For Meg, Zeph, Woody and Zero
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Statement of authenticity

I, Patrick Robert Jones, hereby state that this work, Walking for food: regaining permapoesis, comprises, to the best of my knowledge, my original thought and writing, unless otherwise referenced. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for any previous degree at this or any other institution.

..............................................

SIGNATURE
Note to examiners

Dear Examiners,

Thank you for agreeing to examine my thesis.

It is perhaps more conventional for a DCA to produce a creative work (such as a volume of poetry) and an accompanying critical exegesis. Instead I’ve attempted here to produce a thesis where the exegesis and the poetry form a whole in three distinct critical-creative parts.

The exegesis appears in two forms; an introduction that precedes the poetry and the essays that follow the poetry. The thesis in simple terms aims to document our household’s transition from fossil fuel dependency. Biographical writing therefore has been essential to all three parts, which are distinct but interrelated.

Kind regards,

Patrick Jones
Abstract

Walking for food: regaining permapoesis represents the author’s household transition from fossil fuel dependency. The thesis attempts to identify the root causes of ecological damage, demonstrates energy availability as the primary shaper of all human societies, and sets out to illustrate an example of low-carbon living and making by enacting principles of permaculture.

The thesis documents both the imagining and working towards a permaculture poetic; a poetic the author has termed permapoesis – an ethic of permanent making. Jones argues that an over reliance on technology and the backgrounding of local knowledges are at the heart of such uncontroversial systemic planetary damage, where life (its subjects and its objects) is made disposable by the imperatives of industry. The aggregating and interrelated problems caused by fossil fuels, money markets, industry science, pollution idolatry, civil colonisations, arts mediatisation and ecological amnesia are described by the author using a collective noun: hypertechnocivility.

Jones argues that in order to transition to just, sane and sustainable societies, such as those found in pre-colonial Australia, people must take seriously their transitions from hypertechnocivility in an era of energy descent. The author argues that over the coming century energy descent, alongside climate change, will radically destabilise the affluent and aspiring polluting economies – the dominant cultures of hypertechnocivility.

The author argues that we have already entered a new era of expensive crude oil as we begin to deplete the last half of global oil reserves. Cheap oil has been at the centre of affluent societies for nearly a century and has driven so-called developments in food, education, art, science, sport, politics, medicine, transport, clothing, building and so forth. Cheap oil has enabled an extreme abstraction from earth wealth, processes and spirit. The author argues we must anticipate and prepare for the ramifications of energy decline and calls for an immediate transition to low-energy, low-carbon modes of life making. The author walks and talks such transition within his own household and community economies and demonstrates the possibility for living with little money. Money and the imperative for growing it, he argues, are the main drivers of ecological damage. However in making these arguments, the author avoids relying on statistics and graphs, percentages and pie charts and instead attempts to create a series of poethical wagers, to cite Joan Retallack (2003). These wagers are the biophysical works he employs to demonstrate the possibilities for transition to a moneyless poethical bioregionalism.
Glossary of terms

aboriginal/indigenous – peoples of place whose origins predate civility and are local to bioregions outside of Australia.

Aboriginal/Indigenous – peoples of place whose origins predate civility and are local to bioregions inside Australia.

accountable – those who are responsible, especially to land, resources and others.

allopoetic – a biological term for development that is organised by external entities.

anthropocene – a geological term representing industrialised humans’ impact on Earth.

autonomous – an alternative term for ‘wild’; uncultivated, self-governing and seeding.

autopoetic – a biological term for activity or development organised by local entities.

applied ecology – the mimicking of ecological functioning by humans.

broad self-interest – the marriage of individual desire with societal and generational accountability.

cheap crude oil – the relatively cheap extraction of the first half of the world’s oil supply.

civil – thought, activity, development and technology engineered by urbanised peoples.

creaturely – instinctive, intuitive and animalistic characteristics.

damage – shorthand for the negative effects caused by hypertechnocivility (see below).

doing-saying – the marriage of theory and practice.

doublewhiteAustralialinepolicy – the continuous technological and political incursion into Aboriginal life and territory.

damage – shorthand for the negative effects caused by hypertechnocivility (see below).

eductive – those who extract resources without being able to replenish them.

generative – those whose resources are renewable and managed accordingly.

geopoetic – earth making.

hypertechnocivility – extreme or intensive technological urbanisation.

industry science (shareholder science) – science funded by and dictated to by the imperatives of industry and the market.

lean logic – efficient, non-polluting, non-excessive and non-wasteful living.

locasphere – one’s local biosphere and food commons where renewable resources are drawn from and stewardship ethics are enacted.

locavore – the practice of eating only what lives and grows in one’s locasphere.
mediated – those who are highly abstracted, rarefied or acculturated by intensive exposure to images, media, symbols, idols and simulations.

more-than-human – representing all life, not just human.

narrow self-interest – the foregrounding of individual desire with little regard for societal or generational accountability.

non-monetary – all economic exchange that does not involve money.

permaculture (permie) – the portmanteau for permanent culture, especially as it applies to permanent agriculture or those (permies) who depend upon and steward perennial ecologies for their fibre, food, medicine, fodder and fuel.

permaPOESIS – the portmanteau for permanent making; making that comes from permaculture living practices.

poethics – a making ethics enacted by doing-saying.

pollution ideology – the unchecked belief that polluting technologies and development are more beneficial than the damage they cause.

progress-capitalism – an ideology based on the perceived need to grow money, technics, development and privatisation regardless of what the land can support.

privatisation – private and excluding relations, especially as they apply to land and resources.

psychoecology – the psychological acculturation of ecological functioning.

sensible – thought and activity that is inclusive of all the senses.

slow-text – writing that is slowed by graphic interference and is therefore difficult for the eye to speedily consume.

social warming – the broadening of social relations and community resilience in an era affected by extreme weather events and other catastrophes due to anthropogenic global warming.

succession – an ecological term for successive biological development.

symbolic culture – culture that is dominated by symbols and symbolism. See mediated.

technoculture – culture that is dominated by technology. See hypertechnocivility.

the commons – a variation on the English legal term The Commons, referring to the free use of public land and resources.

the market – an economic term for the global monetised market place.

world’s worlds or worlds of the world – a term used to stress diverse life, intelligences and realities, and to resist one-world reductionism.
While few environmental writers or ecocritics would be prepared to join Jones and his family in this radical experiment, most would agree that unless our words, however artfully crafted, emotionally compelling or intellectually challenging, get linked to deeds, ecopoetics might amount to little more than ‘fiddling while Rome burns’.

Fig. 1. Wheel of progress capitalism, 2011
Preface

Those of us in affluent countries forget that life is lived on land and because of land; we forget our eyes are set forward as ecological predators, mammalian hunters, gardeners and foragers who are also from time to time transformed into ecological prey. We forget human wealth is not the accumulation of abstract figures and derivatives that stringline across digital screens in the heart of cities and banner across the bottom of television screens in our lounge rooms. This is imagined, temporary wealth. This is momentarily cooking the books. Monetary economics is a phantasm of symbols curated by anthropocentric salesmen and women. Wealth, in real terms, is the land’s capacity to give forth. Abstract figures and derivatives have been presented to us as wealth, but today they really represent the debts of ecological overshoot. The physical effects of such debts have accrued slowly from the first organisational systems developed in the earliest cities. Aggregating abstraction is what history has witnessed and recorded since the advent of symbolic life, but none so monumentally as during the last three centuries, and none so aggressively as during the past three decades.

Our membership “in the most destructive culture ever to exist”1 has required we make a significant shift from values of reciprocity and cohabitation to those of gated and private existence. Fences divide, leaf litters are raked and burned, monocultural lawns are sprayed with poisons, centralised media dictate, children’s toys come stained with far away suffering, polluting cars and trucks complete the required multiplicity of our resource transits. Our food, for the most part, is toxic and innutritious.

Year after year we are further mediated by interrupting devices and simulated smogs. We become something else entirely than the animals we were born. Increasingly our membership in the culture disallows us from entering the shrinking damp carnal lands of fern and frog. In such shrinking lands decay is always falling back into life. But not so with our culture, “Cartesian mastery brings industry science’s objective violence into line, making it a well-controlled strategy. Our fundamental relationship with objects comes down to war and property.”2 Today we don’t personally have to enact violence to be wholly destructive. The damage we cause in the way we live is nearly always at arm’s length and away from view. The results of such unaccountable harm are many and varied, and almost always linked to monetary exchange. Household cleaning products, toxic toiletries, polyurethane treated timber, Styrofoam packed foods, lab-engineered preservatives, a plethora of pesticides, caffeinated sugar drinks, air conditioning, brominated flame-retardants in children’s clothing, poisons in breast milk, pornofication
of child consumerables made in unknowable sweatshops, institutionalised schooling and the pathologising of young people considered not normal, the systemic acceptance of anthropogenic pollution as unapologetically our way of life.

“But who has made the decision that sets in motion these chains of poisonings, this ever-widening wave of death that spreads out, like ripples when a pebble is dropped into a still pond?” Our membership in the most destructive culture ever to exist demands we hand over our power to allopoetical players, those who are external to our local communities, and exchange it for a smorgasbord of largely unnecessary choices that makes complex the illusion that we are beyond ourselves, beyond the local, that our technologies make us other than animal, other than biological, other than ecological beings of place. Our membership demands we remain globalised technocults, hi-tech bystanders who defend technology as neutral or apolitical, while at the same time ceasing to defend what we once loved and what brings us love. But our war against the land is of course a colossal assault against ourselves as much as every thing and every body else. Our technologies are not neutral; they’re strategic in creating such systemic unrest, such unrelenting noise, such loveless damage and such permanent war. Without which there would be no demand to grow more technics, more markets, more cities and more money.

Throughout these pages I will argue that what we consume and load into our bodies determines precisely how we behave in the world. That what we consume and how we go about getting these things masks our violence and forms our politics, even if our politics amounts to nothing more than going along with the dominant ideology – a two-party progress-capitalism. Narrow self-interest is systemic in the most destructive culture ever to exist, but it is also clear that most of us know this way of life is not working. It’s just in countries like Australia our affluence often gets in the way of our ethics and our politics. This in part is what makes us such unprecedented polluters and a culture committed to enacting damage.

Is it possible to be responsible again, responsive, sensing, accountable beings of place? If we know deep down that the false freedoms of progress-capitalism ascribed to we, the world’s rich polluters, are killing us slowly (and not so slowly) and taking so much life with us, how then can we opt out of the membership that we’ve been given at birth, or at least since school? This thesis attempts to respond to these questions; attempts to demonstrate that ordinary life need not engage with such blind violence and asks whether it is possible to live more accountably again, contiguous with the uncivil laws of our fellow earth communities.
Fig 2. Wheel of ecological culture, 2011
Life occurred in and around the writing of these essays and poems – with children, loved ones, friends, other animals, mushrooms, plants and the town’s community running through every page and thought – interrupting, inspiring and expanding the consciousness of the text. This was not some exclusively holed up exercise of lonely intellectual maledom; this work does not carry on that long established tradition of isolation and reification. It does not hold writing and the writer to be sacred cows – elevated, hierarchical, removed.

Some will think I’ve tried to do too much here, cover too much ground; that my arguments are too broad and not detailed enough. But in my defence, in these essays and poems I’ve attempted to capture a moment spanning the past several years of our household’s transition from an almost total reliance on fossil fuels to a more limited one where industrial technologies are increasingly backgrounded. The broad and at times overwhelming nature of reforming an ecological, non-monetary economics of the home place and of the nearby community demands that we think again more generally and act again more generatively. It demands we begin to regain our lost aboriginal intelligences, to remake ourselves again as applied ecologists, unschooled and uncivilised in western art and industry. This deliberate move from specialisation, industrialisation and the market is part of the process of transition to localism, or what we call in the community in which I live, relocalisation. Food is central to relocalisation. Food and energy produced off the fossil fuel grids and sensed and walked for close to home are essentially what this work is about. My aim here is to demonstrate a model of poethical living based on permaculture principles and a low-energy commonsense that is very old, but no longer very common. This thesis, amid a community of associated thought, is essentially about walking for food and resensing again what it is to be a creature of place. Such a subject must include all the worlds of the world; it must be broad ranging, it must cover considerable territory, and it must compost specialisation and examine widely.

The writers and thinkers I refer to throughout the text are not necessarily canonised scholars. Rather, I’ve tended to draw on fellow writers who do not take for granted their fuel for poesis, the foods sitting in their refrigerators. And in some cases writers who already live without a fridge. Many of my references throughout therefore have been those who have been imagining how to live again with limits and lean logic, to cite David Fleming (2011). This is not simplistic or reductionist logic, rather logic that understands limits. Society’s fossil fuelled complexity has little to do with human brilliance, but instead immeasurable narrow self-interest. What I want to resense in these poems and essays are the possibilities for re-engagement with human intelligences that are biodiverse, while at the same time, well versed in limits and the land’s capacity to give, to love, to bear forth gifts of non-
monetary exchange and value; “to abide in and to live from some chosen and cherished small place”, where allegiance to it “is not a conclusion but the beginning of thought.”

Both the essays and the poems in this thesis follow similar subjects. However the poems are for readers who better come to the world’s worlds in song and in play, and the essays are for those who better come to these ideas resourcefully and pragmatically. Again, I’ve attempted to create a marriage rather than a duality between the pragmatic and the utopian; between the exegesis and the creative. I am a reader who falls between the two and therefore it has been necessary to produce a work that entertains more than just one expression.

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Notes
4. Joan Retallack conceived the idea of poethics, a merger of ethics and poetics, in her seminal work *How To Do Things With Words*, Sun & Moon Classics 1998.
5. David Holmgren, the co-originator of the Permaculture concept, is often asked whether permaculture is just commonsense, to which his standard reply is: “Yes, but it is sense that is no longer common”.
Walking for food: regaining permapoiesis

Part 1: Introduction
No, no, no sickness really, only clean one – because they lived on wild honey and meat – they have been living on bush tucker – nothing – no tea, no sugar, no ice-cream or lollies, nothing – only been living on bush honey, bush tomatoes, bush raisins, edible seeds and grass seeds – any kind of seeds – they lived on yams – no sickness – nothing, all good – nothing, they were good living in them days – they only got sick from a cold – only catching a cold, that’s all – no more – no sickness, nothing – because they living on different food – yeah, different food bush tucker...

Introduction

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morEls,
coprini.

not Just hunter
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ailanthus,
cutting down
ailanthus.'

This work begins and ends with a critique of writing that expresses a broader mistrust I have for mediated life and which, in turn, questions whether it is such life – life of the city; formed by civility – that gives way to the extensive damage that today is so commonplace.

