear. Badlands are rejected spaces, areas 'where people are warned not to go' (13), and communally charged in story and imagination with a mythic status of deviancy and horror.

Like rubbish dumps on the outskirts of the 'good and lawful' (13), badlands provide a place in which wrong-ness can be contained outside, and out of touch with, the civil and the tamed, demonstrating to a populace that 'savagery can be encysted even if it cannot be eliminated' (15). Thus, these are lands as much cultural as 'natural', deployed in narrative to constitute a malignancy on the national body, always threatening to spread, but still affirming by contrast the dominant remainder of the country as settled and controlled. A (post)colonial symptom, badlands relay place unassured, the bounds of

safety punctured and revoked. They are a blight on the national landscape, spaces into which the anxieties always circling around unhomeliness find ground. This is the premise to which understandings of non-indigenous unsettlement in Australia so often return: a view of spatial estrangement expressed in these 'no-go zone[s]' (15), the fear of difference and a horror of the unclean, and the desire for neat ends, resolution and forgetting 'the blots that sully your past' (23). For badlands, Gibson argues, suggest more than an inability to coalesce or take charge of the national space; they are inherently historical and yet continually reproductive, ghosting the past in the present through a repetition of 'bad'.

It is colonialism—'whatever [it] was and is' (Gibson, *Seven Versions* 2)—that makes the land unsettled and unsettling, and it is the colonisation of Australia that has created, as Gibson puts it, 'an immense, historical crime-scene...[with] old passions and violent secrets...lying around in a million clues and traces' (1-2). It takes a relatively small imaginative jump from the modern-day crime-scene cordoned-off by police and trawled over for evidence, to envision a non-indigenous populace isolating and containing—for the purpose of overcoming—its badlands, that present their own case for dispossession, exclusion, terror and murder. A colonial 'crime-scene' is thus superimposed with the particular stretches of Australia where '[t]ales of murder and itinerancy' (14) find natural reflection in a landscape of extreme weather and isolated townships. Yet, as Gibson demonstrates, a discursive excess attached to crimes and 'bad' events, and their continual re-imagination and haunting effect in cultural narratives, always eludes these cordoned-off areas.

Unable to be left in the past, crimes—however fragmented, or elusive in 'evidence'—are perpetually effective. Gibson maps out a ground that, for those 'crossing and recrossing' (2) a badland space, physically or within the mind, is destabilised by the proximity of pasts that overrule safe containment. Here, the land, the past, and the 'horrors' of difference are brought into relation with the self: a relation that, in Jameson's terms, 'makes the present waver' (Jameson 38). Chloe Hooper's *A Child's Book of True Crime* presents a similar ground in which 'old' and 'new' crimes coexist and disturb. Gibson's thesis that Australia's badlands provide a landscape into which the 'dark' side of human nature can be pushed, finds echoes in Hooper's novel as small-town Tasmania—'Imagine feeling like you're living on the very end of the earth, and also knowing that you are' (Hooper 64)—provides a charged context for 'bad things' and haunting crimes. Kate Byrne's fascination with a twelve year-old murder/suicide, officially read as a narrative of marital vengeance is, in part, narrated through and intensified by the traces of colonial violence that litter the landscape.

It seems that the effectiveness of terrible pasts in the Tasmanian setting cannot be divorced from contemporary crimes. This does not represent a linear inheritance, but an echoic relation of the kind that refuses containment; not a condemnation to repeat murder and violence—a cause and effect narrative and a discrete origin for trauma—but a reminder that the 'bad', and the past, can never be put aside or quarantined. Where Gemmell activates the mythic qualities of Tasmania for her textual purpose, Hooper plays upon both a broad tradition of the Gothic qualities in Australian landscapes and the

particularity of this island state as an icon of non-indigenous damage and perversion. The repository role of Tasmania in discursive imagination—or what Gibson would call its badland qualities—is expressed by Martin Flanagan when he relates his first visit to the mainland. He discovers that, in popular opinion, '[w]e'—meaning non-indigenous Tasmanians—'were the ones who had done the killing, we had shot out the blacks' (21). These are attitudes that indicate the geographical isolation of uncomfortable pasts in this location, attributing and locking away responsibility far from the mainland (and nationally dominant) self.

For Flanagan, the eradication of Tasmanian Aborigines and the culture of convictism—Port Arthur especially—with its peripheral stories of inbreeding, sexual disorder and cannibalism (for instance, the convict Alexander Pearce who killed and ate fellow escapees [Collins 13]) marked out his home as disquietingly shadowed, overhung with the 'strangely deafening silence' (Flanagan 40) of untenable events: that which is shameful and shut-out. Unlike Gemmell, who represents indigenous absence as silence in this landscape, the silence Flanagan notes is occasioned by discomforting presences, the overhanging narratives through which Tasmania is mythically known. In 'badlands logic' (Gibson, *Seven Versions* 38), this is Tasmania as a 'lair for evil' (13), a place in which geographic and historical conditions seem to affirm a landscape that 'produce[s] and nurture[s]' (38) violence, danger and extreme behaviours.

Martin Bryant's much cited explanation for his choice of location after shooting dead thirty-five visitors at Port Arthur in 1996—'A lot of violence happened there…It must be

the most violent place in Australia. It seemed the right place' (Bryant qtd. in 'Out of Control' 36)—performs this narrative, laying down yet another tale of suffering and death upon a spot, now 'itself…cast as a serial killer' (Gibson, *Seven Versions* 30). An originary point makes murderous history, and an apocalyptic site figures the end. However, as Maria Tumarkin argues in accordance with Gibson's theory of badlands, this uniqueness—or 'freakish quality' (Tumarkin 205)—invested in the Tasmanian landscape becomes an act of minimisation equivalent to quarantine whereby a continent-wide story of colonisation and dispossession is circumscribed, making such damage an exception rather than a constituent of widespread, ecological effects (205). The isolation of Tasmania as the foundation of this traumatic narrative is what *A Child's Book of True Crime* confronts, and it is in its gestures towards what Paul Collins calls 'the great Gothic horror stories' (13) of Australia's past that the cultural presence of haunted landscapes is both acknowledged and reconfigured.

The association between Gothic fiction and Freud's uncanny is strong, evident in their twin concerns of the repressed secret and its unhomely effects. In Parkin-Gounelas' description of Gothic conventions, it is place or the home that figures centrally, constructing an 'anatopia'—or uncanny context—instigating from a bounded location an unsettling proximity to a particular mystery or repressed preoccupations. Mysteries 'are nothing but buried histories' (Parkin-Gounelas 132) she insists. In the context of home, inheritance, genealogy and property figure, concepts that can be extracted from the realm of the private house to one of public concern and the 'homeland' of nation. Freud's own application of unhomeliness to the post World War 1 'house of western civilization'

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(Vidler 7), disturbed and unsettled by the fracturing of territorial security implicit in notions of a unified society and culture, has implications for an uncanny Australia, which, in a Gothic tradition of land and belonging, is made anxious and destabilised when the familiar becomes strange. The settler-colony becomes a site of encounter, repression and reappearance.

Andrew McCann elucidates a 'colonial Gothic' (1) in these terms of repression, where what is sublimated forms 'a locus of horror' (1) within which the tensions of revelation and closure operate. Here, '[w]hat appear[s] to be a stable, law-bound order turns out to be founded on crimes that must be expiated', as 'the "repressed" of colonization: collective guilt, the memory of violence and dispossession, and the struggle for mastery' (1) return. It is the 'dangerous proximity' (2) of a mystery or crime that thus renders the colonial experience Gothic, a relation of denial and constant awareness, or what Gibson refers to as a '[d]isturbance in the soul' ('Quiet Suspicion' 44) for the settler subject.

Endpoint, the apparently peaceful coastal town where Hooper sets her novel, displays this forgetting and its unsettling results, as an old crime is revived and, moreover, commodified by the out-of-towner, Veronica Marne. For the gentrified citizens—the 'noblesse oblige' (Hooper 72)—of the community, enclosed and safe behind their 'forefathers' hedgerows' (72), the publication of *Murder at Black Swan Point*, a true crime novel pursuing the 'facts' behind the murder of Ellie Siddell, is a 'surprise…[and] betray[al]': 'Why couldn't she let the dead rest?' is the general sentiment, or more specifically, 'She's opened up a Pandora's floodgate of worms!' (48). The return of

murder to popular discourse represents a threat to conceptual boundaries and the slow flooding in of disconcertion that can no longer keep the 'bad' away. Echoing their cries immediately succeeding the mysterious crime (did Margot Harvey, whose husband was Ellie's lover, kill the young woman and then suicide?), the town's people bemoan: 'Why this town?... This is a quiet place... This is a good place, we don't even lock our doors' (70).

Descriptions of 'good' and 'bad' circulate in Hooper's text, and the cultural currency of their sharp distinction is repeatedly argued. Ellie is a nice girl, well brought-up; Margot is an 'incredibly kind woman, practical and generous' (70). For those who knew her, she seemed 'incapable of such a brutal crime' (69): a devoted mother and loyal wife, Margot 'had done everything right', performed and perfected 'every good-girl trick' (191). Things from here had simply gone 'bad'. Despite the abhorrence of the crime and its distasteful re-revelation, *Murder at Black Swan Point* sells, 'attractive', we are told, 'because it was classic', a formula of love, seduction and betrayal in which the step from 'nice upper-middle-class girl' (57) to vengeful murderess is a leap across a shocking divide. Given parallel backgrounds, Margot and Ellie each started out on the side of safety.

At school they were told '[n]othing would really go wrong' (67) when they set out in the world. For girls with 'lovely upbringings who didn't understand disaster' (67), the road ahead was already mapped, clear of irregularities. Unlike the 'bad girls' in class who 'stripped off their gym uniforms brazenly' (67), Ellie undressed modestly, making sure to

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conceal the strange 'new body she didn't know what to do with' (67); '[t]he first girls to develop were, naturally, sluts' (68). In her home, '[e]very chair had been exquisitely turned. Each painting was another new town's violet sunset' (68). At boarding school Margot watches the girls who creep out to smoke with boys late at night and wills herself to fall asleep in the assurance that 'she would get everything she deserved' (74). The attribution of performance to these roles is enhanced by the dominant narrative voice which, coming through Kate and her sense of identification with Ellie, conveys both complicity in and critique of this culture of good versus bad, and the cultural construction of what Kate terms 'doomed girls' (204). These are females made vulnerable by their sexuality, 'sacrificial lamb[s]' (168) to the desires of a predatory world, hidden behind smooth surfaces and fantasies of innocence. 'For young women', Kate relates, 'doomed girls are annoying. It's a reminder one should start locking the doors of a car. A photo of a schoolgirl with bangs and a dental brace stands for never walk home alone on an ill-lit street' (132). 'Good' girls monitor security while 'bad' girls tempt their fate.

When innocence is unwarrantedly violated, newspapers choose 'the prettiest photo' (132) to present as an icon of virtue and victim-hood in a 'dark' and dangerous world. If stories of young women gone wrong emerge, they are hastily erased. After the daughter of the 'equivalent of Tasmanian royalty' (53) has an illegitimate pregnancy, then shoots herself against the wall of the family home, the 'Hurnells covered the stained bluestone with pretty pictures', cut from the 'pages from an old *Woman's Weekly*' (53). Juxtaposed images of the *Murder at Black Swan Point* crime-scene—Ellie's child-like room full of stuffed toys, make-up and sports clothes splashed with blood; her body when found in her

pretty single bed, severed at the head—complement this dichotomy (light/dark, surface/depth) within which 'gingerbread house[s], iced lovingly, bordered by candy-boughed trees' (16) secret away sin and corruption.

The motivation to cover over the 'bad' and to sweep the landscape clean of crimes is Hooper's allegorical link between the case of Ellie Siddell (and her symbolic gender role) and the '*Ur*-true-crime-story' of Tasmanian history, where 'in volume after volume the bodies pile up' (97). In naturally beautiful country, picturesque and even picture-perfect—Hobart, we are told, is 'a city that still looked, from the top of Mount Wellington, like a nineteenth-century oil painting' (13)—the reminders of colonial violence—ruins, wilderness, stories—are threaded together by roads and highways whose edges are littered with the animal carcasses of roadkill. 'Behind every loveliness was something harsher', Kate narrates (38); '[p]ray for rain to wash it all away' (64). 'We live here because nasty things don't happen. We live here because people are good. We have homemade honey at the local store, and lovely bed-and-breakfasts' (77-78).

Tasmania's 'game board' of settler names—'Wander...from Cape Grim to the Never Never to Nameless Lake...Suicide Cliff...Purgatory Hill' (72)—are on the tourist map, sweetened by gift shops and produce factories. A painted wheelbarrow sits 'full of miniature lavender' (42) outside the old prison warden's cottage in Endpoint, while at Port Arthur, within the 'old sandstone walls' of the convict women's prison, 'truffles were handmade' (86). Yet, as Kate explains, these smoothing gestures are not new, but historically repeated in a crime-marked landscape. Sympathy Hills and Point Puer

overlook the waters where convict children had washed, having built with their own hands the penitentiary's walls. After the closing down of the penal colony in the 1870s, 'Endpoint's newly righteous settlers painted the convict's unmarked gravestones white' (36) to hide their 'convict stain'; '[a]nd this was the way we reinvented ourselves' (150).

Endpoint's history is therefore characterised by attempts to keep crime in its place, cordoned-off 'with wire and…yellow tape' (236) like the rubble of Point Puer's prison— too dangerous to enter, a threat to safety. The repression of presences and the remaking of surfaces enable a distinction between beauty and horror to be maintained, despite their repeated juxtaposition. Kate considers this as she walks, shaken and traumatised after her car crash—her fan-belt mysteriously cut clean-through—past a site where public hangings once took place, near the sheer cliffs and 'postcard' views (77) of the coastal waters. Holding an apple taken from a bag left trustingly by the side of the road, itself a marker of homeliness and community (honest people would 'leav[e] money in the empty jam jar' [77]), she pictures the condemned convict brought to the gallows, 'jubilant, indeed triumphant, at having been granted an exit from this hell' (85):

> It was hard to believe that my grandparents' grandparents were in the crowd watching the man laugh. My grandparents' generation certainly didn't speak of it: they were still touched by the stain. My parents' generation didn't speak of it because they had not been told. And at school my classmates and I didn't find this history the slightest bit related to us; even if it was, we didn't really care. (85)

Like Ellie who realised at school that 'history only happened in textbooks' (67), Kate traces her own place in a culture of forgetting as around her sounds of threat, and her own thoughts of Veronica's maniacal revenge, move through the air.

The Gothic model of an established order of social relations, underscored and threatened by 'events that must be disavowed or elided' (McCann 1), situates the uncanny in moments of recognition, when what is assumed to be 'normal' is received or revealed to be otherwise. Salman Rushdie's infamous essay on Adelaide, another Australian city seen dressed in smooth reserve, invites comparisons with Kate's perception of Endpoint, and the Tasmanian 'establishment', comfortably situated in a sanitised narrative of decorous history. The 'kind of disguise' (Rushdie 228) he encounters on the face of Adelaide and that prompts a certain 'double vision' (228) in its visitors—a vision, presumably, of light coexisting with dark—infers a code of silence, exclusionary and articulate only to its own. This 'enigma' is the secret side, the 'horror film' quality of a 'sleepy conservative town' busy denying its 'truth' (231) even while 'gradually things...come bubbling up from under that smooth, solid façade' (230). On his hearing about the Ash Wednesday fires, and the suspicions of arson that accompanied this, Rushdie wonders, '[w]hat sort of people are these that burn the landscape? There is strangeness here' (230).

Mark Ellis' similar perception of the city is informed—as was Rushdie's—by its badland reputation: Adelaide as 'the murder capital of the world' (Ellis 13). Nothing 'has terrified me more than the dark, empty suburban streets of Adelaide at night,' he writes, 'so vivid

are my macabre memories of snatched children, buried bodies and disembowelled boys' (13). True crimes, circulated and made mythic by 'small town…gossip and rumour' (13), are like those in the fictional Endpoint, lurking everywhere behind 'twitching net curtains' and a 'pretty, cultured' (13) display. For Rushdie, Adelaide's freakish qualities are the product of rootlessness, a too-smooth place that cannot offer belonging. Apparently grafted onto the land—in contrast to the 'harsh pure desert' he later flies over, a landscape that 'was the reality, was Australia' (Rushdie 231)—the city is both estranged and makes strange, a colonial offshoot uncomfortable with its newness and the indigenous ground it obscures. Following this trail, and picking up again on Gibson's, it is the denial of the 'bad' that incurs its return in other and various murderous forms: a denial unsettling and perpetually precluding the homely—a 'time when people could know themselves *in* their place rather than in spite of it' (Gibson, *Seven Versions* 175) [emphasis in original].

Ellis' specific angle on Adelaide's sinister qualities—'Lock up your sons' (13), is his exhortation—foregrounds the child and the perversion of childhood innocence as a figurehead for the Gothic experience of darkness puncturing light. He invokes an unhomely locality more grotesque for the fact that the nucleus of 'home', the unit of the family, is made irrevocably unsafe, and lists off the missing children and teenagers vanished forever or found dead and mutilated, that mean, for Adelaide parents and their offspring, 'a special, unspoken' (13) anxiety. 'You see…young women's remains were being dug out of the ground', he explains, 'and…young men were going missing, and,

although you never believed it would happen to you, the spectre still hung overhead or hovered in your subconscious' (13).

Here, his discomfort with Adelaide's comfortable façade—washing it all away, so to speak—lies in what he discerns as the community's failure to secure a space for unmolested youth: 'would anyone come running…if they heard you scream?' (13), he wonders, suggesting an instinct for retreat from what is a known 'dark' side. For Ellis, the violation of child-eyes, even in adult memory, is the most disturbing thing of all about Adelaide's character. Since the figure of the child in dominant discourse—and in a western Romantic tradition—represents, as Vidler puts it, an as yet untainted consciousness, or 'the bright surface of the world' (33), the tarnishing of this gaze infers a premature entrance into the world of 'experience' with its secret and horrible things. Ellis' unease with the culture of hidden excess and perversion that he perceives can therefore be read through the unsettling effects of the uncanny which breach the boundaries of the familiar and safe, and further, destabilise childhood as the pure place of beginnings.

The narrative within the narrative structure of *A Child's Book of True Crime* presents a reading such as Ellis' of a disturbing and corrupt Gothic world. The storybook tale, that intersperses Kate's narrative, of animal detectives seeking their own answer to the Black Swan Point mystery, plays on the novel's title, creating a story in children's terms for the terrible events of Ellie's murder. This extreme baptism of fire for the innocents to whom such narratives do not constitute a 'normal' part of childhood imagination, conveys a

place of bedtime stories gone awry, a Gothic landscape full of underground whimpers and 'hidey-hole[s]' (Hooper 29), and a vista in which beautiful black swans sing in mournful tunes, their sleek necks bent to make an 'ocean of question marks' (110). This story, Kate imagines, will tell 'the truth' (79) of the adult world, as the native animals Terence Tiger, Kitty Koala, Wally Wombat, Percy Possum and Kingsley Kookaburra see out their years dodging bullets and cars, their friends and relatives decimated by feral cats, chlamydia and lost habitats—'the years since Ellie's death had not been kind to any of them' (182)—but ever still in the pursuit of the 'good', and the restoration of a world out of moral kilter.

The animals' protectiveness of Lucien, the only child of Thomas and Veronica Marne and Kate's prodigy student, as the three—in Kate's narrative at least—tussle for sexual power and status, is mirrored by Kate's professed instinct to preserve Lucien's childhood from the adult torpor surrounding him. 'I suddenly wished Lucien and I could just leave and go somewhere safe together,' she cries, 'away from these people' (179). In Kate's ambiguous eyes, herself slipping between the assumed boundaries of adult and child, childhood is nostalgically rendered, a time after which, 'nothing will ever seem so green' (160), and as she stands by the side of the cricket pitch watching her primary school class play, she senses 'the menace underneath' (160) this purview of innocence, a 'tiny rip develop[ing] in this sporting picture' (160); '[t]hey were statues on a well-kept lawn, in poses sketched by a noble to inspire other paedophiles' (161). The threat of crime latent yet slowly eruptive is made analogous with puberty and the sexualisation of the child's

body, brought with a shock into adult desires. 'Wouldn't it be lovely,' Kitty Koala whispers, 'if there were some recipe to avoid becoming an adult' (225).

Instructively, the storybook protagonists turn with 'old-world dignity' (209) from their mammal cohorts engaging in flagrant sexual practices, the night sky full of the cries and screeches of 'worlds ending' (208). Kingsley's tree, 'his palace', becomes 'a bestiary' as '[e]ach branch strained and groaned' under the weight of 'simpering creatures' (208). Turning from this chaos, his 'bushland gang on the ground below…like displaced nobility' (208), Kingsley cries into the sky where, even there, 'cloud-lovers' tussled together: 'Lucien… Hide! Hide!' (209). Lucien's exposure to things beyond the 'normal' limits of childhood safety represents an uncanny shift, a gothic fault line in a 'manageable' world with 'its scale of anarchy', as Kate expresses, 'to my liking' (47).