The Scottish author Keith Gray (2013), discussing his teenage years with students at a youth literature event held at the State Library of Victoria, said: “I didn’t realise what a book could do for you – it’s an amazing piece of technology.” Several months later this statement was printed prominently at the top right of a full-colour page in the glossy SLV News. The quote floats across the surface of a photograph showing a group of well-groomed smiling school children that are presumably listening to Gray’s keynote address. The photographer has focused in on two children in particular whose sparkling uniforms, skin, teeth and hair all glow with the combination of personal cleaning products, seductive camera filters and photo-manipulating software. The resources, synthetic chemicals and indeed environmental damage required to produce such mediatised perfection are of course completely disappeared from view. Gray’s statement about what a book can do for you, alongside the perfect image of affluent, attractive young white people going through their civilising process, all seated in rows of comfortable padded chairs in a climate-controlled lecture hall, is an implicit piece of propaganda. Writing is a trace of what has been so gravely lost, a remnant of the campfire, of lying on our elbows after a good meal listening to the elders speak and sing of the old people, of sharing knowledge of the food just gathered and consumed, the stickiness of meat and root on soiled fingers, of making sense and performing life with language, with song, circulating narratives deep-rooted in home place, on ground.
With writing we are not often listening together, we are more often than not alone employing institutional literacy to assist us with our aggregating estrangement. The successful author, Gray, along with millions of artists worldwide, flies around the planet promulgating the myth of civil literacy, knowing but conveniently forgetting that this kind of activity is foremost a thing of damage. Such propaganda belongs to an ideology that makes the arrogant conclusion literacy can only improve life. This conceit has grave consequences.

The American media scholar Thomas De Zengotita (2005) writes, “[s]cratch an educational philosophy and you’ll uncover a political scheme. Every time.” Writing, as the central pillar to formal schooling, only ever expresses the politics of the author regardless of the subject being expressed. The fridge, the floor, the desk, the chair, the computer, the heating, the cooling, the apparel and the motorised transport of the writer are all beneath and across the surface of the writing as conceits of privilege, hierarchy and estrangement. This work is no different, except that it recognises the problem of writing and puts it in the foreground as an alert to the reader: *you are entering colonised territory*. And it is colonised, and by extension traumatised, territory from which I write – Jaara country – where the oral-ecological culture was once performed across six seasons and the language was Djadjawurrung and never written down.

Writing is an instrument of civility and is used as a weapon of civility’s accruing colonisations, which falsely crusade literacy as *poverty busting* despite the obvious fact that civility has created poverty – hunger, famine, disease, deprivation and division – in the first place. This text is unavoidably an attribute of colonisation, as is all writing in Australia. There is no post-colonial written text and never will be, but this statement doesn’t exclude a post-colonial future, which must necessarily include a return to oral-ecological expressions and forms. With such strong suspicions concerning writing it may seem odd for me to *write down* this work. But if I am to be pragmatic, culturally we’re still too far away from being able to *do* without writing again. Something as central as literacy cannot just be dropped overnight. As long as my writing does not mask the fact that this is a public relations project for foregrounding ecological intelligences and backgrounding technocivility then I will continue to employ it for the purposes of this work. This writing, therefore, should simply be understood as impermanent technology used for the transmission of ecological transition with a view to an eventual return to oral society. I haven’t written this thesis to trek deeper into literary reification, sedentism and artful aloneness, but rather navigate points for trekking back to or remodelling human societies that were not so mediated, not so chronically unsustainable and damaging, and attempt to understand how we might reclaim again such unwritten intelligence.
Food, I have come to realise, is essential for such work; it is a thing of performance, of blood and living, soil and community, of biological, chemical and physical relationships, of energy. It determines what we do and what we say. It is a fundamental thing of life, the eternal exchange of matter from one form to another. Food gives life and performs nurture as nutrition, medicine and insight. Or at least it once did. Today these relationships of ecological exchange have been degraded. Food now, for the most part, is a machine of pollution, a constant interruption to ecological processes, a perversion of life and death. This work emphatically attempts to redress this predicament – not with graphs, percentages and pie charts but foremost with action and deeds that have then been recorded here in symbolic letters that accumulate into simple representations of biophysically claimed thought – walking, gardening, foraging and hunting it into existence. Some of the letters in the work are jumping around, as you will see later, seemingly uncontainable contiguous with the intentions of the text. But most follow the conventions of systemic agriculture and appear as legible, uniformed rows of printed type, ploughed through or cut into the monological environment of the white page, the politics of which I will return to.

Over the past several years my family and I have been eating food sourced on foot or by bike from roadside plants, community gardens, marginal forests, lakes, seas, creeks and our home produce garden. We live in Daylesford, a small cool climate town that is situated on the backbone of the Great Dividing Range in Central Victoria. We've been actively generating a more immediate, intimate and slowed understanding of what is local and expanding our metabolic, endosomatic practice of locavorism. While for me personally this way of life stems from an intuitive childhood ontology, which sprung from an environment of creatures and plants, hills and small creeks, it resurfaced again sharply from something a travelling Cuban permaculturalist, Roberto Perez, spoke about in our community’s town hall a number of years ago. I was in my mid-thirties when he visited and at the time I was beginning to understand what it was that I had been missing from my childhood, which, at least in my revision, and before school sport and later middle-class punk culture took me away from it, I spent roaming the blackberry and honeysuckle infested banks of the Mittagong Creek hauling in great quantities of yabbies, covered head to toe in muddy sediments, sharpening spears of willow with blunt fishing knifes, lighting small fires, which would be sat close to with neighbourhood friends smoking bark cigarettes.

After Perez’s visit I had started to sense how I could possibly regain such a perceived way of being as an adult, and became increasingly interested in permaculture utopianism. “The food has to be walking distance”, said Perez, the very definition of locavorism. I now
favour, and what he meant was that for Cuba in the early 1990s the exosomatic crude oil ideology had become bankrupt following the fall of the Soviet Union. More than two decades later Perez, ironically yet mindfully, was travelling the world on the last drops of cheap crude oil alerting us to Cuba’s predicament, when the oil taps were virtually turned off overnight. He spoke of the many positive responses and experiments that were happening in his country, but nonetheless warned us that with peaking resources from global fish stocks to mined phosphates, essential for industrial agriculture, the world’s oily affluent will soon need to live very differently, less abstracted from land—“soil not oil”, to cite the Indian ecological philosopher and food activist, Vandana Shiva (2008).

For six years now my family and I have boycotted supermarkets and replaced much of this grand dependency on crude oil, petrochemicals, packaging and multi-fuelled technologies with foods that are locally obtained by foot and forest gardened. Our move from a high dependency on what I call hypertechnocivilisation, or what is more often simply labelled late industrialism, to a far greater dependency on ecological function has been a gradual transition and one with no certain end in sight. This deliberate step-by-step transition has become a slow unearthing of what food and other energy is available in our immediate environment and therefore what diverse ecological communities exist here. Our household’s transition has so far been framed by the question: how can we build seasonal resilience to peaking resources, failing monetary economies and climate change while attending to the blind violences, pollutions and unjust footprints of hypertechnocivilisation?

This work in part attempts to track some of the movements and discoveries we’ve made as a family within a broader transitioning community over the past several years, moving from modalities of damage towards a pragmatic poethics, to cite poet and scholar, Joan Retallack (1998) – a making ethics. I have taken poethics here to mean a generative ethics, an ethics that composts disposability and aims to reinstate life as continuously present, adaptable performances of permanence. Food, we’ve come to understand, in community and with a significant global cohort, is not just a thing to marvel at or a satiate to quell hunger, but a potent political opposition to corporate-consumer disposability and damage. I’ve come to think that those silent or ignorant about the political agency of food are either complicit with or witless to those multinational companies that aim to so fully control the world’s food markets and lessen our health and resilience for monetary profit. Such complicity, ignorance and control must be challenged, not necessarily just in protest and critique, although these things are important, but more importantly by living deeds – living deeds that can transform generationally into ecological culture.
The food we have been consuming as a family and how we have been collecting or generating it has been and continues to be a process of unmasking our civil violences. This is, in part, an attempt to reappear and better understand the local Jaara peoples’ land management strategies, especially as they apply to food and energy sources and relationships to home place through broad self-interested caretaking. This is a difficult task as much of this oral knowledge and culture has been destroyed by civil imperatives. Jaara food came from loved land that nurtured and instructed. Our household calls this food the sensible fuels of permanent culture. Another significant influence that has helped us dampen down hypertechnocivility and its profit-driven consumption within our household economics is permaculture relocalisation. Here local food is grown as part of a process of ecological and social repair and regeneration, contiguous with Aboriginal peoples’ stewardship of perennial ecologies. Monetised economics doesn’t dominate the process. In our local sphere, or what I have come to call our locasphere, this food includes some Jaara bush tucker, newly naturalised floras known to some as agricultural weeds, autonomous mushrooms, perennial and annual fruits, herbs and vegetables from our garden or one of the local community gardens, grains from small local farms, our garden chickens, ducks and rabbits, occasionally autonomous animals that we hunt for or trap, and raw milk from nearby garden goats and cows. The supply of these foods is irregular and uncertain and so fermentation and preservation have become important; in fact little in our diet is absolutely guaranteed but such uncertainty becomes more comfortable as our knowledge increases and diversifies and we become more intelligent to local, seasonal availability. To supplement this food we still buy a small amount of transported agricultural product from further afield, but mostly we eat fruits and vegetables that we garden, hunt or forage for, or know the nearby earthy origins of how they were produced.

But our household is not operating in a vacuum. Our transition in relocalising our food and energy resources, and addressing the degree to which our participation in hypertechnocivilisation degrades the environments that make life possible, is paralleled by numerous community friends and peers whose transitions have also begun. Because of the Internet, community friends are also far away virtual friends and knowledges are shared digitally across regions and continents as gifts while there is still the infrastructure, albeit polluting, exploitative and increasingly mass controlling, to do so. Whereas the Internet itself is a useful tool for transition from civil affluence and damage towards a leaner logic, mainly because knowledges lost like skinning a rabbit or brushtail possum or turning hawthorn berries into fruit leather can be quickly reclaimed, I can’t see it featuring in the long-term (post-pollution, post-hypertechnocivilian) future. The Internet and its associated hardwares are so dependent on non-renewable fossil energy infrastructure and other mined
materials it is fantastical and indeed foolish to believe it will always be around. Using the Internet as a tool to transition away from hypertechnocivility, rather than to carry on with the myth of permanent progress, is an important mental shift and the same can be applied to all technologies, including writing. The question I believe we continually need to ask is whether a given tool is helping us move towards ecological culture or whether it is keeping us attached to pollution ideology?

**Permaculture**

Permaculture in its most basic definition can be understood as applied ecology. In the early 1970s in Hobart, at the time of the first global oil crisis, the co-originators of permaculture, David Holmgren and Bill Mollison, devised design strategies for human settlements that drew on the collective intelligence of perennial ecologies and the indigenous-agrarian peoples of place who lived with and imbibed this intelligence. For a growing many, but not exclusive to all transitioning households and communities, permaculture acts as a framework for life beyond pollution, beyond affluence and acute anthropocentricism. It demonstrates how to regain low-tech, low-carbon, low-mediated, lean ways of living where imported resources are increasingly limited and more-than-human patterns of existence are better understood and applied. Permaculture attempts to prepare people for an inevitable energy descent and climate uncertain future.

In a recent conversation I had with David Holmgren, a friend who lives in the same community, I asked him what the models for permaculture have been:

...cultures of place that have persisted over long periods. These are primarily indigenous and long established agrarian societies that have worked within those limits, at least for very long periods of time without a constant growth necessity, and therefore without catastrophic collapses.

It was in learning Holmgren's principles of permaculture – creatively use and respond to change, produce no waste, use and value diversity, integrate rather than segregate, apply self-regulation and accept feedback, use edges and value the marginal, etc. – that I began to realise how a low-mediated, low-tooled foraging, hunting, gardening culture could be reclaimed. I sense that a long time ago my ancestors lived well on the land and to have done this they must have had exceptional knowledges. Knowledge about plants and geology, water and soils, cooking and preparing food, about weather patterns and their creaturely others. Knowledges that are all but lost today, replaced or disappeared by an unprecedented reliance upon technology.
Permaculture is one of the most significant and pragmatic approaches to tackling food supply shortages, food autonomy and health, and food related environmental crises, as combined activities of everyday life. In a permaculture, abundant food can be grown on a small scale while repairing soil ecologies and allowing for a great diversity of species to flourish. This can be done in forests, deserts, grasslands and backyards, as well as on rooftops and balcony gardens. The future is millions of little permacultures, all adaptable, nuanced, diverse and informally interlinked, not five or six global chemical and seed companies owning and controlling the rights to and methods of the world’s food supply. Permaculture suggests we have to make the choice between these two realities now: either we support one big profit-driven and polluting solution to ecological overshoot that will only create more damage and injustice using up the last of the world’s fossil fuels, or we enact many varied poethical responses, flexible and adaptable to change.

Permaculture has clear social principles, rooted in universal ethics of care and communion with others; it is concerned with gift economies and broad self-interest, community resilience and adaptability. I wish for these poems and essays to be regarded within a permacultural lineage of slow and sustained transition from hypertechnocivility to rebuilding ecological culture. This monumental project may take many generations, but it may also have to be more immediate in response to sudden and violent collapse, depending on the variable speeds of climate, economic and energy transformations. But be it rapid or slow change, those who will adapt more successfully are those who are beginning or have already begun to make their transition away from civility’s damages. Despite the overwhelming trend towards greater urbanisation, it seems evident that being caught up in such development makes people extremely vulnerable to what lies ahead.

But not all environmentalists believe that permaculture equates to sound environmental responses to global predicaments. Permaculture has been labelled as an ideology that allows for the dissemination of weed species. Whereas this is mostly untrue, permaculture does not hate weeds or ferals; instead permaculture refuses to rule out weed or feral species as edible-medicinal and beneficial resources in an era of falling affluence and fossil fuel consumption. Pests, ferals and weeds are all figments of the prejudices of anthropocentric agriculture, and by extension civility. Aboriginal people are much better at accepting more-than-human newcomers. Whereas permaculturalists also attempt to find common ground, saying it is far better to eat weeds and extract their local medicines than spray them with toxic chemicals or bulldoze them with diesel, mainstream environmentalists form opinions about weeds outside of their metabolical needs. In other words they might say “save the trees, save the whales, save the climate”, but in the next
moment head along to the supermarket to do their shopping. This is the very opposite of sensing the world as caretakers who live and eat directly from a loved home place and who can see the effects of their activities upon it.