Kate's observations in class, informed by child psychology, of Lucien's disturbed mental condition—'What it meant for this child psychically, to have a mother obsessed with death and gore' (49)—suggests the breakdown of a state in which children are 'protected from things so strenuously that the slightest irregularity…could overwhelm' (66). A version of 'pristine' (57) crime with its clear right and wrong, watered-down or evading complexity and horror, seems preferable to Kate, kept within the reasoned limits of psychology and its understanding contained by 'pure science'—the 'jigsaw puzzle nature of crime' that leads the bushland animals 'ever on' (82). Endangered childhood, juxtaposed with the raggedy collection of native animals—a morally inflected environmental tale—thus positions innocence and a 'natural' order against a badland

chaos, connecting to a tradition of colonial configurations in which 'the lost child and indeed the lost world of childhood' (Thomas 53) infers a relationship between purgatory and the untamed Australian landscape.

However, what most disturbs Kate is the commodification of innocence, and her identification with both Ellie and Lucien as the innocents of the text is unsettled by the complicity she reveals in this perverse environment, despite her professed abhorrence of it. Her sense of unease at the veneer of Endpoint's goodly community—'I stood near some mothers, wanting to blend in. They talked in hushed tones without acknowledging me' (Hooper 174)—emerges from her awareness of this culture of commodity, where, in the pursuit of self-gratification, boundaries of safety waver. This is a system characterised by the 'hieroglyphs of marketability, pleasure and cultural value' (McCann 2) where an economy of consumerist supply and demand admits visual revelation and the flaunting of previously hidden grotesques. McCann outlines the disturbing effects—'sparking debate and...public panic' (3)—of what he terms the 'Gothic commodity' (2), an object secret or hidden entering into a public economy of desire and consumption. Within this, market value is attributed to the commodity at issue, pedagogical or moral worth justifying the entrance of something previously private into the discursive sphere of an 'ordered metropolis' (4).

To exemplify this, McCann cites the nineteenth century anatomical museums that captured popular imagination in a frame of scientific and religious purpose. Female sexual organs, exhibits of placentas, foetuses, and displays of sexual excess and

'abnormalities' in non-white women (for example, the so-called 'Hottentot Venus') were frequently the central display of these museums, ostensibly set up to demonstrate the products of sexual depravity, disease and deformity, and therefore educative in principles of social hygiene, discipline and sexual regulation. The light of reason and knowledge could be trained on pathologies and unspeakable dysfunctions through the literal cutting open of the body, revealing its hidden chambers, kept secret in Victorian attitudes towards the corporeal. What McCann argues, however, is that the aesthetic pleasure and consequent commercial viability located in such a display reinstated the Gothic exploration of *unreason*, admitting not instruction, but enjoyment in the active consumption of 'otherwise repressed or forbidden subject matter' (7). McCann continues: '[t]he anatomical museum, in other words, had become a way of circulating pornographic spectacles "before the public eye" without legal penalty. It had become a form of mass culture that appealed to a public craving for obscenity and exploited the shock values of objects that…were not publicly available and integrated into the market for popular entertainment and amusement' (5).

Such displays, operating at the extreme limit of public acceptability, enabled a sense of transgressive consumption that unsettled the distinction between desire and horror, excess and containment, discipline and disarray. As McCann explains, the transgressive attraction to unreason is inevitably produced by disciplinary discourses—aligned with reason—and thus the Gothic, in this understanding, offers a means to dwell in and consume forbidden social spaces. This discourse remains reactive to official moral codes and yet circulates as a contained form of cultural production, kept within prescribed

market bounds. Transgression is thereby limited as symbolic or imaginative, commodified in a Gothic display of what is otherwise repressed but is now valued for pleasure or the satiation of desire—a 'culture industry', McCann asserts, 'that thrive[s] on the production of abject spectacles' (7). Disorder, unreason and violence still circulate as commodities but, distanced and circumscribed in this way, they can remain secreted as the 'repressed underside of the well-ordered society' (9).

Kate's affair with Thomas demonstrates the exchange value of sexual innocence and knowledge. Brought up like Ellie as one of the private school girls with 'ponytails synchronized' (Hooper 66), Kate's naïveté and desire for experience sees a formula of magazine-style flirtation—'Would he want to kiss me? I'd read an article on the merits of having an affair with an older man' (44)—evolve into a series of clandestine encounters, lunchtime trysts and role-plays: '[b]efore I'd met Thomas I was the least experienced person in the world…[now] I'd spent time inside the skin of every slippery girl I'd ever met' (200). Her clichéd and clumsy attempts at seduction gesture towards 'the orgiastic world of adults' (45)—slipping her 'tiny underpants' (14) off under her short skirt and high heels as Thomas drives his convertible—and mark an 'experiment [in] being a woman' (197), while offering to Thomas a 'willed innocence' dressed in 'nuanced baby talk' (165). 'What did you do when you woke up?', Thomas asks, 'Did you eat your breakfast?… Did you wash your little face?… And then you got all dressed-up for the grown ups. Did you want to make all the other kids' dads hot? Hmm?' (165).

There is marketable currency in innocence and experience for both Kate and Thomas, extracted in secret and invested with excitement, pleasure and, for Kate, horror. Thomas' sexual patronage is laced with threat in her mind, and as Kate becomes more convinced of his collusion with Veronica to replicate the Ellie Siddell murder with her as its victim, this newly revealed adult world is all the more shocking to Kate for her own complicity within it. The consumption of sexual knowledge is her attraction to danger, and her enactment of paedophilic fantasy for Thomas—"'I was playing in the playground." I moaned. "I like the swing and the slide"... "No one saw your underpants did they?"' (177)—is charged with what is both frightening and forbidden: '"[w]as this the way people really behaved?" I would ask myself in mock affront... Then I'd shake my head, like any normal person, at how bizarre, at how terrifying, people managed to make sex' (104).

Kate's identification with a 'normal person', bemused by the excesses of this economy in which she participates, is consequently legitimised even while she is unsettled by her obsession with Ellie Siddell's murder. Ellie's body represents the ultimate consumable form in both *Murder at Black Swan Point* and the numerous rumours and theories that flow around its central event. Like the exhibits in the anatomical museum, Ellie is displayed and dissected in imagination and in the pursuit of 'truth', as much as she is at her murderer's hands. Again, Kate's complicity in this is made clear, generating and compounding her fear and paranoia of the Marnes as she maps out and transposes Ellie's story on her own. From Veronica's book, Kate feels as if she has 'already seen inside' (70) the Siddell home and Ellie's room: '[h]er clothes carpeted the floor', she narrates.

'Lipsticks and perfumes were spread over each inch of the dressing table… It was hard to believe she'd brought her lover here, but she was still only nineteen. And I bet every time Graeme Harvey led her to the single bed, and pushed away a layer of debris, Ellie wished she'd remembered to tidy up' (70).

Veronica chronicles the police investigation as they 'bagged nearly sixty items from the house…over half…from off her bedroom floor' (70), laboriously listing for the public reader Ellie's private life: 'a pair of pink underpants; a sports bra; a T-shirt…two towels; candy wrappers' (70); '[t]he list…also included brown matter labelled "blood scrapings", samples of Ellie's blood, her hair, her nail and muscle tissue; scrapings from under her fingernails; and the knife found lying next to the body' (71). Such details, provided and consumed, foster Kate's paranoia, leading her to see her house as perfect crime-scene material: '[a]t a certain hour, as dark swelled, axe murderers started growing in the flower beds. Or else Margot did' (129). She imagines Veronica's blade entering her body just as Margot's supposedly had Ellie's, and in a combustion of fear and orgasm as she makes love to Thomas, Kate spins with nausea as 'grainy black-and-white photos of Ellie Siddell's body' (27) slide before her eyes. '[A]fter reading [Veronica's] book,' she relates, 'I walked around my house as if visible from every angle; suddenly the walls were made of eyes. Like some primitive version of hell, every vase knew I was bad' (58).

Margot is treated similarly by Veronica's text, her life-story and private spaces opened up to public question and consumption. In the true crime book, all aspects of the event are purportedly detailed: from her frenzied slashing and the amount of blood left at the scene,

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to what she imagines as Margot's maniacal drive to Suicide Cliffs in which she 'slipped and slid all over the road, Ellie's blood still staining her hands' (71). Public fascination with the true crime text is thus shown to signify the collusion of 'public anxiety, consumerist pleasure and pornographic scandal' (McCann 10), highlighting the paradoxes of a culture that seeks to keep unspoken violence or crime while desiring to imbibe, in textual form, what is held up as forbidden and irrational. The anxiety of the hidden coming to light and the satisfaction of its revelation are coexistent.

As the distinct registers of private and public are blurred—where, for example, 'women are locked in to trade secrets, and men are locked out, to defend truths' (Juers 34)— knowledges leak and are imbibed, with lines of reason, truth and order breached by desire. Perceptive of this, Kate questions Veronica's attempts to affect an 'ethical stance' as a true crime writer, wondering whether she could 'get inside the criminal mind, while bending backwards to then show her horror of the deed? In every chapter she'd tried to cloak her own fascination as social responsibility. Her own perversion as research' (Hooper 72). The idea of 'getting inside the criminal mind' testifies to this anatomical approach with its frisson of pleasure and horror: 'psychiatric profiling', Kingsley Kookaburra notes, 'provide[s] rich ore indeed' (30). Like the 'secrets' of the female body, with its menstrual marker that make female killers 'more fascinating and more repulsive'—'They know what blood feels like on their skin or their skirt' (23)—an official abhorrence of brutal crime cradles its attraction.

As Kate sees the true crime genre encouraging the public to feed on the secrets of suppressed or interior spaces, while on its surface professing its aversion to this, she co-opts this layered image—like Rushdie's double vision—into a model of the individual psyche. These are badlands that exist in the mind. Veronica's assertion that 'I had to acknowledge there's a struggle within all of us... An eye for an eye' (100) informs Kate's view, and in the psychoanalytic model of the 'murderous' unconscious—'we are all killers in the unconscious of our desires' Mark Seltzer explains (Seltzer 17)—she claims self-recognition in the murdering villainess: 'these horrific crimes were not just the things other people did. These deeds were with us; they were in our nervous systems. We read true-crime books to learn about ourselves' (Hooper 105). Indeed, Kingsley Kookaburra agrees that '[a]ll through nature there were such stories of deceit and betrayal...Could one conquer one's instincts?' (30).

From this perspective Seltzer writes that 'the difference between the psychic killers and the psycho killers means this: the psychotic is the one who takes things literally, acting out what others merely think, collapsing the distance between representation and things, private desires and public acts' (18). These dual proclivities to sociability and anti-social excess thus rest secreted in the non-active killer, while in the individual who plays out her destructive desires, all boundaries are revoked and the repressed is displayed. The proximity of secrets and the revelation of what lies behind 'a thin veneer stretched over the horror of history' (McCann 10) are contained by 'the logic of commodity', through which, McCann argues, '[they are] reified, reproduced, circulated and consumed' (10). At the point of the forbidden's release, at the uncanny moment when good sociality is

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shaken by what it disavows, unhomeliness is circumscribed, breaching a real possibility of 'excavat[ing]' and claiming 'the repression inherent in colonialism' (10).

It is this circumscription that delays an assimilation of the 'bad' (in the past, in the unconscious) and the mythic into a settled sense of place. Thus, in the Gothic tradition of the unhomely in Hooper's text, houses are insecure, open to intrusion and their own strange plans. When she wakes to an unfamiliar view of her familiar back yard, Kate wonders if '[d]uring the night the house had taken off...relanding with each angle out' (Hooper 142). Surfaces cover over uncomfortable stories, while parents dream of infanticide, and children of murder and violence, shaped by adults' desires and the lies they weave. Thinking her pupils too young for Tasmania's 'issue of genocide' (33), Kate has the children write Dreamtime stories; the day after sending off postcards to the Tasmanian parliament urging the passing of the Aboriginal Land Act, her students appear 'crying because their parents had reeducated them. They were going to lose their backyard and therefore the new swing set and trampoline' (35).

Kate considers the children's induction into adulthood as a process of incarceration in a 'world where people with walled imaginations lived walled lives' in an 'airbrushed prison' (233) of hushed tones, secreted excess, and denial. 'The idea that they needed to be protected from the truth was surely a way for adults to protect themselves', she argues. 'The unseemly things which children said when left alone, when the brakes were taken off aggression, were perfectly natural. They were the shadow-feelings of adults' (233). It is in the figure of the child—a shadow, a suppressed consciousness—that 'truth' is

therefore located, and improper and unassimilable into the adult everyday, these qualities of honesty and irreverence for comfortable surfaces must be remade.

Promiscuous Pasts and Unsettled Relations in Australia's 'Badlands'

I want to argue, however, that the inevitable economy of consumption and containment presented by the Gothic commodity suggests the limitations of this approach to badlands, and it is through a different viewing of the uncanny, one which does not call upon a duality of surface and depth, that Hooper's text exceeds its own Gothic overtures. While the Gothic elaborates on the proximity of crimes and things that unsettle, the eruptive nature of the repressed returning—enigmatic, as Carter explains, 'because it hides what it intends' (*Lie of the Land* 116)—necessitates a foundational ground above which a 'lumpy topography' (18) speaks only cryptographically. Environmental disorder is thus consigned to signify the self's inability to exist easefully with accumulated forgetfulness, and the ecological and ontological necessity, that both Gibson and McCann point to, of correcting such dis-ease.

While Gibson, like Hooper, exhorts his reader to accept 'secrecy, ambiguity and inconclusiveness' as 'part of what happened' (*Seven Versions* 69) in the context of the past, and to observe the fragments and traces of 'bad things' scattered about the landscape, his appeal to acknowledge rather than ignore trauma or disquiet in a (post)colonial society is premised upon an outcome of healing and resolution that would render badlands unneeded, ousted in a society that accepted its past. Consequently, it is in the poetics of archaeological uncovering *as recovery*, no matter how scattered the origins

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of trauma may be, that the ground is articulated. Hooper's badlands elude such correction, representing, and most importantly, negotiating a topography where a metaphorical opening of the ground will only illuminate deferral. In a trope of suspended beginnings, any attempt to go beneath the surface of an event—'appear[ing] to disturb the foundations of Cartesian thought, to disrupt its logocentric linear perspective' (Carter, *Lie of the Land* 118)—will only mirror and reassert this 'conceptual space symmetrically underground' (118).

It is by attending to the surface of things that the subject's relation to the past, to crimes, and to an environment, can be constituted beyond the commodified or conceptual lines that order and contain ecological elements. Rather than heading to a destination of realisation or restitution, these relations '[b]urn...slowly', continually 'staging transitions' (Carter, 'Making Arrangements' 28) in a multitude of ontological forms. To allay unsettlement in this context is thus to forbid the possibilities of surprise and reappearance, ignoring the incommensurable effects of radiation as different bodies, presences and events touch and become. Further, in Hooper's text, the commodity is elaborated as part of an environment that is continually reconfigured for the self in the world inclusive of, but not regulated by, mass media and popular culture. Her view is of ecology rather than economy.

Gelder and Jacobs' understanding of the uncanny differs from a view of the familiar becoming unfamiliar, with its implied reliance on surface and depth. Instead, they conceive of the uncanny as meaning a cohabitation—like the spectre's non-present

presence—of apparently oppositional elements and instate simultaneity and oscillation as forces of unsettlement. In this model, the familiar is not remade unfamiliar—taken over, broken through—but inhabits both states together, activating each in a promiscuous play of what are perceptively dichotomised. As a way of figuring (post)colonial relations, Gelder and Jacobs emphasise movement as central to uncanny place, where, in Australia, 'secrets' or mysterious things—and significantly in their argument, the Aboriginal sacred—demonstrate the solicitous nature of incomplete knowledge. Considered in this way, the secret is never contained or cordoned-off, but is relational and active, renegotiated ceaselessly as different proximities and distances to the past are made and remade.

The implications of an unsettled relation between non-indigenous peoples and 'home' is taken by Gelder and Jacobs to be indicative of unrealisable categories rather than the superficial tethering to place of settler Australians. The ambiguity that they argue is always present in colonised countries, where 'one's place is always already another's place and the issue of possession is never complete' (*Uncanny* 138), highlights irresolution but also transformation and retransformation—a movement back and forth between positions, and the space in revelation that is also concealment. Conceptualised on the surface in this way, the uncanny is not an effect that comes from the outside, thus destabilising the ground, but is always already present and realised through inconclusive touch. From this view, I argue, being grounded means encountering the effects of an uncertain and constantly shifting place.

From this perspective, Kate's experience of unhomeliness in Endpoint and her unsettling absorption in Ellie's narrative, can be read as her grounding in a bumpy narrative of a promiscuous environment that insists on presencing its past. Her growing awareness that the truth of Ellie's murder can only ever be approximated realises her distance from the truth as she imaginatively moves towards it. This does not seal off the crime but rather disseminates its reach. The animal detectives are also unable to resolve Ellie's death and Margot's disappearance, as they parody the ontological desire for firm ground and evidence as truth—'the kookaburra was not shy in peeling back the surface to uncover a protagonist's most basic emotions' (Hooper 30).

There is no body recovered from below Suicide Cliffs; facts resist cohesion in the text; and narrative gaps refuse 'to restore the common light of day' (Parkin-Gounelas 137) that would settle disorder. Kate is unable to match Ellie's story with her own profiling of 'the Marne's plans', and realises that '*Murder at Black Swan Point* would offer no clues. Each chapter ended with another unanswered question… its author had no idea what had happened—315 pages, but all she'd needed to scratch on each was I DON'T KNOW' (Hooper 186). Rumours cannot be reconciled, nor fragments pulled together in straight narrative line. Despite the traces left behind in DNA samples, the abandoned car, the blood in the Harveys' bathroom—in the 'exchange theory' of criminal detection, Kate relates, 'just as a criminal leaves traces at a site, so they take them with them where they go' (152)—there is no linear correlation between these, no balance of cause and effect as 'all the possibilities branched off endlessly' (194).

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The association between childhood and the recognition of true crime's unstable ground—which would otherwise provide an identifiable foundation for Endpoint's 'bad' side—overturns a positivist tradition in which the 'child's eyes' are equated with untainted truth—a vision of the world, Carter writes, 'without prejudice or the blinkers of premature rationalization' ('Turning the Tables' 26). Kate asks her class, '[w]hat if we lived in a world where everyone told the truth?… Can you always know the truth?', and Lucien's response is telling: 'you can change the truth. But it usually happens over years… Truth is a flexible substance' (Hooper 52). A pure space of human consciousness and conscience, where right and wrong, good and bad, are clear, is therefore disavowed, and the ambiguous slips between the categories of child and adult in the text—outside a structure of commodification—disturb a narrative of progress or apocalyptic disorder.

What Carter describes as a rectilinear view of the world, a landscape unfolded in a flattening out of time and space—sharp edges and direct lines of passage—is the shape of positivism, in which subjectivity is unshakeable and certain. '[O]ur desire to "not get lost," to leave a clue, is so strong,' (194) Kate remarks, bemused by the fact that 'Margot hadn't left behind a suicide note'. She had 'left nothing' (194) as either a trail or marker—no statement of self, no confirmation of presence. Yet to become 'lost', as the text indicates, is neither to absent oneself from the present nor to recover a childhood sublime, for there is no one beginning to which the self can return. Kate's privileging of childhood as the only space in which tragedy fully resounds seeks to find this distinction between the jaded and the pure, but turns to a point of dichotomous collapse. Her summation that '[u]ntainted by a hundred other learned horrors, [children] are haunted

for the appropriate length of time. They ask a thousand unanswerable questions. The story stays with them; they dream of it' (79), is thus ironically self-reflexive. As her own enquiries and obsessions reveal, there is no measure 'appropriate' for the effects of haunting.

Evidence of the crime, unable to be gathered together, appears and disappears, wavering and shadowed, as does the past with its own crimes—like the elasticity of time—which is similarly unbounded in the 'adult' world. Gibson's consideration of the problematics of evidence in the context of crime points out the philosophical reliance on 'hard' evidence in a western episteme, where in the case of true crime 'court transcripts, photographs, police reports, archaeological relics, or notarised contemporary testimonials' (*Seven Versions* 67) constitute the foundation of fact in story. In this paradigm, the 'absence' of evidence can absent presence, interpreting truth as materially based and thereby the immaterial as inadmissible and inconsequential. In much the same way, colonial records textually inscribe what is privileged over indigenous oral accounts of the past. A forensic approach to crime will exclude what does not constitute rectilinear truths.

However, despite the selectivity of the historical record informed by this tradition, whereby a repainted wall or whitewashed tombstones will admit a place as 'new and unstained as if there were nothing residual to see, touch, feel and believe' (Gibson, *Seven Versions* 83), badlands are alive with remembering, heaving and sighing through the force of events. These are not official accounts or containable effects and the landscape Kate describes recounts its own version of the past in this way, tracked through time and

reactive to presences. The specificity of crime is itself disturbed. No one event is kept out of touch with another, and all crimes bleed into those both before and after, never homogenised and retaining singular force and value, but present in effective proximity and distance on an historical map—'people upon people, land upon landscape. Past upon present' (Gibson, *Seven Versions* 50). There can then be no clean beginnings in this unstable environment.