One significant and worthy (albeit indirect) critique of permaculture appears in Adam Curtis’ provocative documentary series *All watched over by machines of loving grace* (2011). In the second episode of the series titled *The Use and Abuse of Vegetational Concepts*, Curtis argues against the reductionist tendencies of systems thinking forwarded by early systems theorists and cyberneticists such as Arthur Tansley, Jay Forrester, Howard T. Odum and Eugene Odum. The Odum brothers had an influence in early permaculture design thinking, particularly in reducing an ecology to a system (ecosystem), much like a machine. In a recent conversation I had with Holmgren about Curtis’ critique we both agreed this sort of criticism was indeed helpful to permaculture’s maturing.

To make a permaculture doesn’t foremost require money, but rather passed on knowledges and simple tools. This is not to say permies don’t engage in technology, monetary economics and private property. Rather there is an abiding pragmatism that doubles with permaculture utopianism, a pragmatism keen to begin work even if the political-ideological arena is anything but desirable or perfect. Permaculture values ecological knowledge over technics, industry and privatisation. This is a significant cultural shift, and one that brings us closer to our ancestors, those who engaged in biophysical living and making and not in systemic damage.

**Permapoesis**

Never have the structures of establishment power exhibited so much hubris and superficial confidence and yet been so porous to corrosive influence, subversion and overturning. More than ever before, the task is to create the alternative possibilities rather than battering at the ramparts demanding change. The revolution in the mainstream is coming fast enough. The quality of that revolution will be determined by the diversity of living and working models that we have the energy and vision to create. The action is at the edge.

Whereas permaculture is a more-than-human human response to the aggregating problems of industrialised food and energy, my portmanteau *permapoesis* – which simply implies permanent making – is a response to what I have perceived as hypertechnocivility’s intellectual crisis. Permapoesis is a reclaiming of locavore sensibilities; a poetic of nearness; an economics of material accountability; an ethic of walking for food where thought is
determined or generated through action, experimentation and pragmatic biophysical engagement with one’s locasphere. There can be no thought without food and no long-term food supply without soils teeming with life. Poetry, philosophy and ethics’ relationship to the soil and to the biosphere more broadly should therefore be unambiguous. So why isn’t this the case? That which truly supports us – microbial life in the soil, plant and animal life across the biosphere – is barely touched upon in western schools, and our almost total ignorance of mycelium and how it makes, unmakes and shapes terrestrial and subterrestrial life goes some way to demonstrating this. As Vandana Shiva states: “[t]he millions of organisms found in soil are the source of its fertility” and, by this generous and generative work (including mycoremediation) our health, wealth and well being. So why is it that few western scholars, thinkers, artists or schools have treated these relationships seriously, if at all – the relationship between soil and endosomatic or metabolic energy, the relationship between ecological damage and foregrounding technology and narrow self-interest?

The practice of permapoesis therefore rejects formal schooling, which aids mental affliction through the promotion of hierarchical social and production systems that are divorced from soil and land knowledges. Formal schooling, which is itself a thing of industrialisation, entrenches an ideology of ecological divorce where humans believe they are somehow exempt from biospheric functioning. Informal education (and I say this from the perspective of a home-educator parent) that demonstrates a clear movement away from such division and hierarchy better enables the transition to ecological culture, where food, knowledge, skills and tools are each part of a contiguous approach to land stewardship and community well being. In a newly founded school in Mexico “students… participate both in the school and in the daily life of the community. Participants will cut wood, work in the cornfields and cook and eat...” This is a model for land-informing education where resource accountability and autonomy are central to its ethics and politics. Similarly, our household belongs to a home-educators’ network. Many of us are involved with community food production and permaculture relocalisation. We come together weekly for various social activities and independently we guide our children to learn through their own interests and our adult knowledges. My teaching method is simply walking for food, where learning and teaching are contiguous and relational and passed on both orally and biophysically, hand to mouth. Home-education involves consuming foraged dandelion roots and preparing them as a vegetable, a coffee or as a health tonic. By digging them up we know that their taproots bore down through the clays, opening up compacted and disturbed ground, creating conduits for minerals and water, mycelium and a host of microbiologies to join the earthworms and give life to the soil and by extension
the creaturely life that lives upon it. A highly mediated, urban existence cancels out such opportunities for resource gathering and ecological understanding; it assumes that our food and other energies are already a given and disappears the systemic damage many of these resources cause through their industrial production.

Through developing processes of permapoesis I recognise indigenous intelligences (people not driven by technics but rather by the logic and spirit of country) as the means for future ecological functioning – reclaiming the sensuous, uncertain and intimate, composting anthropocentrism, moving from agriculture’s fences, chemicals and motors to more nuanced modes of existence such as foraging, gardening and hunting, by foot. The fullest embodiment of permapoesis is walking for food where we are literally bathed in the environment that nurtures us, which teaches us.

**Ecology without frames**

Urbanisation provides a context for life that begins with the built environment – footpath, floorboard, carpet, chair, air conditioner – and ends in aggregating symbols and simulations of what we ecologically estranged peoples call nature or landscape. These two words do not belong to lexicons of permanent peoples of place; they belong to an estranged and violent language that is always referring to somewhere else, that is away from the very here of now. The common sentence, *when I go out into nature and experience the landscape I feel...* needs to be replaced with a deeply breathed creaturely utterance of ground knowingness. We need an “ecology without nature”, to cite Timothy Morton (2009) and an ecology without landscape. Framed vistas, picture postcards, scaped (escaped) lands don’t feature in permanent cultures.

Today, the mediatisation of life through frames of glass – cars, televisions, buildings, planes, trains, binoculars, microscopes, films and other photographic media such as blogs, websites and phone apps – has momentarily enabled us limitless opportunities and choices to invent, revise or reinvent our lives. For only a handful of centuries we have been able to peer through glass into a shop window and admire the little worlds of consumable delights that seductively blink back at us, that stimulate our desires for greater and greater material improvements. Glass – made by melting (with industrial furnaces) silica sand (a component of soil) – is an essential technic for the development of mediated life. Glass forms an important part of the technical heritage for life becoming lifestyle and land becoming landscape. Such common words of our culture are intentionally dismissed from these pages, as are (mostly) the words wild and nature (unless I’m quoting someone else) as
they too represent a language of separation, of civil enculturation. However, I recognise this work can’t escape all such civilising imperatives. I am currently using one of civility’s most mediating tools – printed type – and sitting sedately on a chair doing so.

It’s as though we’ve been unable to witness our own separating lineage, or at least respond to it with any clarity or force. Was it not that history and literature were supposed to have been civility’s checks and balances? Have they not become, like industry science, more agents for the monetised economy, for estranged production and work? “Permanent innovation” involves permanent “techno-scientific war” to cite French thinker and former armed burglar, Bernard Stiegler (1994), and creative and scholarly work also falls under the demanding rubric of civil newness, or what I call innovation anxiety, as a chief cultural imperative. Stiegler elucidates the unholy merger of science and industry in the acclaimed Australian film *The Ister* (2004). He states that the classical Greeks warned against the impoverishment of science by industry, but from the Renaissance on, with the formation of the bourgeoisie, this warning increasingly fell on deaf ears. The world became framed, in perspective. In *The Ister* Stiegler problematises for the west the Prometheus-Epimetheus doubling of mastery and amnesia, Prometheus being the god of mastery and memory (technics) and Epimetheus, his twin brother, the god of the fault of forgetting (amnesia). These titan twins still affect our relationship to land in a very significant way. Mastery of the land is combined with forgetting what it can actually support, what it can recharge and how it can perform permanently. Civil culture is always forgetting where the real basis of its wealth is, and civil art is the mediator of such mastery and forgetfulness. But it is industry-directed science that has raced us along at terrifying speed into a culture of systemic damage, jamming us with the next great progress, toy, entertainment or “technological rupture”, to cite French historian Bertrand Gille (1962). Amity is redundant under such fire and fury; reflection is difficult with such noise and permanent warfare or incomparable affluence and abstraction. We civil forget that we too are descendants of land-accountable peoples that we were once highly knowledgeable peoples of place who were accountable to our local land and its many communities, and we were once ecologists without frames.

We civil subjects have toiled on supported by agricultural apparatuses from the distancing vantages of the metropolises, constructing the necessary tools to cope with aggregating alienation, disease and mental affliction. There must also be an exchange from damaged soils and damaged guts to damaged minds. Our stomach flora has been assaulted by hypertechnocivility; the accruing pesticides of soil now transform inside us. Such violence caused to country and body doesn’t just evaporate. The inflammations and diseases caused by our poisons now promulgate generation after generation in ways we
may never fully understand and which will have lasting consequences regardless of how blind, or seemingly robust, we are to them. Two Canadian researchers Rick Smith and Bruce Lourie (2009) argue that, “[a]t this moment in history, the image conjured up by the word ‘pollution’ is just as properly an innocent rubber duck as it is a giant smokestack.” What is left that isn’t damage and poison?

**Soil life**

Soil is the unequivocal basis for the land’s wealth and health and therefore the basis for our lives and yet it is always somewhere else, disappeared from view and almost never celebrated. Increasingly, as we have left the soil and its fruits for others to tend, private interests have stepped in. This is the long lineage of damage enacted by civility’s monological food and energy resource schemes that span from the earliest civilisations to today’s global hypertechnocivilisation. All city-based cultures have come and gone, as ours will too. They are the definition of impermanence. Collapse is inevitable when a culture becomes so abstracted that it forgets the basis of its wealth and health. Today, whole islands have been levelled to mine agricultural superphosphates that are required to ‘fix’ the impoverished soils of industrialised food supply; bloody oil wars have been fought to supply tractors, pesticides, transport and food packaging plastics; industrialised food has created widespread diabetes, obesity and a plethora of other diet related diseases; extreme cruelty and systemic blind violence continue to be committed on already enslaved animals; degraded lands, polluted oceans and rivers have proliferated, and, as a result of all this estranged and monetised development, aggregating anthropogenic greenhouse gases are destabilising the planet’s climate. This lineage of human manufactured damage, of slavery, extinction and pollution, must be attended to if we are to reinstate ourselves as intelligent animals and begin to perform as such.

The last sentence from my book *A Free-dragging Manifesto* (2008) reads: “Lying on the bitumen our hands in the soil turn it over.” The line predetermines the onerous task of unmasking, peeling back and restoring the compacted layers of industrial modernity, its lawful privatisations, bombings and civil intransigences to again engage with the soil and the making it gives forth. One specific imperative for this thesis is to contribute to such unmasking and to the urgent repairs of such woeful disjointedness. I have tried to set the scope for beginning to sense what permapoesis might look like; composting mental affliction, composting the witless hatred of the biosphere enacted by city living. Industrial civility’s educational schemes, unjust and polluting development and profit-directed industry science all combine to determine that we follow a dominant ideology
centred on damage. This ideology proliferates from home life to school to workplace to retirement village. We then box up or burn our dead so that even our final moment is an act of monetised pollution, of carbon or methane emissions. We could be composted ceremoniously and aerobically, returning nitrogen and carbon and other beneficial compounds to ground, but instead, even in death, we don't allow the soil, its organic matter and its earthly communities to touch us and make us into more dynamic life. We interrupt even this most sacred of biological processes.

At the other end of the spectrum children are no longer allowed to be very physical or get very dirty and some who are suffering the consequences of such restrictions are even sold dirt pills to try and compensate for the loss of such bacterial health. Increasingly hand sanitisers are used on and around babies and children, weakening their immunity and killing off the great majority of beneficial microbes that cause no harm to humans but have key ecological roles across more-than-human life. Such an absurd ideology has its origins in the sanitary engineering feats of early industrialisation. It sells the progress–capitalist propaganda that industrial modernity is the saviour of our health. But the diseases and epidemics born in the cities were caused by monological civility in the first place. They are now commonly referred to as the pathologies of civilisation, which must include agriculture's plagues as extensions of civilised life. These pathologies are a result of overcrowding, steep reductions in biodiversity and a loss of our ecological wits, foods and medicines. Industrialisation saw people thrown off common land where they could tend and steward local resources, forcing them into towns and cities to become industrial serfs, estranged and mentally afflicted but eventually pacified by mass entertainment, formal schooling and ultra-consumerism.

To amplify again the spoken words of Joe (2010), the Ali Curung elder speaking of his old people: “They only got sick from a cold – Only catching a cold, that’s all – No more – No sickness, nothing – Because they living on different food – Yeah, different food bush tucker.” No industrial sewerage plants, no civil sprays and sanitisers, no dirt pills, no synthetic antibiotics, no school to equip us with a lifetime of boring, meaningless and damaging work, no toxic Botox promising extended youth, no endless promises of technological salvation. “Technofix solutions make no attempt,” writes Australian ecologist and philosopher Val Plumwood (2002), “to rethink human culture, dominant lifestyles and demands on nature, indeed they tend to assume that these are unchangeable.” The one thing modern civility so often loudly and proudly claims over the lives of our aboriginal ancestors is longer life. But this has to be understood in context. So much of modern life involves work, sometimes three, four or six times more work than many of our ancestors,
but our life spans have only doubled, at best. The costs to the biosphere of such long lives are immeasurable. Yes, we live longer, but we also consume and pollute for longer and have little time to make life. So, is longer life really such a trophy for hypertechnocivility? What soil and what life do we leave behind after such long living?

Food medicine

For the past three generations and more, civility’s thought has been fuelled out of the crude oil barrels of supermarket systemisation. Certified organic supermarket food can be included in this analysis, although it is slightly less damaging at the farming stage of supply. However the transportation, refrigeration, packaging and scale of mass market organic food maintains its status equally as polluting-packaged product, and nutritionally it is questionable whether it is much better for us, due to the long-term storage of this food. Monetised eco foods and other privileged ecoproducts have only created more middle and upper class shopping opportunities and eco markets have done little to curb the growth of unsustainable and unjust development.

The Australian researcher and permaculturalist Letitia Ware believes that the great majority of human diseases are related to diet, but you rarely hear of a doctor prescribing home-grown, non-tilled, non-chemicalised and immediately picked food that has come from earthworm and mycelium enriched soils and that has been exercised to produce and then walked for to collect. Instead a doctor will prescribe for us a written order to buy privatised medicine that has no ecological relationship to the land in which we live but everything to do with the global monetary economy. And we will inevitably drive to the local-but-very-global chemist to get it. Ware believes that not disturbing (ploughing, poisoning) the soil’s mycorrhizal networks – the mycelium that develops a mutualistic relationship on the ends of plant roots, significantly increasing their surface area – enables plants considerable more uptake of nutrients making the food they produce much more nutrient dense. If we accept Ware’s science, this must mean greater soil health and thus greater health for the plants and the animals that eat them.

Australian ethnobotanist Dr Beth Gott, speaking recently at a public lecture in Melbourne, went into detail about pre-colonial Aboriginal health in Victoria, surmising that carbohydrates in Indigenous diets came from storage roots (murnong, lillies, orchids) that contain fructans rather than starches. Whereas starch is turned into sugars by enzymes in the upper intestine causing blood sugars to rise, fructans break down with intestinal bacterias lower down the colon lessening the rise in blood sugars. Since civility Aboriginal health and well-being have
taken a battering, not just from the violence of guns and massacres, dispossession and religio-
indoctrinated literacy, but also from switching to sugar-producing starches and refined sugar
heavy diets that require the systemic disturbance of soil. Diabetes and obesity were unheard of
in pre-civil Australia, acknowledgement of which must raise questions about unchecked civil
prejudices and what is intelligent human life and what is not.

When the medicine is in the food we tend, forage and hunt for, when food is once
more unprivatised and part of biopsheric functioning, when we are once more part of a
loved and loving locasphere, then we will be closer again to enacting ecological culture. But
for now, this is the picture: in Australia, “[a] report… by the World Wildlife Fund and the
National Toxics Network found about 80 pesticides approved for use in this country that
are either not registered or have been deregistered overseas.”32 For the most part Australian
shire councils haven’t even begun to fathom the urgency of producing chemical reduction
strategies, let alone implement them like our Canadian counterparts.33 Instead Australia is
committed to green-lighting pesticide-reliant Genetically Modified (GM) agriculture. This
so-called solution to world hunger is solely about profit and market control, at any cost, and
it is wholly reliant on non-renewable cheap crude oil. This fact alone makes GM agriculture
redundant as a future supply.

The copyrighting of GM seeds is another example of such intransigence to land
and its diverse communities, and a relatively new chapter of private food supply warfare.
Newly available biotech seeds are modified to grow in lifeless soil where micro-
fauna and fungi have been killed off, thus favouring dominant species (labelled by civility as ‘pests’)
to overshoot, and thus justifying the use of synthetic (petrochemical) pesticides to which
the biotech seeds have been made genetically resistant. Seeds have also been genetically
modified to ‘suicide’, so as they can no longer be saved or shared as common gifts of soil
and land. If privatised GM seeds jump already privatised fence lines courtesy of wind – an
autonomous transporter of seed – and take root on non-GM farms, non-GM farmers can be
(and have been) successfully sued.34 An industry that refuses to include its environment and
forces people to buy its woeful science is monological totalitarianism, and marks a new low
for anthropocentric greed and narrow self-interest. A mediated, disconnected, urbane and
uninformed public allows for such businesses to do their worst.

To go outside and discriminatingly pick or dig your food from a nearby garden,
grassland, forest or forest-garden amid a multiplicity of non-poisoned ecological players
and neighbourly interrelations is to sense the ethics and love of the soil at work for all life.
This poethical response to food, land and soil is absent when indiscriminately ploughing
a field, consuming a packet of industrially furnaced potato crisps or an apple stored by
industrial refrigerants. This is not just because it is about flavour and nutrition but also accountability and respect for country. These four things – flavour, nutrition, accountability and respect – never appear together in a study conducted in a laboratory, and the latter two have no status in the trials and tests of civilty’s industry science. We have no means to measure these things as contiguous parts of a whole within the current ideological framework in which science and industry are linked in operation. If specialisation won’t protect us from industry science’s toxicities, corruptions, prejudices and damage, and doesn’t encourage participatory stewardship and biospheric understanding of our basic resources, then surely we must rethink the way in which our culture is orientated and the means in which we obtain our food. For food is the basis of a culture.

For me all this begs the question, is the type of food we eat contiguous with the quality of the fuel we use for poesis, for making meaning, making life? If the dominant methods to produce, wrap, store and transport food and other essential resources – based foremost upon the exchange of money – are the most destructive and wasteful ever employed, then can we say that consistently eating ecologically estranged and toxic food will consistently make ecologically estranged and toxic thought? Well, perhaps it’s not as simple as this. But then again, perhaps it is just that simple. In a previous essay I determined the relationship between industrial thought and industrial food to be like this:

The arts of industrial civilisation are intrinsically linked to industrial agriculture; that what industrial agriculture does to our bodies (and with the landbase), industrial culture does to our minds. Fairly consistently the resultant pathology is a kind of intellectual diabetes that derives from the over refinement and over processing of materials – where the seduction of the reader/spectator is paramount, the common understanding is that as long as there is food preserved by synthetics and refrigerants we can afford to indulge ourselves in transcendental medias.

Then to mark this point my friend and poet Peter O’Mara and I wheeled a large display stand of best selling potato chips from one end of an airport shop to sit beside a large stand of best selling airport novels at the other. By performing this thought we were able to observe the implicit commonalities these two dominating substances had with one another – mass mined potatoes and mass mined pulpwood. Art is then affixed to these materials either as packaging graphics or printed literature. But the story that has been disappeared from view concerns the destructive extraction from ecologies and the use of damaging chemicals and materials for the sake of such mediated food and art. Neither product is made to nourish us for sustained periods of time. Both are made to take money from us, assist us with entrenching our sedentism and impoverish our metabolic health.
**Artist as Family**

Not long after the airport performance our household devised a practice that aimed to diminish our involvement in sole-practitioner art. We set out to make art that expressed and documented our transition from hypertechnocivility, particularly fossil fuels:

Whilst many artists continue to resist biography as a mode of interpretation... Artist as Family place their domestic life in the centre of their work – drawing attention to the way that personal relationships sustain artistic practice. Their work is a celebration of the resilience and creativity of family life. It is also a political statement about the value and purpose of art as a generative force for change, rather than a system of consumption.37

My family has come to generate a household practice of making that helps enact permapoiesis where soil life and food medicine are implicit tropes. We call our small band, which extends into our local community, *Artist as Family*. Despite being increasingly unconvinced by what the west likes to call an *arts practice*, we nonetheless employ permapoiesis as a transitional form of making sense and sensing life through food, relationships, knowledge and craft where the poethical performance of walking (or bike riding) for food increasingly informs our practice, and where civil abstractions, consumption and technology are increasingly backgrounded.

Resource accountability is central to Artist as Family’s practice. When we came together as a conscious making group we engaged in a series of environmental performance works outside our home and community. The first was to spend three weeks in the city of Newcastle, NSW as a kind of family holiday foraging for anthropogenic waste along the coastline and throughout the city and its suburbs. Day after day we carried out the same task of walking or bike riding to collect hundreds of bags of waste. We swam, played in the sand, picnicked, rested, communed with locals and gazed (as inlanders) in awe at the sea. But mostly we picked up other people’s discarded refuse as a way to focus our attention on the whole sum of the damage. After three weeks we had amassed a monumental pile of industrial food and drink packaging, which we exhibited (for others’ attention) in a city museum as simply: the everyday detritus of hypertechnocivility as collected by a family on holiday.

This was our first real foray into intensive day-to-day foraging, which involved the rather painful task of looking at the culture we’ve been born into and recognising ourselves as contributors to such damage.

Artist as Family’s practice is one of doing-saying, another by-product of Joan Retallack’s aforementioned *poethics*, where making deeds are explicitly joined to saying
ethics. Retallack is offering poethics as a way of thinking about ethical making and by such a term is calling for a making ethics. Artist as Family audit, as best we can, each food kilometre that comes into our home. We no longer fly or own a car and we haven’t shopped in supermarkets for over six years. Doing-saying means walking and bike-riding the talk, powering our home from the sun or from fallen timber, salvaging and upcycling outmoded technologies and materials, composting our wastes, digging swales on contour through the garden for passive water harvesting of intermittent rains and our bath and shower waste, eating and teaching others about autonomous medicinal plants (weeds and bush tucker), growing our food within a diverse ecology of biological contributors, exchanging produce, garden design and gardening tips with community friends or at the various community gardens we’ve helped establish, and sharing these things with neighbours and friends through informal barter. We recognise that growing monetary wealth synonymously grows pollution and that this exchange is unambiguous. It’s a simple sum: the wealthier we become (in monetary terms), the more we consume and develop, the more we exploit and pollute. We therefore base our practice on a creative frugality: the less we consume the less we work within the monetised economy and the more time we have to transition to a moneyless economy – foraging, gardening, walking, biking. Every year our reliance on money diminishes just a little bit more, which expands the scope of our practice.

For Artist as Family, we’ve discovered through practice, art can be a resource unto itself. Not just an intellectual, spiritual and emotional resource, but also a biophysical one. Our second significant project was to plant a permanent food forest in Sydney as a public artwork. The intention was to make a model for art that doesn’t just take but instead gives back to the soil and its diverse communities. Food Forest (2010–) is a work that foregrounds biodiversity and demonstrates materially that art can be generative, can be a resource, rather than just an extractor or exploiter of resources to make market desirable products. In other words art can be generative contiguous with ecological functioning. Most simply stated Food Forest is a food-producing garden that is permanently open to the public for use as a free food commons. This work attempts to blur the traditional western line between art and that estranging term nature, a line that the Australian nineteenth-centuryesque art critic John McDonald (2010), critiquing Food Forest and a host of other new environmental works, wants to keep clearly delineated when he writes: “The most powerful piece of environmental art is probably a magnificent landscape painting...”39 Here he represents a prevalent civil prejudice that must foreground (and praise) the mediated at the expense of the biophysical. McDonald here appears oblivious to how Wordsworth’s influential framing of the picturesque has created untold separation from ordinary ecology, from the making and unmaking
Fig 3. Food forest (Surry Hills), 2010
Fig 4. Food forest (Surry Hills), 2010

- **Food Forest**
  - **Plant Zones & Passive Water Harvesting Design**
  - **Zone 1**
  - **Zone 2**
  - **Zone 3**
  - **Zone 4**
  - **Zone 5**
  - **Zone 6**

- **Mulberry**
- **Spanish Chestnut**

- **Shrubberies**:
  - Rhubarb
  - Herbs
  - Flowers

- **Trees & Shrubs**:
  - Citrus
  - Guava
  - Lightwood (Bottlebrush)
  - Killarney (Silverbeet, Smith’s)
  - Macadamia
  - Avocado
  - Ficus Carica
  - Mulberry

- **Ground cover**:
  - Strawberry
  - Warriing
  - Chinese ginger
  - Sage
  - Mangolds
  - Warriing

- **Remarks**:
  - Locate all services before digging.
  - No forest footprint is dug out to create a small dish shape to catch water as it rains.
  - Top soil with some clay and heavy mulch replaces the sandy soil.

- **Existing Lawn**
  - Newly dug out
  - 800 mm
  - Existing lawn

- **Lawn Swale**
  - 1500 mm

- **Sand**
  - Depth

- **Design**
  - Less than 1m
  - Up to 8m
  - Up to 15m
  - 15m
  - Less than 1m
of everyday life. Nature, according to McDonald, is best idolised in oil on canvas and this, according to the critic, constitutes an environmental work. Food Forest is in part self-maintaining, conserving and feeding. It utilises applied ecology and what Artist as Family call social warming, or art that makes relationships, to become a garden that supplies uncapitalised food for an adjoining soup kitchen and its nearby community. It is a physical poem set on publicly accessible church ground, a reversing, perhaps, of William Blake’s (1794) poem The Garden of Love, where “[p]riests in black gowns, [are] walking their rounds... binding with briars, my joys and desires”. It is a home to marginalised urban dwellers, untamed and bourgeois organisms. It is an environment to inhabit, to garden, to find solace in. Its politic makes a clear departure from typical expressions of nihilistic contemporary art centred on individual careers and burning resources. The work is informed by a permacultural pragmatic-utopianism, which has in turn been informed by how indigenous people function as non-polluting performers and managers of land. As a necessary extension of this work, the food produced becomes part of a local gift economy where art, science and economics are integrated parts of a whole. The poem is experienced while gardening communally.

Artist as Family are currently planning our third major project, which will involve a year of bike camping, slowly travelling up the east coast of Australia extending our foraging knowledges for a publication called Free Food.

Making and unmaking

The demise of the shaman, and of primitive power generally, has been an enduring motif in the literature for the last two centuries. It has accompanied the close and loving descriptions that anthropologists have made of the operations of shamanistic power. As they draw out that power, transforming it as it is shunted into the measured language of the social sciences, they consolidate another narrative about the rise of secular and scientific progress. These two narrative moments – the rise of one and the fall of the other – are more than just dialectically connected.

The English word poetic comes from the Greek word poiesis (the Latin poesis), which as I’ve already stated simply means to make. And, as I’ve already suggested, poetics concern the generative, which must also, necessarily, concern the degenerative – unmaking. Making and unmaking are contiguous processes where life must include death, cross into death and back into life. Irish poet W B Yeats’ familiar line “All things fall and are built again,” from his poem Lapis Lazuli (1936), seemingly entertains such normative processes of making and unmaking. But then the entire poem is situated from the point of view of the probable
destruction of western civilisation, when the doubling processes of making and unmaking are becoming increasingly interrupted. Poiesis is the near opposite of the Latin word *dampnum*, which means *to damage* or *to lose possession*. With damage death doesn’t cross into more life, but rather it “amplifies”[^43], to cite the Australian ecological thinker Deborah Bird Rose (2011). The year 1936, in which Yeats’ poem was written, marks the rise of machine politics, the seismic rise of the Nazi party in Germany and inevitably technologies of mass destruction. Yeats’ alarm concerning systemic industrial damage in *Lapis Lazuli* sirens even more loudly today:

> …if nothing drastic is done
> Aeroplane and Zeppelin will come out
> Pitch like King Billy bomb-balls in
> Until the town lie beaten flat.[^44]

The precursor to this war, *The First World War*, started as a dispute in Iraq (then Mesopotamia) between the Germans and British over their equally frenzied hunger for crude oil. Our humanist-centric history books repeatedly tell us this war was started due to human complexes, such as the assassination of a European monarch. That was a minor story by comparison, however. It was really about fossil energy and how this power could transform the world. Getting access to ancient fossil energies, especially crude oil, to fuel hypertechnocivility was why all those thousands of people died in that war. It can be argued that the millions of people who died and suffered in all the subsequent world wars have done so at the bequest of civil innovation and industry, with cheap crude oil pumping the veins of hypertechnocivility.

Could Yeats have ever imagined drone missiles in 1936? Could he think it were possible for western civility to develop GM foods, gas-fracking and acid-job mining, spreading hideous genetics and chemical cocktails out over the biosphere and into the aquifers at unrecordable speeds? Where will all this end?