With boundaries unsettled, and different planarities of time and space brought into relation, the self in these poetics can never be imagined as cleaved smoothly and totally away from the 'bad'. 'Knowing who the murderer had been,' Kate admits, 'wouldn't keep me safe' (Hooper 197). Both the circumscription and resolution of crimes are continually deferred as Kate's particular experience of horror is realised as 'part of history' (Gibson, *Seven Versions* 50). *A Child's Book of True Crime* represents a landscape in which levelled ground and newly constructed environments cannot cover over or forget previous presences. There is no dichotomy between surface and depth that enables disturbance to stay repressed 'below'. Kate's recollection of her father's school, 'built on a graveyard' (Hooper 187) makes literal a metaphoric view of Australian non-indigenous ground, one that would mourn the passing of indigenous presence, and articulates what it is to 'live with history' (186-187). 'Bones poked out of the earth,' she recalls, 'and it was realized some of the coffins would need to be exhumed. When the chains of a crane accidentally broke, a coffin came crashing down into the schoolyard. One little boy was expelled for running up and trying to prod a wedding ring off a skeleton's finger' (187).

This kind of relation to the past in the present, unauthorised and deemed inappropriate by dominant conceptions of how life should treat death—outside the self and respected within these limits—intimates what is in the midst of happening, and is replayed by the children in the text who run and scream through the space of Port Arthur. Dressed up as pickpockets and forgers, they enact an historical stage rather than isolating it, floodlit and single-voiced. Defying prescriptions of authenticity, '[t]hey waltzed and wrestled' amongst 'diseased' (107) façades: '[wearing] their faux rags they looked like a children's theatre troupe performing the off-cuts of *Oliver!*... They had heard of one convict who, trying to escape overland, found a dead kangaroo and wrapped himself in the animal's fur. Lucien was allowed to be the kangaroo man, and Darren and Henry were suddenly the officers out hunting' (96).

Amidst the exhibits and cases displaying the hard evidence of history—objects found or recorded in story; the torturer's equipment alongside mock-ups of 'the crime' juxtaposed by moralising distance with punishments received ('Life for stealing a flute... Seven years for stealing tobacco' [89])—the children 'reeled around, *delighting in their nausea*' (96) [emphasis mine]. The carton of cigarettes, stuck onto the wall for demonstrative effect, and emptied of its contents by pilfering hands, signifies its own encounters with previous irreverence, ironically mimicking the past and exceeding the ordered boundaries of traditional museology imposes. What can be read as history commodified, even vulgarised in this way, is breached by relation and the continual production of meaning that touch initiates. The Endpoint community's whitewashing of the past is placed next to

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this: the same gravestones painted over now lie broken and scattered about the cemetery—'kids,' Kate observes, 'maybe even the dead's direct descendants...had nothing better to do' (36), a recognition, unsettling for its own breach of social codes perhaps, that the past refuses to remain in its 'place'. Such damage speaks of relations and a living with history that does not abstract memory from the landscape, but reforms its shape without erasing its trace and, neither professing nor preserving truth, still generates meaning in ecological touch.

Kate marvels at the contrast between the alive-ness of her students and the 'dead place' (107) that is Port Arthur. Yet at the same time she notes the ground at her feet: the penitentiary's floors are carpeted with 'yellow daisies and milk-thistles' (88); the 'crude windows framing the most uncanny views: serene Opossum bay; rolling green hills; an English country garden of weeping willows...planted by homesick officers' (88). The desire to remake and smooth over an uncomfortable landscape is evident all around, and yet, in the remains in the ruins and stone, in the re-emergence of growth, and the 'long high cry and sudden note change' (88) of the whipbird, a resonance of 'the horror that existed [here]' (88) is felt by Kate. Alive, the badland shoots and folds like the rhizome. Kate points to rocks, 'bruised purple, bruised red—swollen with history' (31); around her 'leaves whisper...rumours' (125) above dirt that 'smelled rich with its own fertile plans' (79). 'Each giant boulder vibrated with alarm. Each tiny pebble quivered underfoot' (9), while Graeme Harvey's grief in Kate's imagination 'lurked like a mushroom cloud over the peninsula' (29).

This is an environment in which the seen and unseen move together. Curvilinear, rather than rectilinear which is necessarily absent of voices, shadows and multi-directions, the very ground on which Kate stands is unstable, throwing her continually out of balance as it records 'the traces of...impact[s] that will not quieten down' (Carter, *Lie of the Land* 17). Here, past things refuse to stay at an ordered distance. The 'strange shapes' (Probyn, *Outside Belongings* 113) that Kate encounters in her environment can be seen to speak beyond a Gothic façade where the repressed pushes upwards from below, distorting surfaces, and the text calls up Probyn's rendering of remembering where temporal and spatial sequences are continually rearranged. An environment presents itself as unsettled, *A Child's Book of True Crime* suggests, in any attempt to construct within it a single line of truth.

In Hooper's novel, rocks 'like mouths, like tongues, like pornographic things', and 'boulders...like the buttressed walls of a cathedral', 'curvaceous, almost bulbous' (Hooper 12), establish the landscape on which Kate's footing must be negotiated. A topography is thus rescued from a smooth imperial gaze as the weathering of surfaces, the grooves in stone, and incomplete tracks, depict relations and transformations in environmental time. Her own relation to Ellie's murder, exceeding the bounds of safe consumption, articulates the destabilising effects of ecological presence that cannot be isolated to a particular event alone. 'Every molecule was now changing' (185), Kate states as she sways on her bar stool, taking in the disequilibrium and tremors of a ground where shapes 'subtl[y] bend' (Carter, *Lie of the Land* 128) about each other.

Disorientating Environments: Alternative Poetics for an Australian Ecology

Repeated references and allusions to spatial disorientation in the text—vertigo, nausea, agoraphobia and claustrophobia—suggest Kate's disequilibrium. An unsettled ground generates menace and fear, closing in and touching Kate: '[t]rees, planted too close to the walls, scratched my bare arms' (Hooper 212); '[a] branch scratched at my face and again I felt seasick' (215). Her environment comes alive, resounding with what she perceives is moral condemnation, read into the vases in her home which watch and judge her. At the bed and breakfast with Thomas, the 'Persian rug gave a slight electric shock' (17) beneath Kate's feet; the trees lining the side of the road as they drive back to the school, lunchtime over, lean in, 'writhing, mournful'—they 'made me nervous' (32)—and birds glare down as Kate stumbles into the playground. 'I felt certain I was in trouble' (44), 'a naughty little girl, late for school' (43). Her sudden realisation that Thomas and Veronica wish her ill induces dizzying uncertainty, and her inability to discern fantasy from reality is described with the disturbing force of an oceanic swell. 'Before me the horizon line trembled,' she describes. 'I'd been dumped by a wave. I stood feeling its slap, the way it belted my body' (168).

A poetic theme in all three novels discussed, the sea represents ontological disconcertion in *A Child's Book of True Crime*. Like a 'huge animal drawing breath' (78), its unpredictable momentum is analogous to the pitch and roll of Kate's desire and terror, which, rather than speaking of her moral 'wrongness', indicates her proximity to the Marnes and their secreted threats, and the story through which her anxiety snakes. This has implications for the reader of the text too. Since Kate's voice keeps the reader in touch with the textual ground, her constant shifts between poise and fall create the effect

of nausea in the narrative itself. There is no straight narrative line for the reader to follow in this landscape of convergence and divergence, as if many worlds and truths were simultaneously opening and closing.

Evelyn Juers describes vertigo as a 'post-edenic condition' (26), aligning it with the Gothic uncanny. Spatial disorientation admits the recognition of unreason and uncertainty in this view, and is reliant on 'revelatory repressions that send…characters and audiences into a spin' (28). Distances collapse and extend around the self, dispelling ontological security and confusing relations between 'your true body positions [and]…your surroundings' (26). Martin Thomas suggests a similar view of vertiginous experience, relating Kant's contention that to think and walk at the same time would induce nausea and vertigo. In Kant's thesis, the intellect, and thus the rational and the civilised, necessitates cultivation in stasis—an extrapolation of Plato's equation of stasis and being (Carter, *Repressed Spaces* 41)—while the 'pedestrian…must observe "a firm resolution to go on a diet with regard to thinking"' (Thomas 47).

In its synonymity with the dark antithesis of human reason, vertigo 'toys with the abyss, reminding pedestrians of their mortality' (Thomas 61), and it is this void that the imperative to stabilise and compact the ground seeks to defer. Vidler contextualises spatial phobias in his discussion of modernity and argues that, for the subject in contact with the refuse of post-industrial culture, spatial disorientation and anxiety are a characteristic response as linear formations give way to destabilised certainties. Behind the shining surfaces of modernity, a dread of sub-rationality or difference—'a fear of

what might be concealed beneath' (Carter, 'Turning the Tables' 24)—is seen to disturb assured ontologies. Kate's feelings of nausea as she and Thomas drive down the main street of Endpoint, with is flower boxes and cottages 'fashionable in England two centuries ago' (41) lining the road, suggests this agoraphobic anxiety. As if intuiting the renunciation of environmental memory, and in keeping with a modality of flat surfaces suppressing disordered ground, Kate is unsettled by the formal lines of colonial architecture: 'I wished we could lock the door and speed straight through this town', she states (41).

Yet, simultaneously, she notices a slight asymmetry in these 'classicist principles' (41), a dimensional irregularity particular to these walls that are both historicised and localised. This is where I consider Hooper's text to further unsettle the conventions of Gothic since in these irregular, local lines it is not a dichotomy between concealment and revelation that is presented. '[D]esigned by convict architects and built of local stone' (41), these shapes may speak of imported ideologies, imposed upon the ground, but as their asymmetry suggests, they still enter into a relational ecology through their presence in an environment. That is, the topographic surface of Hooper's text conveys a living with the past that is effective in the immediate. I therefore consider the spatial disconcertion and disorientation represented in the novel as indicating generative poetics and ecological dynamics that can be distinguished from an understanding of the uncanny limited to the dichotomous frame of surface and depth. While unsettlement can be read as produced by an unwitting discernment of what 'lies beneath', this spatial construction does not disorient an ecology itself, but only 'shakes' a subject and precludes its possible firm

belonging. To see disorientation as an ecological characteristic, however, releases the past or the 'bad' event from its environmental exclusion. Ontological shapes react and transform in ecological relation with these elements. They are a part of becomings.

Carter explains the colonial tradition of western resistance to spatial uncertainty which, he argues, was a necessary tactic of imperial thought. Within this ideology, the unstable figure, unable to walk a straight line, reflects a 'primitive state' and an 'evolutionary unfitness' (*Repressed Spaces* 40), displaying 'refusal to keep in step' (41) with progress that is unorthodox and degenerative. *A Child's Book of True Crime*, however, represents a world without straight lines and the environment around Kate refuses any submission to linearity. Hooper's novel configures spatial and ontological unsettlement as ecologically informing. Any effort to contain unsettled relations between self and ground is evidently fraught. While moments of spatial disorientation can indicate a falling into pathology—slipping between the lines and into the gaps against which empirical knowledge is defined and measured—*A Child's Book of True Crime* elaborates these ruptures in the whole as the place, or ground, of ontological process.