Life is in a constant state of decay, of unmaking. When a born child cries and makes breath she enters into the poetical, the generative and also the degenerative. But when she is gifted a toy that has caused damage in the way it has been produced she herself, through her own desire and play, becomes a participant in the damage. Damage in this instance is not decay, but rather an “interruption”[^45] to life, to cite Rose (2011) again. From this transaction someone has *made* an item to sell and someone has *made* money from the sale, but if the making and the sale cause damage or loss, then they are no longer poethical, no longer generative, but rather poetry’s opposite. This is how we are initially coerced
into accepting hypertechnocivility – through poisoned gifts. Poetry’s low status today in monetary terms is not surprising given that damage now trumps ordinary making. Poetry’s lack of monetary relevance is, in fact, its blessing, and it remains a dormant form for culture awaiting the return of campfire song and performed knowledges. This echoes, at least in part, Australian poet and scholar Justin Clemens’ sentiment that “...people worldwide still desperately care about poetry despite its absolutely essential irrelevance to any economic indicator...” 46 I think Clemens here really means irrelevance to the dominant economic hegemony. In the meantime, while this dormancy still applies, how might we stop this trend of foregrounding industry’s damages and backgrounding generative making?

**Biophysical poetry**

Within the tradition of experimental *poethics* and the practice of *permapoesis*, which can be regarded as ecological playmaking, I have been performing unwritten and unspoken poems using my body as the writing tool in an attempt to model a biophysical poetry that reclaims *a language older than words*,47 to cite Derrick Jensen (2004). The poems generate no waste and materially consist only of an environment. The poems are essentially meditations on place where my body is active or still or sometimes under stress, perhaps holding form three or four metres above ground, my hands and feet gripping or pushing off entities of that environment. At times my head and feet are pushing at each other in order to support my whole weight. This is not a poetry that sits in *nature* with civil notebook ready, recording the bird in the tree, rather here the poet is in the tree and *I too am looking for food* or resting with the bird. Although this meditative practice doesn’t require a reader or audience, and certainly not a market, I have filmed some of these works over the years and made them available online.48

In an attempt to address the interrelated problems of reification, representation and the *market* by making unsaleable biophysical poems, walking for food became a necessary extension of such thinking and making. Here the metabolic fuels of forest garden and forageable commons fuel the poem maker, making thought both relational and part of an economics based on place knowledge not global money. Poems are family life, community kin, gardens, gift exchange, hunting and foraging. These are all poethical performances that help compost civil art, its symbols, divisions and markets. When I think of the cave art and rock engraved maps of Indigenous Australians, the songs and dance, the pre-civil toolkits, instruments and knowledges, I am increasingly astounded by the non-exploitative, non-polluting, non-class orientation of this making. I believe that the inclusivity of such forms – objects, performances, knowledges and drawings – are our
future models, not as appropriation but in the way in which art, knowledge and land can become again synonymous generative forces.

A friend and poet, Michael Farrell, writes in his essay *A Poetics of the Plough: Ned Kelly’s the Jerilderie Letter* that “[t]he very word ‘verse’, meaning ‘turn’, is derived from the turn of the plough (Concise Oxford Dictionary 1194): making what is now known as a line-break into an agricultural metaphor.” Farrell asserts here that poetry’s relationship to the plough, to cultivation and thus to culture is therefore implicit. His research makes important reading, as it extends to civility – *cutting soil to make city*; from the Latin *cultura*, to make culture – but I would argue poetry, and indeed culture, is older than the cutting plough, the polis and the page. Oral societies sang and performed their poems in ecological time and place, and I would also argue that it is songlines not ploughlines that make life, not damage. There is a difference of scale between disturbing soil with a digging stick and disturbing great tracts of land with a plough. Thus it is a pre-plough poetic that particularly interests me in this thesis.

The forms of culture making that don’t pollute or exclude people from land are surely our future models. It is a fenceless (privateless) poetic I call for throughout this thesis and this position is what makes my work unapologetically utopian.

**Slow-text mesostics**

John Cage’s poethical procedures spanned more than four decades from the 1950s. As a composer, artist, poet and ecological thinker Cage attempted to make art that included its environment, art that was never an interruption to life but rather was always taking part in it. Cage’s modes of making influenced Joan Retallack and countless others and still has currency today, especially for those who value art based on generative-degenerative performances. Over the years my own poetry forms have borrowed significantly from Cage. He was a great lover of mushrooms and walking for this particular food is another poetical form I share with him – making food generatively, biophysically, by walking and foraging with knowledge and simple tools. Cage sensed the soil and its communities through foraging for mushrooms. Accruing an ecological consciousness through such mycological body work is a significant practice of his, which is evident in such works as 4’33” (1952). This composition attempts to critique the high walls and mediated environments of civil culture by engaging in the everyday habits of the earthly, the creaturely – we performance-attending mammals as coughing, wriggling, creaking, scratching, breathing, sniffing, scuffing, snorting, fidgeting beings. 4’33” is four minutes and thirty-three seconds of listening to the happenstance worlds of (albeit, mainly human) life being performed. With this work Cage is devising the question: take away the concert hall, the
instrumental props, the *environment for listening*, and what do we have left? Cage is what I call a transitional ecological thinker. He, like myself, can’t help but be ensnared by civility’s forms and products (books, art objects, musical scores, concert halls) but at the same time senses their impermanence and future irrelevance. He asks us what life, what music, what thought do we have left when we remove the conventions and prostheses of industrial civility, which Fukuoka (1978) later answers as such:

> ...teaching music to children is as unnecessary as pruning orchard trees. A child’s ear catches the music. The murmuring of a stream, the sound of frogs croaking by the riverbank, the rustling of leaves in the forest, all these natural sounds are music – true music. But when a variety of disturbing noises enter and confuse the ear, the child’s pure, direct appreciation of music degenerates. If left to continue along that path, the child will be unable to hear the call of the bird or the sounds of the wind as songs.\(^5\)

In returning to the page for the series of poems that I present in this thesis I have wanted to create a transitional literature that also attempts to make a biophysical poetry, a marriage of the utopian and the pragmatic. For this I have turned again to John Cage (1961, 1967, 1979, 1988), particularly his mesostic (or centred acrostic) forms because, for me, they attempt to disrupt the civil-mechanical ordering of the standard page and printed type while remaining legible.\(^5\) I therefore amalgamated my slow poetry form, which employs jumping letters with a Cagean mesostic device called a *stringline* to make what I call a *slow-text mesostic*:

```
be born of G
go round 
again Gолучн not torn
again wheге leaves
will settle aNd build
again
```

When a letter is *GOING* in the wrong direction or is in the wrong horizontal alignment the eye might stop or jump. This is not smooth driving for the highly trained eye; the bitumen that so concretely supports the *doublewhiteAustralialinepolicy* develops a pothole. Then if many letters are in the wrong alignment, making not an anomaly but an environment, the page becomes a place of mishaps, of roadbergs and potholes, weeds form in the cracks of the road and soon enough ecological succession begins to take place. A forest quickly grows. The eye has to get out of the machine and walk. This is slow-text – the content on the page becomes something the eye has to physically move through. It is no longer purely a thing of effortless travel or witless consumption, but rather it has become a thing of its own making, its own biophysics and stresses. And while it is true these mis-aligned
letters remain technical symbols or representations constructed within human-only frames, they also express and tell and make themselves present at places where authorship has been remade and even sidelined. Here the arbitrary and random merge with the intellectual and emotional, making an aesthetic that isn’t only human. In other words in a slow-text mesostic the poet isn’t the sole creator but rather shares authorship with more-than-human chance. 

Our eyes are physically arrested when reading a slow-text – a page of letters where many are in the “wrong place”. This physicality is initiated as our eyes drag and the speeding mind is frustrated, no longer allowed to run like a well-tuned motor across the page or turn like a tractor into neat rows across the diesel-managed field where supposedly our food must derive. Now the text disperses, more aligned with the habits of wind-blown seeds, drifting mushroom spores or creeping underground rhizomes, to cite Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1972–1980).

In my slow-text mesostics, just five letters have been chosen as the reoccurring letters in the wrong place. Five letters, of a possible twenty-six, are thus mildly autonomous. Each ‘b’ for birth, ‘g’ for growth, ‘c’ for consumption, ‘d’ for death and decomposition, and ‘r’ for regeneration represent a simple order of ecological cycling. Each time the text comes across one of these five letters they jump up or down, super- or subscripting. The first three letters, b, g and c go up (super) and the remaining two, d and r, go down (sub). Then a string line is chosen from the text, which runs vertically through the middle of the poem. This centred acrostic accumulates its own logic; sometimes explicit, sometimes obscure. This string line is visually pronounced on the page in bold capital letters. Choosing the string line automatically triggers a chance occurrence as each line’s position is determined by lining up the capitalised letters.

In these slow-text mesostics the visual, sonic and denoted elements of the text all attempt to be metabolically what they are metaphorically. But the symbolic page is inescapable in a literate technoculture. A slow-text therefore needs to first note this problem and forever remind us of it, never forgetting what masterly damages lie behind agriculture’s machines of production that in turn fuel the cities, productions and cultures of hypertechnocivility.

On the page of a slow-text there are many simultaneous cycles occurring, so the page resembles less a ploughed field planted with one crop and becomes instead an autonomous garden of many forms and senses. This kind of text demands that machines behave erratically, idiotically and inefficiently as a way of beginning to learn to do without them, and start to make poetries that are again machineless.
These slow-texts again quote John Cage, both in their adaptation of his mesostic forms, or centred acrostics, and in his related experiments to help demilitarise and demachine the page. In my slow-text mesostics I want to pass on knowledges that I have accumulated through numerous others that can assist the reader to possibly reclaim and reperform semblances of ecological life. In this way my poems are more akin to folk song traditions, story telling, Aboriginal sharing of knowledge, community seed saving, feasts and recipes, than avant-garde experimentation made (eventually) for *the market*. In other words they are better sensed heard (read aloud, performed) than seen, and thus the poems on these pages became a kind of anti-poem, an anti-commodity, not for inaccessibility’s sake, but because *the map is not the territory* and I want the page to scream this out and embody it.

These poems of recipes and shared ecological knowledge, as well as of hatred and the lamenting of damage, cycle remnants of Blake’s folk innocence and experience. The poems welcome in Blake’s earthly desires, his creaturely intuitions and his sinking elegies of enclosure and censor, sameness and privatisation. And yet, at the same time these poems when heard, or at least a number of them, are reborn as positive responses, songs to enliven our ecological bodies; a refiguring or reclaiming of the geopoetical – poems of the earth; making earth with all human senses. I have children, I have therefore entered the animal-ethical domain of living within generational adaptation, and therefore I must contribute to making the land around me permanently liveable and filled with ecological making and unmaking. This is my broad self-interest as a creature of the understorey.

The song of the poem, the music, is especially important in these slow-texts because the song, outside of the technical attributes of the printed poem, is the generative, the love within the text that is sounded out by we breathing, speaking, sensing, singing mammals. A song sings a text slowly, making the subject attended to. Without this slowness and attention we cannot properly defend that which we love. We cannot know or defend our home places when speed is technocratised and local song is devalued or destroyed by it. Love is faith that supersedes hypertechnocivility’s endless questions and relentless anxieties; love knows without question, but it is not always comforting, rarely certain and never ready to consume on demand.

A weed is by common definition a plant in the wrong place, and as aforementioned, within my poems a number of letters deliberately follow such an arrangement. Weeds are pioneer plants that begin ecological succession on damaged ground. They can bring to razed soil many necessary parts – trace elements, minerals and nutrients – for ecological repair. My slow-text mesostics, my letters in the wrong place, are of course
a singular answer to systemic ecological crises; there is of course not one solitary response. Rather they attempt to help mark the end period of ascending energy-affluence and denote the beginning of “the long descent”, to cite John Michael Greer (2008), of fossil fuelled hypertecnocivility that may well be sped up by climate change. In a low-energy future autonomous foods and poetries will come into focus again. We eat weeds almost daily in our home. They are the old plants of our multiethnic ancestors defamed by the associations they have with invasion and colonisation. But weeds have simply followed civility’s agriculture in a spirit of autonomous-fenceless defiance. Weeds are the very things that hinge our agricultural and foraging cultures together. They have survived centuries of drought, plough, human ideology and now petrochemical poisons. These autonomous beings are adaptable, hardy and tenacious and many offer up to us nutrient dense food and medicine, without charge. Fuelled on weed juice and soups I have written this work; old phytochemicals kicking around me, fuelling the thought and action, the doing-saying, necessary to write such a work.

Afterword: essays

The second distinct part of the exegesis in this thesis appears as a series of eight essays that expand on and give detail to what has been raised already here in the Introduction. In the first essay, Eating weeds, I take the reader on an hour’s long forage to collect enough food to make the evening meal. These edibles are picked within our community’s uncapitalised pharmacopeia to begin to demonstrate what I mean by reopening the commons. I am arguing here, as throughout this thesis, that we need to extend the adage we are what we eat, to what we eat and how we obtain this food determines the type of thought and indeed society we make. Do we go along with the dominant ideology that concerns intellectual and agricultural supply as inherently industrial, private and damaging, or alter the means by which we gather our food and share our making?

In the second essay, At arm’s length, I examine what I call the accountable killing of animals in creaturely, permacultural and Aboriginal senses, and ask how can we reclaim an ethico-animal accountability in an era of pacifist-sanctioned corporatism.

In essay three, At close quarters, I continue my examination of our household’s attempt to become accountable beings of place, and argue how an ethic of material accountability leads to greater intimacy with the world’s worlds. Our semi-suburban-rural home and our local food commons neighbouring the Wombat State Forest, become the places for an attempt to re-encounter the sensible and intimate; to reclaim the loss of knowledges and “affection”,
to cite Wendell Berry (2012), that has occurred through the terrifying and destructive forces of privatisation and privatisation’s children – specialisation, technocivility, ecological estrangement and class war.

In essay four, Gardens of Love, I retell the story of establishing several community food gardens on public land in our home town; suggesting some reclaiming of the loss to authority and anthropocentric damage that William Blake (1794) expresses in his poem The Garden of Love. This essay is a poethical-political call to arms (with simple garden, foraging and hunting tools) to remake communally or take back the commons, where narrow self-interest is replaced by broad community-interest, and where stewardship and accountability can once again take place.

In the fifth essay, Gifting economies, I explain my own poethical-political imperatives for treating the pathologies and injustices of monetised hypertechnocivilisation. However, with all our enthusiasm and positive permacultural activism throughout this work it should be noted that much of this experimentation is bound for failure, synonymous with new environmental modelling everywhere that aims to be multifarious responses to the predicament we find ourselves in. But failure and uncertainty must be regarded as generative here, not wasteful. Failure and uncertainty (the getting of knowledge) must replace mastery and amnesia (an over reliance on technology) if art is to again seek a place of worth beyond the market and beyond bourgeois careerism and private relations.

In essay six, Walking Jaara country, my eldest son Zephyr and I go to be WWOOFs with Jude Perry and her partner Uncle Brien Nelson, an elder of the Jaara people who have maintained a very permanent presence in the lands in which our family and community now live. We go to listen to and be with Uncle Brien at his Bunjil Park Aboriginal Education and Cultural Centre, and with him work his land as a formal barter, exchanging our labour for food, bed and knowledges.

In essay seven, Taking the old tea, I experience the sensory joys of more-than-human love by putting myself under the spell of a very old psychoactive plant medicine. I consider plant and mushroom sentience and fully sense their poethical and loving dimensions, and from this experience I understand more acutely a culture of song awaiting us again. The subject of which I return to in my final essay, Literary stiles and symbolic culture, which is written as a letter to land and river writer Maya Ward and returns to the problem of writing as it applies to ecological crises. Appendix 1 is the response letter I received from Maya, which is a passionate defence of writing. Appendix 2, Autonomous edibles of temperate
Australia, records a list of nearly 100 species we have learned to eat since giving up on supermarkets and forms the foundations of Artist as Family's next project-publication-performance, Free Food.

Notes
5. A locavore eats a local diet.
7. Later I argue against the conceit that modern globalised society is ‘post-industrial’ when it is clear the digital age is wholly dependent on industrial infrastructure and apparatuses. Hence ‘hypertechnocivility’ is really digi-industrialism and not post-industrial at all.
11. John Robin has been one the strongest critics of permaculture, criticizing it for its potential to spread environmental weeds. This argument was expressed at a public debate between David Holmgren and John Robin at the University of Tasmania in 1990, and is still often heard among more conservative environmentalists.
17. Mycoremediation is a term that concerns the use of mycelium (fungi) to repatriate and improve soils, especially soils that have been contaminated by industrial pollutants. The American mycologist Paul Stamets is leading this work.
21. Ross, Daniel and Barison, David (directors). The Ister (film), Melbourne: Black Box Sound and Image, 2004
27. ibid, Joe (see epigraph).
31. From a public talk given by Dr Beth Gott, hosted by the Victorian Herbalists Association, Fitzroy Library, August 15, 2013.
32. ibid, Bernoth, Ardyn.
33. ibid, Smith, Rick & Lourie, Bruce. p28.
36. This action took place at Newcastle Airport, NSW in August 2008 and was filmed by Meg Ulman as the short video *Best Sellers*: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=urG7l7jdHgo – accessed 15 October, 2013.
38. The Lock-Up Museum, Newcastle Australia, hosted *Artist as Family* as part of their artist-in-residence programme in Spring 2009.
45. ibid. Rose, 2011. p82
50. ibid. Fukuoka. p17.
52. From the last stanza of the poem, *Dwell*, as found on page 54 of this thesis.


55. An acronym that stands for Willing Workers on Organic Farms; a global barter of labour for food and lodgings.
Walking for food: regaining permapoesis

Part 2: Poems
Broadly speaking, Jones’ poetic mode is one of epistemological intervention. It rebels against what it thinks of as the ‘neat technocratised rows’ of printed poetry in English just as it seeks to disrupt the agricultural categorisations that insist on the eradication of weeds. For Jones, weeds repair land damaged by farming and industry and prepare the ground for reafforestation... If a plant or a letter or a word is in the wrong place it is viewed as a ‘mishap’, or a disruption. To overcome this ‘the eye has to get out of the machine and walk... the text becomes something the eye has to forage for or through.’


Jones makes an explicit attack upon the romantic self-consciousness of white Australian literary culture and its oblivious transportation of European aesthetic modes into antipodean landscapes... [the] typographical interferences and static slowdown, hook and strain the reading process, such that emotion, reflection and cognition are caught and inflected in the present-time of reading. Jones forces us to grapple with a specific set of poethical considerations: how does language-use contribute to the violence of white man and machineries and economies of ecological destruction? What kinds of vernacular interventions might inhibit such violence? Can poetry save the world? Jones’ poetry isn’t for everyone, but the world he is saving is the same one you’re living in.


I think Jones’ physical poems articulate a challenge to John Kinsella’s provocative statement from his poem Bluff Knoll Sublimity, where ‘nature’ poetry is akin to ‘validating a so-so idea with the nitty-gritty of conquest’, that is, poetry can easily fall into the trap of confirming our blind spots and prejudices rather than challenging them.

— Stewart, Emily. “Reading Habits and Enclosures”, unpublished paper presented at Critical Animals, as part of This is Not Art festival, Newcastle, 2011 http://emilyvalentinestewart.files.wordpress.com/2013/06/reading-habitats-and-enclosures.pdf
The Garden of Love

i went to the garden of love
and saw what i never had seen
a chapel was built in the midst
where i used to play on the green

and the gates of this chapel were shut
and "thou shalt not" was over the door
so i turned to the garden of love
that so many sweet flowers bore

and i saw it filled with graves
and tombstones where flowers should be
and priests in black gowns were walking their rounds

and binding with briars my joys & desires

Food forest

he is in the Forest of food
where the expulsion has been overruled –
Reloaded and gender redistributed –
the despotic Greeks and Romans Jews Muslims and Christians
plough deep into the soil
the earthworms and Portuguese millipedes assail

he is in the forest of food
clays will solve the salty habits
reunite bulls and lunar eents
and the maney apeasants
will børn primitive again
free from the digital stoops and tooth decay
the black kowns walking their rounds
will buge the leaf litter –
when the forages of winter
will offer spring flowers to the bees

M
Moonar

we li^ght fi^e at Yes-people sp^in^gs
wee wi wAnnop ve they sun^gs and they sing^gs
we Make b^reakfast and g^o looking for yams –

let's g^o yammin^gs
the white b^oy D^gs in
moonA_r moona_r yellow daisy flowe_r
out In sp_rin^gs an_d into the summe_r
taSte just like potatoes
small tu_b^e_s qu^gs out wIth a sti^ck –
b_a_kna b_a_kna d_i^gs thE g^oun_d
we'll cOk 'em with plantain_s an_d leek
Walking for food

poverty is a construction
of Civil culture
agri's cities
have dispelled
the ecological communities
made those with nothing
once free from debt
made peasants

no poverty is possible
when we walk for food

while medicine
is in the food
we walk for

while fallen timber
from loved forests
fuel our homes

While rich rock waters
flows freely uncontaminated
No poverty is possible
Song

pick oNly
what you nEeded
bE it mushrOom
fruit oT seeD
always
kindLy leave
moOe than enougH
for tomoOw's feed

all food
must bE free
for you An d kin
and my Family

theR's nothing
moOe repullenG
tan for est food
sElliNg

take onLy
what yOu need
bE iT water
nOtr wEed
and always
roughly leave
more than enough
as future
deed

All food
must be free
for you and kin
and my family
to profit
on what’s public left
remains the curse
of Commons theft
The commons is expanded

we graft medlars and pears onto wild hawthorns

we walk out from Home and pick the soup weeds from the cracks in the road

we lie with the mushrooms and listen to the old songs that belong from the gills

there is no rest when there is settlement

we are forced to art and invention mistaking newness for renewal

a world not preceded by language but one that arrives together on the tongue – the leaf and the word

—
Winter’s pharmacopeia

The fruits and weedy plants that swell
through frost and sweet occasional snow
who lovingly bake themselves to us
at local when we require them most
when it is cold and we fall sick
they offer free preventatives

Rosehips and chickweed
watercress and feijoa
citrus and stickeyweed

Garlic from cèllar

Preserved as fruit leather

Honey bottled

From the flowers of summer
Dwell

we cannot only dwell
in the cleft train terrains
of catastrophe and
impenetrable descent

we must also try
to sing uncertainty
cover it by chance
and coveted by it
by chance
be coveted by it

so many disturbances
this town’s sound
Torn and compacted
poisoned witness
if only for the secreted weeds
in full numbers unnoticed
this beginning
often futile ciliation
of the creaturely
be born of round again

and not torn

In where leaves will settle and build again
Natural bitterness

Not everything is peaking on the path of descent

The industries of spontaneous flora—
an invisible abundance that greed ignores—
air through deserted fields

while the departments of sharecropping
go broke

vet ch Big nitrogen fixer has many aliases the market cannot know
dead nettle that plain little weed

is pot luck if things get really bad

The chestnut root of bracken fern

like water chestnut

liNe d from the soil

wilderness dish

and mustard greens—
eat as much as you like
not EvrythinG is peaking
iN the lonG descent
dock and rosehips and plantain in soup
chickweeGrown in neutral soil
chisp and lush after morning's frost
lomandra seeds for an ancient cake
dry poas and dead wood
for it's primitive bake
not everythinG is peaking
going this Relentless deGline
cold poppies A food source for an uncapitalised time
thistle oil for a biofuel fleet
penny cress is crude oil for a biofuel fleet
leave to stickweeG as tea and juice
Ottawa on eczema the aerial shoots
mucilage from thistles
for in internal organs
the hard facts of petroleum geology
for we cashed-up boGans
—
A place of simple feeding

with these berries

I pull from this small tree

Come primitive thorns

That stick into me

Picking The continuous line of spirit

That the old people began

When making fruit leather

Sized by the sun

to survive a winter

from a place of simple narration –

an autumn recipe requiring

just fruit water and solar radiation:
with a bowl of berries
rowing free and close to home
mash them with your hands
add water and then comb
through the mixture
removing all the pips and skin
fairly soon the mush will set
with all its natural pectin
then with a sharp knife
shave the jelly into thin slices
and rack them in a sun-filled spot
before storing as winter vices
no sugar is necessary
instead these dried berries are good for your heart
food as medicine as our ancestors knew
Forest

for each Tiny branch you cling
in your forest gymnasium
each dead and living limb
a stage for you to sing

Sing little bird your song
i too am looking for food
in life together
we sing root and die
and in this continuum
we forage on

sing little bird sing
don't let me stop

your morning song
Clipped

we cut
the lower limbs
from trees
so as children
can not climb them

in doing so
we cut
their wings
disable and
divert again

the simple sight
Of children
to wonder roam and be

Who will defend
their desires
to climb
a woody tree?
Bad debt

my Face blooms red
in Fury
My son again
doused In
sweatshop Gs
And fill coming toys
banned.spot.Tswea
Gifts from Ear. kin
who believe no harm done

How is it
the injurious hates
of our cultural
Are so loud
seize so much attention
and yet remain
So unaccounted for?
how many times can one express the simple premise that if a thing is produced somewhere else from materials unseen made by people who hold no voice then it is an act against life and of war to buy it and transfer such bad debt onto a child
Out schooled

forest chil

ren –

The bad eggs of class

rooms

and slum

der kids who won’t follow

the impression

of righteous adults

serving society’s

mission –

just want to climb trees

and hang with the
caterpillars

i only the ee lessons

in children’s

geography

when we were actually

writing the earth

the first

my teacher

so angry

ripped my text book

from my listless desk

pulled up his hand

smearing his blood

over the pages
The second
an excursion along a creek
where we discovered ox bows and riparian filters
open skies and bird calls

The third
an ungulate field trip
to a nearby dairy

It was in these three lessons that some learning took place but for the time in school (in the classroom) I was in a zoo—
an explosive exasperated corporate mission
must destroy
the little mammals within us
so as we can turn confinement to interrupt life
and normalise our billowing destruction of it
coca cola paeDophilia
liEEnsecD by the goverPment seEtoE
whAt ill-mental hanD oE eye
coulDE drive such sEcP soEty?
in what diStanE resouRE e waES
buEn the hoRe ts of ouRE laws?
of what oI do we aspiRE?
that fueLS the cE uDeness of cOmB at lies

anD what aniMaLS 'shrooms anD plants
COuLD foGER new foRESTs AnD new GE asslanDs
when all fossil eneGYies peAK?
what dEd rink? what dEd meat?

what the smart phone? what cHil dE en sLain?
AnD in what supeR maEt toils ouR bEain?
what moNSanto? what toxiC lanDs
Dare their GEysophate teRoTs stanD?
when The sun th rows down her beams
and wa rms the earth with or porate dreams

do we s mIe at this work to see?
do they who make all this shit make me?

coca cola paeDophilia

liEnse d by the go ver nment se to r
whAt ill-mental hand or eye
D rives this sick so ci eth
Portrait

no genteel man
in tHIs room
william buckley

what mortal hand or eye
no elaborate frame
of gold
best of such
Companies of
colonial
Symmetry
your civilized eyes
unusually fixed
despite your neck tie
In me
civic wage
tall man
Named simpleton
paragon
you unwittingly helped
destroy your foster kin
and what painful witness
your love and terror
of thirty-two years 'will'
in no such language
you mistakenly ushered the people
who uncivilized you
taught you cunning
now in this false-decadent city
in this decadent room
painted a diabolic red
you stare vacantly
your pardon joy – is it He's?

Your blackness here
in a room
beside white superior
brick boy
civil nor wildness
Neither a real comfort to you
dispossessed from cheese
dispossessing of kulin
countie
a camp where children
laugh at sight of fuckin' adults
hump humpy

the e's somethin'
of the primate
in you
on this Wall
but nothing of the sternness
(of Industry)
Nothing of the assurance
of leafy gold property merchants
(you're Undated
and no aSt sigNeD you)
hisTo ry wasn't
sure
it wanted You

you aRe
thE only
white suJeCt of invasion
to livE on cOuntry
while still a fenCeless
albeiT te rrito rial
cOmmOOnS

you saId
or one of you Civil autho rs did
thAt you r wathaurong life
would've been Complte d bliss
if iT we r en't for the ra id's
and r evenge atta cks
over kinfolk women

in cIvi l cultu r e
desi r-voi len c e
is Ge ne ral
but ent erely masked
or ena Cte d elsewher e
on society's behalf
by professionals

you felt your influence growing

strong children
before batman and wonder pull you out

thirty-two years

no table

no chair

no good one good

no books or oily pictures

but today it is only

the pages and pages

that keep you historied

such a rarity

for a late-european

To be so fully
colourised

—
Groundwater

In a small county hall west of Reswick, forty-eight men and three women listened in to a specialist talking up the draft of a management plan for groundwater.

A data projector flickered crude figures at a watchful queen. A cautionary principle left fallow in some far away field.

No real management is being sold here. Only public water at less than a song for a few dollars a tanker load. Irrigators need Cadburys and coke—
join The lineages of sanctioned theft that descend from the crown

govern welfare as a ranged in the draft
subsidising industry's claims of this precious resource
brocked and wheeled with little care for biology
this is management of biology not of ecology
Bystand

flour sugar coffee Tea –
the staples of bystander society

We have choices we do as we please
in the compounds of bystander ease

crow eagle and bat –
Ons also totems that

with fences of sheep and cows
we cherish only what's ours
we bystand for private property

class transforms to colony
this country will never become

—
Mortgage

how can we be so oblivious
so permissive in accepting
The perpetual until death?

how is it that those
who profit on life sentences
are constructing more and more fences
of their own?