I argue that the experiences of vertigo depicted in text convey the uncertainty of the subject in relation to its environment. Distances are unsettled between self and other, as proximities change, oppress, or rearrange environmental positions. The connection between agoraphobia and claustrophobia is thus evident: an expression, Carter writes, of the 'oscillation between the desire for contact with the other and a fear of it, between the desire to enter into a relationship and panic at the thought of it' (*Repressed Spaces* 32).

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Carter's understanding of the agoraphobic subject whose experiences of vertigo or dizziness are generated by a horror of open spaces, and the claustrophobe who fears a loss of herself in 'an anonymous mass' (15), positions this oscillation 'between the closed and the open' (31) as indicative of a single condition: a realisation that the ground is not stable and assured.

For Carter, the pathologising of spatial disorientation is the re-embrace of a regulatory discourse the bounds of which 'disordered' movement evades. Equally, the contained definition of these phobias as reactions to modern estrangement—'the sickness of the urban scene' (8)—where the self is unhomed and rootless amongst smooth façades, presupposes an ontological certainty that has thus been shaken, resulting in an anxious contact between foot and ground. In an alternative perspective such as I advocate, spatial disorientation defines 'a particular kind of space, or place, with a distinctive physical form and history' (9). Neither pathology nor ontological 'crisis', the experiences of vertigo and the self's loss of balance point to a human subjectivity responsive to, and formed in touch with, ecological constituents. Such disorientation means movement *in* place, opposed to movement valued as a passage for progress with the stabilised self taking the surface in its stride. Instead of a view of human mobility and contact with the ground, where the land is flat and hard edges meet to bounce off each other, movement in place relays an ontology and an ecology that are never firm or static, but charged with always reconfiguring proximities and distances.

Here the expansion and contraction of the ground records a local gathering where 'cloud-like formations and deformations of groupings' (Carter, *Repressed Spaces* 9) trace out place. In this sense, footsteps that fall without simultaneity or equivalence constitute a topography: presence or non-present presence configure an environment. Footsteps respond to and move with the land's inclinations and kinetics while registering the 'peculiarities of the foot's impression' (Carter, *Lie of the Land* 360) left upon the surface—both singularity and multiplicity are crucial to the recognition of tracks. A reciprocity between foot and ground further connotes a relation in which mutual effects are not gathered together or equalised, but are nevertheless there. Such a 'sense of the ground rising to meet the walker and answering his downward pressure with a vectorial intent of its own' (*Lie of the Land* 360) is Carter's poetic understanding of the not-necessarily-coherent noise that is muted by a quarantined environment.

Noise itself becomes another measure of disorientation and relation when it 'induces nausea...a sense of vertigo' (Carter, 'Desire' 143) in an unsettled place. Imagined flat, the land is without amplitude, but in a vision of multi-planarity, with the rise and fall of an uneven surface, sound is admitted and vibrations signify as acoustically productive and echoically un-timed. Kate's nauseating encounters with space therefore take into account her own effects on the land. 'Trees bent back as we sped by', she recalls of her car ride with Thomas; an impression that returns in the sounds and shapes of the environment. 'Cicadas were chanting. The new day was electric' (Hooper 164). In Carter's words, the 'agoraphobic stroller has to keep in faith with a lost, curvilinear world' (*Repressed Spaces* 48). Outside the lines of empirical thought, and with the

subject hesitating rather than confidently striding across an open ground, a 'different kind of space is disclosed' (41).

This space, which is neither closed nor open since it references becomings, allows what Spivak terms an 'ethical singularity' (xxv) to be admitted into encounters between self and other that never totally reveal or hide. 'We all know,' she explains, 'that when we engage profoundly with one person, the responses come from both sides... We also know that in such engagements we want to reveal and reveal, conceal nothing. Yet on both sides there is always a sense that something has not got across. This we call the "secret"' (xxv). The consideration of what remains 'secret' in this way—what can never be known or represented in total—admits it into a folded surface of relations. It is no longer 'hidden', but remains in touch with the desire for the total knowledge of an other that will never be conclusively realised. Kate's relation to *Murder at Black Swan Point*'s crime, and the crimes that constitute her historicised landscape, follows this model of contact, desirous yet incomplete.

Her waves of nausea and spatial uncertainty suggest the oscillation between desire and fear—gestated in both proximity and distance to the past—that constitutes Gelder and Jacobs's uncanny. An historicised topography brings her in touch with 'bad things' and secrets, but will never fully disclose a singular event. Moreover, the singularity of crime figured as an analogy for the past designates a foundational pretext, from which all the 'bad' derives, is rejected. Kate's inability to extract Ellie's story from her environment does not collapse the two women, but allows for Kate's own movement between and

through these narratives. Neither subject can be reduced by the other even while their ecological effects cross and enfold. It is this singularity—and a point to which I will return—that prohibits 'any monstrous finality' (Foucault 369) accorded to an event.

From this perspective, ontological disorientation reflects topographic forms in which heights and depths are disarranged. Carter's agoraphobe refuses 'to slide away, to be swept off his feet' (*Repressed Spaces* 48) by rectilinear formations, reading obstacles in the landscape that negate a smooth, flat surface—'like a branch or a rock causing a disturbing irregularity in the bed of the stream' (49), but around which water reconfigures and flows. What would seem an abyss, a gap in reason and a frightening void for the ontologically firm, becomes—like this rock or branch—an interval or place of recomposition, requiring the moving figure to twist and bend into different shapes. Kate's nausea can be registered thus: against a reading of mortal recoil, her experiences of shifting ground and swaying motions gesture towards what Heidegger terms a 'moving-into-nearness' (qtd. in Carter, *Repressed Spaces* 60). The agoraphobe 'bears witness to the invisible topography of relations'—violence, damage, making, remaking, constituting the Australian environment—'lost or bypassed or still potential' (Carter 71), recognising impact and effect while disallowing their settling. Seeing the world of lines quaver and disperse—even only for an instant—the disoriented subject perceives a milieu of potential relations and encounters outside the limits of sharp edges and totalities.

Significantly, as singularity is introduced into touch, relations are localised and configured through individual distances and scales that will not be made standard. To

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paraphrase Muecke, 'force' and 'value' are unstable measures, produced and particularised in different relations 'not established by "principles"' ('Landscape of Variability' 45, 58). Rather, they are renegotiated in movement. Hooper's text represents a 'haunted' landscape in which no one relation to, or moment of, encounter with the past is identical with another. In this environment, there is nothing—neither narratives nor certain belonging—to hold the subject firm. Where ontological security is dissolved, a view of an ecology veiled by shadows, like the ephemeral quality of smoke, is presented. This veiling does not hide or lock away terrible pasts, but suggests their presencing which defies revelation. The cigarette that Kate, in her mind, sees Margot sucking down with post-coital glee after her frenzied attack on Ellie, performs this clouding of the event, trailing from its burning tip indecipherable but relational lines, dancing and drifting off. Margot's 'secret', in this way, enters into the weathers of a shifting ecology. The interweaving of sex, death and disappearance in this scene conveys the erotics of possibility that play, generatively, between the revealed and the hidden.

The sexual charge of Margot's 'crime' is echoed throughout the text as Thomas and Kate's liaisons—an asymmetrical mirroring of Ellie and Graeme's—teeter between violence and pleasure, invoking a doubled promiscuity: one is Margot's breach of good girl behaviour, venturing into the forbidden and the taboo, and the other is the irresolvable uncertainty surrounding her 'becoming lost': '[t]his figure, Margot Harvey, had broken out of the mould, and went blazing into the night, howling, " No! No! I will not be civilized about being replaced! I will not retire gracefully!"' (Hooper 57). As she vanishes into the darkness, the trail of smoke in her wake resists Margot's environmental

erasure, and her non-present presence flirtatiously evades the monogamy of reconciled meanings and settled uncertainties. Understanding the uncanny in these terms, and as Carter's spatial disorientation indicates, promiscuity or flirtation is 'an endless... oscillation between two positions' (*Repressed Spaces* 58)—an act of 'taking hold of something only in order to let it fall again, of letting it fall only to take hold of it again' (Benjamin qtd. in Carter, *Repressed Spaces* 58).

Such a way of understanding encounter brings the unhomely into a context of desire and irresolution in the sexual liaison of bodies, and Kate's relation to Thomas demonstrates this. Dressed in a flimsy summer dress she seeks him out—'my walk may have been jaunty, full of rude intonations' (Hooper 179)—with a knife concealed in her pretty beaded bag. However, Hooper's poetics of desire and relation, evident here, destabilise the perceived dichotomy of the bad/good girl and configure the local as an unstable gathering place in which subject positions remain unfixed and open to surprise. Kate's recollection of her student's response to her wondering about 'what it would be like to fall in love', is humorously telling: "'I think it would be really disgusting," the girl had guessed, "and after you'd kissed someone you'd vomit"' (218). Sexual threat and fear are real—and as the text asserts, women are especially vulnerable to this (the agoraphobe thus registering the potential for violation in public spaces)—but in keeping with this, vertiginous experience demonstrates the impossibility of spatial circumscription, and the cultural regulation of this, ever producing secure conditions for the self in place.

Kate's 'secret' affair exceeds safe bounds, and as the ambiguous 'I KNOW' scratched in 'maniac's hand' (59) on her classroom door makes clear—and despite her attempts to read this mark as a portent—the event with which she is obsessed is never contained or kept within lines of discrete consumption. As previously stated, patterns of consumption in the text are presented ecologically rather than economically, without equal exchanges and neat transactions. The commodified object cannot be fixed in its ecological place. Carter makes this connection between the commodity market and the agoric gathering place where a supposedly ordered system is still complicit in the unordered and un-timed moving in and out of bodies, in different groupings and with singular intentions. Here, 'the crowd both drives and is driven…its traffic both transforms and uplifts, but it also threatens to sweep away and destroy…a unit in which inflation and deflation dangerously stalk each other… Similarly, in the marketplace, one can talk up products, but there is always the danger that the bottom will drop out of the market' (Carter, *Repressed Spaces* 150).

Kate's ambiguous pull towards both adulthood and a secure space of innocence, articulated in a language of beginnings and ends—the finality of childhood, for example—is ironically framed by the rhetoric of nation and national foundations in which '[p]eople, disgusted, went on and on, *once again*, about how Australia had forever lost its innocence' (Hooper 200-201) [emphasis mine], as a response to crime and badland eruptions. The gap instituted between innocence and experience—and repeatedly invoked in *A Child's Book of True Crime*—is considered a dangerous abyss in cultural terms, but as the text infers there is no solid ground from which an 'innocent' subject can ever

plunge. Kate's feelings of dissolution as she looks at herself in the mirror hanging on her family home's wall depicts this instability, where becoming occurs in reshuffled distances rather than a straight and commanded path. '[A]ll the comforts of my past had stood up and left,' she relates: '[l]iving away from home, there was no one to tell me who I was anymore... I had got lost in someone else's life' (144).