What kind of relation
would allow such manipulation
at the price of our
and indigenous dispossession?

the theft of ancient land
has no legitimacy anyway
it was banked by an alien crown
so why continue to pay down?
Anthem; elegy

yr breath is shallow

shallow spirit –

what Ever and hopeful

yr breath is closed

closed body –

Stimulants

and anxiety flippinG

yr breath is dying

assisted prolonged

(yr breath traumatic
cut open)

unprepared for life

unprepared for death

yr breath is out –

out of spirit

unprepared for death
Noxious

i
hemLo^c^k may kill
men Of lite^r^at^u^r^e an^d on foot
but to the Soil
brin^g^s fe^r^Tility

ii
monSanto's repu^b^li^c
still Odious
In the^g^r^oun^d^s
of ill-feil^g^ned^d demo^c^r^cy

iii
wee^D^ out the i^c^h
and thEl^r^ filthy
coal (sEam)^g^as oil
Plati^c^ ste^r^lity

iv
poet^y is al^c^r^D^y
a me_d^i^ate^d^r^m
Why then agg^r^ate
an^y dou^b^lin^g^ ambiguity?
Soldiers of suburbia

some a tea nergy
drink

unsettle the spirits

alcohol mad –

\textit{ghosts of dispossession}

most ate depressed

and eat and eat

And fuck and eat

And watch the flickering –

\textit{spectres of simulation}

all a tea roundless

\textit{Uninitiated in song}

not of any place

but fixed address –

\textit{soldiers of suburbia}
you Ask
what would it take
To stop the change
the extreme events
the displacement
rising waters
Escorts
and catastrophic fires?

and we Say
end all industry
fossil planes
more land and
and resources
This is
in effect
The rebuilding
of the perennial
economics
and the Redreaming
of the local
potential
tales of place

Climate will change
and the masterly be forgotten
don't be reliant
on that which will
no longer be spoken
Locasphere

Eating an animal
is akin to murder
says the vegan
who drives a car
and flies and trucks
he privileges diet
all over the militarized world.

Boping an animal
involves killing
says the localvore—
answerable killing
of neighbor plants
and mushrooms
and fellow animals

only an animal
knows the place
in the local sphere.
An animal can kill another in ecological predation but of course the Anthropocene—from suburban vegan to senseless omnivore—Kills en masse and daily without sensing it.

So to unmask the origins of packaged resources to sense the world beyond cant label At package ethics so correctly is to know ourselves (again)

we are animals of place who timely forage and garden and hunt clearly of the terrain

In which our violence takes place is rightly accounted for
Succession

witH eaCh six seasons
past affluEnCe
we fAll Deeper
inTo suCcEssion

wiTh little money
to peRfoRM old HoRrors
we walk wallaBy tracks
mAt-ush basksEts
Throwing sticks
a hundReD yearS
of swEet-shop cloth
hanGinG fRom ouR hips

hunting pa rents
push theiR chil dren
to climB and scraPe and cut
to chew plantain
and wrap theiR wounds
with the masticated reEns

it’s Not just counTry
whO’s eatinG weeDs
a few sticks
set the fire
poach the rabbit
in spring water
and cast it on—
the giving meat
falls from the bone
we throw it through
a salad self-sown:

pigface flowers
are salty sweet figs
wild lettuce and hawksbeard
a liteness eat
phyla steaminess
pickled above water
thistle roots and mallow cheeses
in a warm Greek horta

no fossil energies shine
on these enlightened times
no false wealth complexity
falls onto the city
Primitivist
(for Michael Leunig)

in The poetry
of the cartoonist
only thin gs of ground
are gathered
only thin gs
of the nightsky
fallen from trees
found growing
"lamp ed by the moon"
"w a gon ed in by the wind"

only sounds
of catUes amplifying
blossoms engineered
by sunlight
the soil warmed
and dug over
by the more-than-human
The taproots
(dOck and dandelion
and yam daisy tuber)

only the dAys
that consume us
remake our intuition
before falling into
the same mistakes
In school
mAdes before

memory and amnesia
our twin twins—
only the ecumenical
make senseless
Car

the Car is a city
it forces our eyes forward
in mass-death predation
it walls us away
makes distant the near
disappears the worlds
of carnal quiet
cuts through them
at its speed
tThe car embodies its myths
of progress
and apocalypse
it rages
as permanent war
a countable only
To the imperatives of civility
the deaths of which are true
as polluted sediments
geology as its Ute
to the short lived
the transient
Poisoned gift

we u_rinaTe in the city
  bUt the r e a r e few r e es to love
  with pRecision nit r ogen
so ou_r Unploctive piss
  sluFes the hard streets
  aNd befo r e the mo rning's ma chines
b_ecomes poisoned Gifts

  the r e's no soil
    to Take ou_r alcoholi c r ansits
    no biolo gy
  to pRecess
  this r Estlessness
  gone b_0 r D

  the c ity stiNks
    It emits a pRecise expression
  of ou_r cheap exTavaNce
    its ol d uinea
  unsettling the Oss
  of G r ee d's kitsch
  the pe r oxid es and fake tans
  of cor porate cO N
what will the tourists think?

the process is no switch to press

in these micturating streets

none to flush away our precious carbamides

in ultimate conceit

and no gardens to splash

no fruit to feed

and by doing so

tend the cycles

of bonded self-interest

as features of the undergrounder

So we just give ourselves away

and keep giving ourselves

to nothing—

Leaks of no return

—
Not on my page

a giant’s boxing glove
ishovering above a luxury car
and the catchline speaks:

“Agression in its most elegant form”

(full page colour
page 3 the new yorker

one every page
admen or intellectuals
are selling the regime
Agression in its most camouflaged form

Faked humanity
choseN eyes
broadly shut
Dental

under bright light
and piercing drill
my hands clamp my stomach
their tense grip transferred to my dentist's temples
her consumption of my lengthy stress
normalised by the surgery's complete belief
in its master's self

now the coarser drill applies an even greater pressure
to our intimacy
this is no initiation
the nurse wipes my drooling mouth with a sterile cloth
asks what I'm reading
my books spilling out of my bag:

how agriculture spoiled our health
necessary disease
and this interrupting labour
Walked words
On walking to *The Real Through Line*

ou_r Civilisation
is b_Ase_d
on a shaky su_Pply
of ch_Eap c_rude oil

what on c_e took
an hOu_r and a half to d_rive
will take fOu_r o_r five d_ays
to wal_K again

wAlkin_g open the senses
inviteS intima_cy
and b_eg_s for K_no_wle_dge

It makes awa_r_e
ou_r aNimal skins
ou_r ene_r G_etic b_odies

walkin_g is pe_rfo_rman_c_e
po_Ems w_ritten
b_y thE ink
of ou_r Feet
thiS bodily geopoeti*c's

this predates the plou*g

and polis

and pa*G
c

d son*g lines p*eAte civility's invasion

KNowl*gies sung

and walked b*refoot

this wAs when the e*th was soft

nu*e*d by perennial G*asses

and loved soil

To*d, to d oun*d is ha*rd

cut and compacted

shoes are needed

to walk coun*ty

Shoes and plou*hs

fences and maps

tec*hN*cs of trauma

of dispossession

Such civility is coercively brutal

and has disappeared

the generAtive knowle*es
ou're Feet are damaged walking to the city
shOes have defoMed
ou're Ecological wiTsh

but walking can pepefOrm
what's cuMely leFt
of a pe-toRate commons
make sung lines of thought
possibly again

these walked poems are without pages' clocks
and the many ensnaRing devices of civility

they are becOminge rate of land again
and begin to vaLue
a return to knowleDge —
civility's prostheses are not intelligent
we belong to the most destructive culture
Ever to exist'

Threat

near Woodland forests
light enough
for food
dark enough
for shadows

we will live
our secreted lives
writing with
Eat volumes
of civil sacrifice

we will grow old Free
as the liberties
of the corporate-made
classmates of our youth

only the Wastelands
will remain unstrained
fibres of the
rinsed
by we ghost y

\[ \text{near Woodland forests} \]
\[ \text{light enough} \]
\[ \text{for food} \]
\[ \text{dark enough} \]
\[ \text{for shadows} \]

we will live
our secreted lives
writing with
Eat volumes
of civil sacrifice

we will grow old Free
as the liberties
of the corporate-made
classmates of our youth

only the Wastelands
will remain unstrained
fibres of the
rinsed
by we ghost y
We’ll have
no acutE se rvi ces
and tEly only
on he r b knowle D g es
to do c to r uS
what we will G a i n
by livin g R emote
of r oAd s an d rates
that b in d an d con t rol
and make us weak
and o c as ion ally
we’ll b e C alle d upon
to fi g ht b Ack
the aff R on te d
who c ome to c ivil ise uS

To teach us poe r y
is R eally pa r t
of c apitalism’s lit E r a c y
th Ey’ll die r yin g
by ou r poi sone d stones
Step by step

when population swell and get sucked into cities
we rely on resources from somewhere else
and in doing so forget the ecological intelligence that our unspecialised ancestors kept so close

and as a result of this dual loss and separation
we ha
tually want and rationalise its genocide
and we leave our food production to faceless corporations

so if we're to survive industrial civilisation
its warming planet peak oil and hyper-separation
we have but a rudimentary set of laws to follow

but perhaps it's still too early to speak again so simply

with oil and other fossils we have the illusion of great complexity
and with our perversely centralised philosophies
primeval images of existence remain elevated to the indigenous and the peasantry
Our intelligence to rapid change may be the deathnail in the coffin of the suburban bourgeoisie which may in turn necessitate composting private property, ruralising populations from car parks to food forestry and because we can no longer say that growth and ascent will sustain and entertain populations hell bent on ignoring the projections of climate chaos and energy descent we'll eat the weed and become radical homemakers, practising wild fermentation and aboriginal patterns of experience, we'll shift the central ideology from waste back to ecology and shunt the industrial military complex through our everyday activity.

So we won't support supermarkets and fossil energy companies instead expanding local food systems and functional diversity and we will not fly and drive the planet into more aggregating violence rather relocalise our produce our arts and our science and we won't grow wealth because we know it only grows pollution we'll become instead of clocking to our bioregion and we'll not slump back to religious agricultural repression we'll resist the disembodiment of past generations.
we'll learn to live again without plas tic cards and life insuran ce

we'll eat yams and fun gi when they're abundant not over harvest and we'll grow food in compost soil but not become reliant on fixed settlements and their temples in an age of extr eme climate

what is now apparent is no long er a problem that needs a solution but a cement equ i l ient responses to anthropogenic pollution because the way in which we live is ultra-fanatical negation – the relationship between our ecologies and bi o sphere in d egradati on

every law every government system is set up to serve centres of veiled violence and fuel ab strac tions to put sola r panels on our roofs and carry on as usual is profound stubbornness to crises and arrogance to frugality what is now required is whole systems insurrection starting with each sporulating home not awaiting confirmation from herbicidal governments that will only slow us down nothing can move more rapidly than weeds on disturbed ground to be connected to the grid of peaking industrialisation including every type of labour from childcare to construction is vulnerable to collapse to rising costs and tides – resilience is found in untamed companies not in cartesian lies
ye's it's still a time of mediately of fantasy
a tipping point of wealth a last desperate at fancy
we've deforested the land base and vacuumed up the sea
plumed a thousand years of oil in one corrupted century

So the payback's on our doorstep and the on-effects are looming
some will pray for techno-fix others apocalyptic
but these two hopeful fictions are not really meant
to prepare us for an era of climate chaos and energy descent
and those who will survive and carry on our species
will cease with airborne yeasts bacteria and forest faeces
and grow again from leaf our relationship to earth
we cannot box up our dead and expect to freely birth

and while there is good warmth and nominal moisture in the soil
we'll eat spontaneous plant life and replace totalising oil
with ecological functioning – step by step – which simply means
we regain permacoexistence – we garden hunt and glean
Affirmation
(for Meg)

i am The dau\textsuperscript{er} of chickens and Goats

the Siste\textsuperscript{er}
of ou\textsuperscript{er} litt\textsuperscript{e} sp\textsuperscript{ins} and creeks
that\textsuperscript{er} listen\textsuperscript{er} new life

i Am the love\textsuperscript{er}
of \textsuperscript{er}esolute \textsuperscript{er}apto\textsuperscript{es} and\textsuperscript{er} loyal\textsuperscript{er} camp\textsuperscript{er} Do\textsuperscript{es}

The mothe\textsuperscript{er} of yam daisies
and\textsuperscript{er} Othe\textsuperscript{er} dan\textsuperscript{ed}elions

(and listen closely)

i will\textsuperscript{er}come
\textsuperscript{er}An\textsuperscript{er}mothe\textsuperscript{er} to the wild\textsuperscript{er} bees
and they will car\textsuperscript{er}y us
with their\textsuperscript{er} love\textsuperscript{er} blossoms
\textsuperscript{er}ear\textsuperscript{er} after\textsuperscript{er} ear\textsuperscript{er}
To the sensible
(for the community gardeners)

with this patchy knowledge of soil
and poor understanding of the renewing life of plants
and despite our schooling
which determines wealth mines
we adhere to an economics of civil plane ta ry warfare
we garden communally

and while the machines of progress
muffle our activities –
there is little peace
with these repeating trucks
of bad debt possessing
belt ing past –
we have coined a world here
that our soil spoiled hands
and simple tools have enabled
Cleave and bumcracks permeate our gardens as bodies bond and bend to ground producing yields of real world wealth and desire thinking is extraordinary when knees are soaked in patches of leaf and fruit.