Thus a surface ontology that is peaked and crevassed offers irregularity and wandering as models of process, denying childhood what Probyn calls its 'moral high ground' (*Outside Belongings* 122): a sublime peak from which to fall into the (hidden) depths of human impropriety. Foucault's opposition to any an event being read as a 'monstrous finality' is appropriate here, for the 'lost' world of childhood, imbued with nostalgia, is countered by Kate's students who already annotate their sweetened stories with darker things—'I had seen the scribble added to their fairy tales, I'd noted where they tore the pages' (Hooper 232). These children already live, write and imagine between the lines of a rectilinear world. Their seemingly awkward, stumbling steps, and the free flowing dance movements with which they approach a wide open space—on the lawns of Port Arthur—countenance that same approach to the ground. Invoking a curvilinear figure, Kate wonders at the text's end: '[m]aybe the first stories we are told are the ones we find our way back to' (236). But there is no originary place of return, and like the crimes that haunt the text, any gesture of retracing, of returning to the scene, involves a different repositioning of the self in relation to what it seeks to know. Such a 'return' means encountering an echo that is never precisely timed but a dynamic track, a 'part-shape'

(Carter, 'Desire' 146), and a knotting of voices, gathering as the singularity of the everyday takes shape.

It is in this day-to-day sense that a 'monstrous finality', as a conclusive ending, can be further considered. Kate's proposition that 'perhaps all perversity comes gift-wrapped in the banal' (Hooper 213) seems cautionary. Yet without the separation of surface and depth, the 'banal' and the 'perverse' fold into each other, with no sharp edges to distinguish them. '[N]ot all things have to be so momentous!' (224), Thomas shouts at the knife-wielding Kate. To consider truth as the light of revelation, uncovering and laying an object bare, demands the weight of empirical terms, heavy, inviolable and unbreachable: a pinnacle of reason beneath which lurks darkness. On an unstable, disconcerting ground, however, topographic inconsistencies that can throw the self out of balance at any time admit a living with the past that sidesteps the monumental, bringing the partial, the ruined and the unresolved into relation.

The Port Arthur buildings that 'had seen the end of the world…would keep rotting until they were just piles of bricks' (107), over and around which people pass and children dance. Echoes reverberate in and out: a story rendered in the sound of 'rain drumming' and the angle of sunlight 'slanted just so' (237) will be remade with the closing in of night, or the unrolling of clouds in a dark sky above. There is fall-out, effect and terrible damage, but never endings, never the worst thing. In between the lines of an historical grid, Kate learns from her students, there 'must be another story, which has to be imagined, written in blood. Always true, this blood story will haunt you and keep you

awake, and the grown-ups should never know of it' (237). This truth that lies in an unofficial, 'pockmarked' (237) ground, is one rendered in movement and as such, refuses totality and togetherness. Always becoming, truth, like the self, is not rooted deeply in place. Its outline is permeable and discontinuous in each new approach to knowledge.

Hooper concludes her text on the blustery coastline of Tasmania—in fact, the imagined edge of nation and the habitable world—where anxieties of the irrational are most clearly articulated, thus affirming this connection between ontology and a topography that resists the smooth breaching of gaps. As Carter explains, the 'island' of the truth, according to Kant, is surrounded 'by a vast and stormy ocean' (*Repressed Spaces* 56), dissolving the continuous line and eluding definition. It is the coastline's multiplicity that so unsettles the surveyor, firm and erect. '[U]nlike the conventionally differentiated river or hill or lake,' he writes, the coastline 'is infinite and folded; it cannot be ultimately mapped or known. It has no other side… It cannot strictly speaking be bounded and possessed… [but] remain[s] recalcitrantly open' (Carter, 'Dark with Excess' 130-131). Kate's closing reflection infinitely extends in this way, as she stands on the edge of cliffs that are '[s]helves of rock, like diving boards or planks, jutted' (Hooper 237) from vertical walls battered sheer by the waves, and their unpredictable rhythm.

Her footing on the 'windiest place in the whole world'—a wind that, blowing 'straight from Antarctica' (238) speaks with all the spareness and desired bounty of this enigmatically unhomely continent—takes in her surrounds, bringing Kate neither closer to nor further from a conclusion to the crime, but tipping her forward and backwards in

contact with its shifting dimensions. Feeling faint, as '[w]ind stung at my face', she watches and tilts with the ocean's syncopation, as waves 'now rose like walls of glass, then shattered, leaving smashed shells—or the ground-up bones of suicides—by my feet' (238). In *Seven Versions of an Australian Badland*, Gibson also brings his text to a close on the coast, which, as it does in Hooper's novel, stands for a place of encounter with difference and the present-ing of pasts. For Gibson, however, this space offers a site of potential reconciliation, and he looks to resolve and heal Australia's badlands through the poetics of a shell, found in the sands, that whispers 'a thousand words for *home*' (*Seven Versions* 183) [emphasis mine] in inaudible sounds and cross-cultural meanings. Though sometimes the shell 'offer[s] the murmur of a lullaby [and at] other times a deafening war cry' (183), it anoints in its complete and smooth form a repressed and hurting nation that can then rebuild a homeliness from the 'mess' of its devastation.

Contrary to this, there is nothing whole in what the sea throws up for Kate, and *A Child's Book of True Crime* refuses reconciliatory poetics in its approach to Australia's badlands. In the novel, it is the effects and traces of damage as they work in a relational ecology, not in the symbolics of restored and continuous environmental forms, that home is negotiated rather than found and secured. While a lullaby can simultaneously speak of death in her text, the spatial spirals of vertigo express more than ontological dislocation or ruptured belonging. In the instant between falling and hitting the ground—or tumbling from childhood into an adult realm—the ground is understood in all its promiscuity:

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From miles away all the waves rocked in with their ancient come-on, that old tease: *I-might-not-break.* If the sea is a crib endlessly rocking, don't tell me the bough won't rot, baby won't fall. How can you look down without some awareness of the end's proximity, and not be slightly seduced? Close your eyes: listen to the sea. You're so near to it—the cradle and the grave—even if you never want to die. (Hooper 238)

The end's proximity is also its distance: there is no final conclusion reached. Just as the rocking cradle suggests the arrest of progress, a suspended footstep on a linear surface, the motion of sway affects amplitude in its rise and fall, which in this iconic symbol of beginnings, untethers the subject from a stable origin. Similarly, Carter's observation of a 'day-dreamer' rocking 'in the cradle of the dialectic' (*Repressed Spaces* 66) is anti-idyllic. 'Open to the sky,' he explains, the cradled figure is 'inoculated against agoraphobia...[but there is] no thesis without its shadowing antithesis' (66), no way, as the always reconfiguring dappling of shadow insists, that a moment of poise will preclude the sensations of tumbling.

On the ground upon which Kate stands, unpredictable and unsettling, ecological relations are configured which, in the singularity of experience that any approach to the past must maintain, are local and refuse transposition to another time and space. Still, a being-here that is topographically attuned still can not assume a firm place to rest. Truth, the incomplete, shock, horror and desire relate and produce each other—'If everyone told the truth there'd be no surprises', little Annaminka intuitively exclaims (Hooper 231). These relations are uncontainable either temporally or spatially, and interrupt and rearrange a nostalgic horizon, one that would imagine an 'authentic' belonging. *A Child's Book of True Crime* does not reject the notion of home or the desire of any individual to belong in

place. What is does assert are the problematics of belonging, that for non-indigenous Australians seeking a firm and 'deep' connection to the land and its metonymic associations—a holding nation and a united society—necessitate a rethinking of the discourses in which 'bad' pasts and historical, as well as contemporary environmental, damage is the only preventative to the attainment of this.

Hooper represents an ecology that refuses securing limits to the historical or environmental and in which effects radiate in unpredictable and generative ways. Generation does not mean progress in this context and works with the same unordered force of radiation. But what it does signify is the absence of endings that would render waste or 'mess' useless and out of touch even as it presences itself. Her ambiguous ground of childhood becomings provides a challenge to non-indigenous dis-ease focused upon national beginnings, and unsettlement is given an active force in the text: it is a mode of habitation, and as I have gestured, an ethical one at that, since it does not presume totalities in either knowledge or relation. In Hooper's poetics, partial and unresolved, possibilities for living with the violence or damage of the past as part of ecological existence are realised outside a dichotomy of restitution and disabling harm, and turn our attention towards the surprises, risks and unpredictable becomings that emerge from a local ground in process.

Conclusion

This thesis has sought to explore and critique representations of non-indigenous Australian belonging at a time when notions of 'crisis' and 'disorder' in national and non-indigenous identity have significant cultural currency. I have argued that a crucial distinction is identifiable in the variant poetics I have examined, informed by holistic or non-conclusive views of human ontology and the particular ideologies of self-hood, belonging and difference that inform them. This distinction is manifested in the application of metonymy or metaphor as poetic description and invocation, and in the gestures of complete or partial representation they respectively involve. By elaborating on each from an ecological viewpoint, with ecology understood as the world of reference within which the subject exists, I have considered poetics as a part of ecological constitution and evaluated the implications for representing the self in the world through metaphor and metonymy.

The significance of an ecological context is two-fold in this thesis. Firstly, environmental discourse has recently gained prominence in discussions of non-indigenous belonging in Australia, maintaining what I argue is a frequently metonymic gaze trained on the relation between undesirable environmental practices by a non-indigenous majority and their tenuous or superficial place upon Australian ground. Ironically, the potency attributed to the 'good' or 'bad' environmental behaviours of settler Australians—which can effectively make or break a workable nation—centralises them as the foundation of national and environmental health, even while their belonging is considered insufficient. Moreover, and as a tactic of countering the ontological implications of a metonymically

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understood ecology wherein everything is in its rightful and well-ordered place, I have harnessed the metaphorics of ecology and environment to address a state of perceived chaos in the nation. By so doing, the application of my critique extends beyond the limits of national discourse to consider the local, the global and the subject's ecological place without definite boundaries. Throughout the thesis I have argued for an ecology composed of relations. Thus, to consider the question of belonging, or of finding a stable ground upon which to claim 'home', shifts the focus in this debate from the uncertainties involved in non-indigenous belonging on national terms, to a consideration of human subjectivity and its being in the world. Reference to a global ecology facilitates such an analysis of non-indigenous belonging, the instability of which is connected to the perceived erosion of connections and certainties at a local level.

The limitations put upon the meaning of an environment and a healthy ecology by the discourses discussed are attributed to dominant understandings of human ontology which conceive the self as ideally contained, whole and secure. I have demonstrated the topicality of ontological security in critiques of social and cultural instability in Australia today, and traced a philosophic thread of safety predicated upon solid and firmly defined belongings that finds expression in theories of subjectivity *and* narrative. A paradigm of security, nourishment, progress and depth—in selfhood, relation and the roots that make 'home'—recurrent in discursive attempts to resolve national disunity and non-indigenous 'crisis', and thus held as the model for a certain belonging, is also present in discursive elaborations on story and narrative which, as modes of representation, are seen as being potentially restorative for a situation of social and individual dysfunction.

My primary point of dissent from the ontological and relational implications of the discourses that seek to secure a space for narrative meaning and firm belonging lies in what a text or a ground that professes to hold a subject or a collective body, as if it were one, signifies for an ecology. I have opposed the notion of 'holding' to the concept of touch and align their differences with those of metonymy and metaphor. As metonymy insists upon a representation that leaves no space for ambiguity or rupture in logical or linked relations, holding implies a subject removed from dynamic encounter, positioned as whole and certain and placed *next to* another holistic and certain entity. The presence of these entities in proximity to each other is enough, in this view, to make an ecology. What touch entails is distance as well as proximity: that is, to be in touch with the ground, a time, a story or an other, means the cohabitation of connection and disconnection, and an approach to contact with an other—as knowledge and understanding—that is always and only ever partially realised. I have considered this an ethical mode of relation, or of being in the world, and opposed this to the moral invectives for a 'good' and healthy ecology predicated on assumed, conclusive values. Metaphors are dynamic and resist conclusion, and in the view of ecology that I have argued for, ends and beginnings are never certain and stable, and thus ecological relations are dynamically charged, touching without holding, and moving as process rather than progress.

To understand an ecology as dynamically existent means that nothing can wholly exist within or outside an ecological milieu. This is pertinent to the two further concepts this

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thesis has engaged with significantly: waste and 'mess' as environmental and socio-cultural effects, and the colonial past in Australia, seen as wasted in itself. The representation of environmental damage in terms of refuse or waste, without meaning and use to a productive ecology, co-opts the language of economy with its exchange rates and value that perpetuates the metonymics of totality and order, and its implicit corollary, division and collapse. Colonialism is implicated in the degradation of the Australian landscape, and this operates with the damage considered in human cultural and social terms that is the legacy of settlement. I have elaborated the place of the past in discussions of non-indigenous belonging, and the attribution of historical 'bad things' to a rubbished national environment. Like environmental pollutants, 'bad' pasts are seen to retard a harmonious society and induce fracture, precluding a unified national state. Nikki Gemmell's *Cleave* and Thea Astley's *Drylands* were read as responding to this current condition of national 'mess', and, as I argued, each propose alternative conclusions for a rubbished environment.

While Astley and Gemmell acknowledge the imposition of structures upon the ground that erode ecological relations—colonialism, non-indigenous hegemony, technological imperialism—their depictions of environmental disorder infer an image of a holding environment that would allow 'deep' belongings and unified connections. What the poetics employed in these texts deny are dynamic and complex relations, since a waste-ridden and 'crisis'-struck nation is represented through the modalities of sharp edges and flat, immobile ground—key characteristics, as I have identified, of an insecure, incomplete ontology as it is configured in dominant cultural discourse. Flat surfaces and

sharp divides as metonymic devices assert dichotomous renderings of the world and the self: subject/object, surface/depth, exclusion/inclusion, human/nonhuman. They prohibit movement between fixed forms, and abandon waste to a useless present-absence. Further, they deny effect outside a register of growth and decay, positioning waste—as it is considered to be unproductive—out of relational encounter.

It is vital to challenge this rendering of the world which would see those elements without order and connection according to linear logic as impossibly mutable and ecologically active. Discourses that insist upon historical narratives or events—made out as waste—being overcome or transcended for the purpose of personal and national recuperation from 'crisis', imagine the effects of the past in the present as a one-way relation: solely damaging and finite for this. This thesis has not sought to demean the experiences of loss and suffering that Australia's colonial past has inflicted and continues to do so. Nor has it claimed that damage is redeemable. However, by considering the effects of damage as total and un-generative, such events or memories can be delimited, closed off and forgotten, or placed out of touch. This precludes the promiscuous character of the past with its implications for human ontology and ecological relations, wherein tensions and points of gathering and dispersing in an ecology may indicate violence and harm, but also productive frictions and meaningful transformations in an unsettled environment.

I have insisted that waste or 'mess' be elaborated within a relational ecology where they exist in both proximity and distance to the self. Necessitating constant negotiation in this

way, the instability of the past and its effects, or the refuse that is seen to litter a 'natural' environment, places meaning and truth out of reach of certitude. The world thus cannot be fixed in representation, or in the process of environmental habitation. Ideologies of restoration and healing that play upon a poetics of divided parts and renewed wholes are problematic for their foundational rhetoric, and foreclose the possibilities that I discern in effects and relations that cannot be controlled, equalised and chronologically shaped. Against a language of solidity and single origins, this thesis has elaborated an ontological model whose beginnings are unstable and for which ecological relations induce a process of becoming. Such modalities admit possibilities and the shocks and residues of encounters, and cannot hold or be held in the sense of containment. In this, nothing that the subject touches on in the world can be removed from possible meanings. 'Mess', simulacra, and the ruins of damage are lived amongst and through, and therefore have no conclusion. A landscape is alive with its potential places of gathering and (re)forming ecologies.

I have explored Chloe Hooper's *A Child's Book of True Crime* as a text that proffers just such an ecological perspective, since it represents the self in the world as being positioned by its spatial uncertainty. In this novel, an ecological subject is continually confronted by partial knowledges and meanings, and disoriented as he/she comes into touch with the discontinuous narratives of present pasts, still effective and ecologically active. Such unresolved or 'messy' events evade temporal order, and inform individual and collective becomings. Highlighting disequilibrium as a generative ontological condition necessitates a reconsideration of subjectivity, belonging and the notion of

reconciliation to which much crisis discourse in Australia is pointed. An ontology that is becoming will come into contact with the unfamiliar and the strangely familiar; it will never know a ground that is firm and assured. With an ecology in disequilibrium, where experiences of disorientation mark out an environmental place for the self, nothing is finally and wholly contained. An ontology represented as unsettled precludes a future mapped out in knowledge and a present parcelled in units of division or cohesive order, and is necessary if the divisive and inequitable structures which do lie across the surface of our living, without responsibility to an immediate environment, are to be continually questioned. The opposition I have asserted between an economy and an ecology is important in these terms, and this distinction offers much for critical work that seeks to challenge, or elaborate different understandings of, western modernity.

I stated in the Introduction that dispossession and homelessness are real and devastating social occurrences. But to poetically conceive of the world as unremittingly unsettled despite all attempts to lay down and road over passages to progress and privilege for some—with a professed view to 'all'—emphasises the unethical nature of how our living spaces are in fact ordered, and undermines the certainty with which such order is imposed. As a friend recently stated in reference to the lives that she sees through her work with homeless women and girls, this should never be accepted as 'how things are'. Despite their absence from view or consideration by the 'homed' in society, these individuals exist in relation to other individuals, and beneath the structures of their outsider-ness—and in broader terms, the powers of the global economy which dominate a capitalist system—social relations constantly reconfigure as they move on the surface in

singular ways, becoming and belonging 'as a manner of being' (Probyn, *Outside Belongings* 8) that for no one is certain. Beneath our feet, the ground is always shifting.

Thinking about belonging in the ways this thesis has explored, confronting any sense of an achievable surety of roots and depth, figures the self and its environment as always in process. Once again, with the official initiation of the second 'Gulf War', a state of 'crisis' has asserted its rhetorical power in the west, and it is important to confront the repeated invocations of this state as particular—that is, out of ecological 'normalcy'—and, moreover, rhetorically conclusive. However, to return to Modjeska's perhaps more modest concern for Australian fiction and its lack of response to an unsettled ground, I argue that response and responsibility are initiated by touch, and that for narrative to be grounded in the present, it must admit proximity and distance in its poetics. Gauge and engagement are the tactics I have embraced for the 'forecaster' who, as a maker and shaper of narrative, can relate what they themselves know, see and intuit, but, if grounded, will recognise the shadows and ambiguities of meaning and never seek to represent a secure environment, at either its beginning or end.

Fraser gestured towards the trust that is invested in the forecaster's readings. Both Dessaix and Halligan also insisted upon trust as the basis for a relation between a reader and story, while *Cleave* contrasted Snip's coming to a 'deep restful trust' (274) with her alienating and destructive experiences of western modernity. Yet neither the actuality nor the possibility of trust is excluded in an unsettled landscape, and, as this thesis has elucidated poetic modalities that relate in complexity rather than cleanly divide

ecological elements, I want to conclude with an image of an environment in which trust moves in tension, and in touch, with fear and hate. Alphonso Lingis articulates the weathers of a dynamic ecology in just these terms, where constituents ceaselessly shift, encounter each other, and transform in untimely and unquantifiable moments:

> Trust is a break, a cut made in the extending map of certainties and probabilities... Before these strangers in whom one's suspicious and anxious mind elaborates so many scheming motivations, abruptly one fixes on this one at random, and one feels trust, like a river released from a lock, swelling one's mind and launching one on the way. (Lingis 99)

This is engagement: when knowledge cannot induce revelation nor prescribe ecological outcomes, and where the partial opens up to unpredicted effects. Trust and mistrust do not exist as opposites in ecological relation, but solicit each other as responses to the world, neither ever total but always impacting. '[L]ike typhoons launched by the fluttering of a butterfly, [they] emerge and intensify with their own momentum' (101), Lingis writes; '[h]ow one feels this force!' (99).

For a nation conceived as fractured and collapsing under the stress of its own uncertainty, a poetics that *is* relational can challenge this view, reconfiguring a (post)colonial society in all its complex 'mess' and electricity. Representation is a mode of relation, and can allow the uncertainties of a dynamic ecology to be registered. Ecological responsibility, or attention to an immediate environment, is thus creative in this way as the subject allows herself to 'become engaged [in the world, or in the text] to the point of being in a sense remade' (Buell 12). This is what this thesis has set out to argue, suggesting the possibilities of an ecological unfixity that is presented through these poetics. In

ecological relations contingent upon touch, the self is confronted and affronted in a day to day space and can be thrown out of balance by the force of its proximity to others, even if it chooses to deny these presences. No longer portentous in this view, environmental constituents bend and twist around each other, and in the contemporary Australian landscape this can be perceived, inducing disconcertion, but also new meanings and ecological dimensions, bringing forth what has been conceptually put to rest, and varying the weathers of ontological making—as it is happening.

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