The mind no longer constructs anxiety or cruelty when the loving company of ground enters our nostrils flowing the passages to the sensitive...
Community composting, Daylesford Community Food Gardeners, 2013
Becoming carless

We have spent money

Cleaning it

and having it

made worthy

of the road

we're a little tense

as it's raining

and one of us

Eight years old

is not so awake

or interested

in the mud splash effects

on upholstery

We still have some petrol

In the tank

it will be enough

for the journey
it's been a year
since we made the decision
and we've rehearsed being without it
All through the winter
recording each kilometre travelled
Each litre expended
and now we're at this point
ready to drive
for The last time
from the town
With little public transport
to the centre
Soaked in it
where the young guy who works
for the Armed forces credit union
will hand us a cheque

to cash in
at The bicycle shop
Mole Creek

This is travel cheap oil
Not normal nomadism

A whole apple island
From the little hills
That support us
That we're close to

Beer He's like the e
My cultural weakness
And still Masts
My stomach bases my thought
And makes my nose run
i dEs\textsubscript{c}en\textsubscript{d} on foot this little town
d\textsubscript{d}own old forest sycamore infested
\textit{g}oats cows wallabies po\textsubscript{t}o\textsubscript{os} share common ground
kEpt in and out by fences
i imagine the soup i could build from the roadside
osehiPs and do\textsubscript{k} root with plantain leaves
i can see the colour and sense its goodness
\textit{g}an\textsubscript{t}hs\textsubscript{e}d with nettle and wood blewit
brewed slowly
just one pot mountain water and fire

This temperate winter dish
\textsc{restoring} all health
\textsc{keeping} my earliest intuitions
\textsc{alive} to the gentle possibilities
\textsc{beyond}\textsc{agriculture}
\textsc{beyond} settlement
the affluent oily structures of which
keep me fe\textsubscript{N}ed weak man-made
and longing for beer...
Zero

before we bought you home
you lived in a shed
with your sister
and bullied your brother
in my ignorance
i made you sleep
by yourself
in the washroom
just to a pup

for two nights
no body slept very well

then i 'succumbed'
(the very word is violent)

To your cries –
your voice chronically speaking
my deaf ears finally sensing
my obdurate cruelty
so you came into bed with us
for quite some months
(as long as you needed)
your anxieties dissolving from that night forward
rejuvenating to yourself
this easy one you were born
Pink blossom

It's father's day
and there's the digging in
of winter's compost
close round the apple trees

she walks over
speaking something
holding a small red bundle
out in front

"our baby"

she says
opening the precious apple
for me to see

nearly twelve weeks old
and about to announce the news to the world

Pink blossom
we dig a Small hole at The base of the budding peach tree
the Boy by kicks a ball at the dry stone wall while we bury our unfruited blossom
Dandelion

the body doesn't just perform the recipe. It performs the ethics of poetry as a vital act. 

Art now is generative. Home-brewed, made and unmade. Not awaiting praise in a museum powered on coffee. 

Coffee is the second largest agricultural commodity in the world, only to wheat like Wheat. And using vast amounts of cheap crude oil. 

Coffee is transported all over the world of globalised trade.
but Coffee is a major pollutant to many worlds
When it is not grown within walking distance of our homes
we are still so far away from home
When we make a plant so prominent that has no relationship to where we live

People are all manners of things when coffee surges through them
the busy, busy, fast, noisy, fast day starts with coffee
To bring us up to speed with the fast-fast and noisy-fast world of the world of a culture that transports in all its resources

and the day the end of the world must necessarily end with alcohol to bring the world of the machine back down to a slower...
more idling speed
even for a few half cut hours

uppers-and-downers-culture-world
the world of cutting soil en masse
and see dinning monocultures
and the spray-spray-spray-world
enables by the industrial transport world
of thoughts

thought is intrinsic
to what it is that fuels us
this is the world of energy exchange –
transforming joules

The world-of-the-world
that is truly beyond
the anthropocene-world-of-the-noisy
offer something more dependable
almost worlds
sometimes unpleasant
and generally uncertain

now my garden fork goes up and down with the sun
i push it down into the soil
and pop up the roots that speak of home
Dandelion grows in all the places that I walk
all the near places that I live and walk
low plants that are self-acquiring and determining
Dandelion is only one world in these places
a weed to some
a plant in the wrong places
an investment in toxic chemicals
for governments and children of corporations:

dandelion not travel without passport
dandelion not be allowed to self-accrete
No no no! Dandelions are the enemy

a culprit of speedy development
razes the soil again and again
we cannot stop the dandelion

We need not water
feed or transport them
they do All this themselves
Dandelions are truly energy autonomous
This makes them a vital food
Even before we discover
They’re already a vital food
a pioneer plant
    A healer of razed earth
    a medley of land and liver
    an industry of autonomous flora

now i drink acacia
    and dandelion coffee
    and teas that forage for
    or grow -
    they are all little homes now

my hands know them in the soil
from the leaves that access the sun
    and makes my food
from the flowers
    that are many little suns
dialing back

when the roots cast up
    and after they are drunk down
i know where i am
Zephyr and Blackwood

two brotHers
wind and trEe
two bRothers
rustling lEaves

jusT to see
tHese two boys be
gEntle breeze
and (tinY) big tree

one of sKy
oNe of earth
One runs ten
one of birTh

how they impreSs
each Others’ nativity
how theIr care
is Loving proclivity

—
Fish remains for the sea gulls, 2013
Spear fish I

my scalp
sMatters to the
cool splash
of openly fermented apples
and momentarily
Stops the flaky decay
the cold harshness
of winter's
head

the baby cries
turns his night nest
summoning disorientation
wakes
the patient
flips the little mammal

tucks in and under
until soon
sleeps again
the boy's muscles
imp<sub>ress</sub> his skinny
contemporary ones who
also the
decay
their building forms
Sounding growth
And built twice
in the sport pose's
eye

deaf's hair
falling and settling
among the beams
of drifting dust
his old kin eyes
Ying seven times
more quickly
only by
our own love

The song's attempt
to order the inevitable
descents – to hold them
at last for a while
While in the writing
the intractable head and baby
the boy and dog
breath and more
deeply in

the exhalation clocks
dand Ruff and teething
vanity and inscrutability
All convalesce naked
in Time's hole

the branch is cut
And very slowly
made into the speech
of the fish you eat

attempts about killing
tenet the dust laying diggs
but my hands are:
all eaten God's
I share my kill soiled food with loved kin
on white sand baches

with pigface
vegatables
We neither lease
or hold another possession
And we smuggle
the dog into the park

we’ve made camp

civility’s laws
different from vinegar
there is no salve
but a cure of the headland

can we defy this curse

can we hide
in the dunes
with spear and tent?

no collector will
catch and ordure us off
if we are quiet

and keep common
the sea
Walking for food: regaining permapoesis

Part 3: Essays
1. Eating weeds

Towards a poethics of walked-for food; towards *permapoiesis*

Under-ode, antediluvian reprisal,
seed vengeance, broad-leaf outrage,
seed-spray head kick, the pressure point
rumoured to have dropped Bruce Lee
in his tracks; haters of weeds,
haters of any more words
than needed: say it straight,
vandals, poofter-bashers, migrant-baiters
dead gum lovers, parrot killers,
worshippers of spray-drenched fruit
that smiles without blight...

I have woken up restless. I spent all day yesterday holed up inside reading studies about child obesity and the effects of refined sugar diets in affluent countries and went to bed all head and bodiless. I’m hungover on voluntary sedentism; my screen eyes bulging and dry, my back and legs achy and tired. I locate my jacket and beanie, pack my shoulder bag with a few tools and three old plastic bags, whistle the pup and leave the house.

It’s freezing outside. The long rye grasses are sodden and Zero, the fourteen-week-old Jack Russell, is soon saturated and becomes immediately reluctant to go on the walk. Sly ravens crow about the eggs down by the coop. I curse the cold and the damp; the winter is well into its fifth month and I’m reminded of French writer Michel Houellebecq’s (2011) description of Paris’s climate, which uncannily captures the character of ours more than half a planet away: “Springtime in Paris is often simply a continuation of winter – rainy, cold, muddy, and dirty. Summer there is unpleasant more often than not... the hot seasons never last long and end after two or three days with a storm, followed by a sharp drop in temperature. It is only in autumn that Paris is truly a pleasant city, offering short sunny days, where the dry and clear air leaves an invigorating sensation of freshness.” In such a black mood gloomy Europeans such as Houellebecq and W.G. Sebald walk along with me. But this is not Europe and I’m reminded of the conversations I have had with our naturalist friend Tanya Loos about the Jaara people’s seasons. Working with Indigenous elders and non-Indigenous researchers she has recently surmised the “Six Season Wombat Forest Calendar.” According to the calendar the season we are in now is *early spring*, which precedes *true spring*. 
It still feels like winter although the soil is warming and beginning to move with spring-like life. The remaining four seasons include *early summer*, *late summer*, *autumn* and *winter*. I have noted myself (as a gardener) that late summer is a second dormancy period when little grows. The soil is parched and more-than-human life is barely moving, conserving water and energy.

I feed the hens and drop yesterday’s eggs off to the house. The little white and tan puppy shivers and whimpers at my feet and “forgodsake!” I pick him up and button him tight inside my jacket and walk out into the wet air. For a time there is nothing said between us, the crunching of my gumboots on gravel and the morning’s early birdsong speak over the day’s otherwise dreary demeanour. Traffic continuously rumbles on the A300 a hill away. “Fuck off!” to the cars and trucks and the industry world that made them. Zero trembles at the outburst resounding in the little valley, I reassure him and he eagerly licks me back under my chin, his coarse dog tongue on my stubble.

We come to the track that runs along Wombat Creek where little dark swamp wallabies are often heard, less often seen, thumping through the woodland. When I think of an ideal forest garden, its many players, its beauty and consoling personality, I think of this little nook of the world. Willows, wattles, cresses, gums, moss covered rocks, elderberries budding in leaf, rabbits, blackberries, lomandras, hollies, wood ducks, wood blewits and mycena mushrooms, dianellas, poa tussocks, wallaby grasses, oaks, cherry plums, a myriad of bird song, lizards, sleeping antechinus, yam daisy and milkmaid tubers, hawthorns and my favourite tree, the Blackwood wattle. These things are not all supposed to go together according to the Department of Primary Industry and the Environment, but nonetheless they do without permission; ringtail possums nest in the prickly hawthorns, Gang-gang cockatoos desire hawthorn berries, small birds and reptiles find protection in the blackberries, pragmatic adaptation is more potent than bureaucratic ideology. The forest floor of this autonomous garden contains many smaller plants, including a pharmacopeia of newly naturalised species upon which the DPIE, following the principles of *man’s dominion*, have declared permanent war. By doing so they have written an open cheque to the chemical giant Monsanto, the company who brought into the world’s worlds Agent Orange and DDT and who told us they were safe to use.

Cleavers grow here, an edible herb also known as stickyweed as it attaches itself to passers-by. We stop and I finger in my bag for the right tool. My understanding of forageable plants has built up slowly over the last several years, pretty much spanning the time we have stopped going to supermarkets. As a family we have discovered nearly 100 autonomous edibles in our locasphere that appear as Appendix 2 of this thesis. These
(mostly) plants are supplementary foods, especially in late winter or early spring when they’re at their most tender and there’s not as much going on in our home produce garden. Cleavers can be used to treat skin problems such as rashes and eczema and they are a rich source of vitamin C. This is the time of the year when there is little fruit around, except perhaps for some citrus, so cleavers become one of the main juicing plants juiced with raw egg and honey and other variable forest garden foods. Or they can be made into soup with a minor nutritious meat stock from an arrowshot garden rosella, a species of bird whose numbers are abundant due to all the chicken grains and fruit gardens locally available to them. Zero shivers uncontrollably now; his dampness has soaked into my jumper and the heat generated from the walk mix to form a little humidity between us. In summer when cleavers are laden with fruit, the ability to latch on to moving things enables a brilliant dispersal of their seed. It’s akin to hitchhiking – travelling by another’s fuel and company, much like Zero is doing now. Apparently the fruits of this plant make a good coffee, an experiment on a long list of herbally things I have noted to carry out. I harvest a large bunch of stem and leaf, which will require cooking as the small thumbing hooks on the plant stick in the throat if eaten raw or are not pulverised for juice.

Dogs are regularly walked along the creek, and two come bounding up to us, their tongues and tails expressing their ultra morning exhilaration. They sniff at my coat but they’re too big for Zero to play with just now so I introduce him to them by smell only. He shyly but excitedly smells and licks back. I’m far less concerned by the dogs’ territorial markings sprayed over our evening greens than I am with a shower of Monsanto’s Roundup™, a very common herbicide that, even despite the mounting evidence against it, Monsanto still claims is ‘safe’. Quite incredibly, governments and others still believe them. The active ingredient of Roundup™ is glysophate, a key component of conventional agriculture, GM agriculture (Frankenfoods4) and conservative (or lazy) environmental land management practices. Roundup does nothing good for the soil, but by contrast, diluted by rain, mammalian urine is an excellent source of nitrogen for plants. Too much uric acid will kill a plant but modest amounts of urine can be beneficial, as we know from urinating on our citrus. Urine comes out of the body sterile and once in the soil performs as plant food. Older human societies have even used their micturating wastes (the active ingredient is ammonia) as an ecological washing detergent. But today council workers with boom sprays pumped from large tanks on the back of their trucks commit select plants to death, following the lead set by the DPIE. The dying, yellowing plants, the compacted lifeless soil, the erosion caused and the wasted food I witness almost year-round on my walks affect how I think of and experience my home place. The transference of Monsanto’s military chemicals to
environmental herbicides constantly unsettles me. An intelligent culture would apply the precautionary principle, but we fail to do even this.

This ideology of dominion aided by the imperatives of the market is prevalent throughout our culture. It proliferates throughout our economic, political and educational institutions, our sciences and our arts, but Monsanto always seems to take things one step further; as does the US government as it feigns to be global peace monger when acting as the opposite. English writer George Monbiot (2013) explains that “[i]n 1997 the US agreed to decommission the 31,000 tonnes of sarin, VX, mustard gas and other agents it possessed within 10 years. In 2007 it requested the maximum extension of the deadline permitted by the Chemical Weapons Convention – five years. Again it failed to keep its promise, and in 2012 it claimed they would be gone by 2021.”

Moss is the only thing that grows on repeatedly glyphosate-sprayed soils; moss typically grows on rock and other hard surfaces – which is what soil becomes after the repetitive use of glyphosate empties the life out of it. Almost everywhere I walk in my locasphere the evidence of continuous poisonings is found, but there are some areas council workers and the DPIE miss – they rarely visit this far side of the creek, which explains why there’s such good foraging to be had here and why the ecology is so dynamic. It is probably because no vehicle can get in this far; and why would you walk when you can drive to other places that need poisoning just as urgently?

After having raced back around the bend, the two large dogs bound back proudly with their human kin and we all greet each other, some cocking legs, others conversing in common tongue.

There are numerous baby wild lettuces, which taste like a primitive, bitterer form of cos. I make sure not to over-harvest as their size will swell again before next week. I find a large spear thistle, a plant related to the artichoke and cursed by farmers. This one’s stem has grown tall and leggy between two rocks. I carefully slice off the leaves, shaving the stem clean of prickles while it’s still connected to the root. This plant can have considerable taproots that make excellent roasted vegetables and the roots are lovely to eat raw after being washed and splashed with balsamic or red wine vinegar. This simple recipe has been tried and tested in our home many times over winter and now constitutes a regular food source provided the thistles are harvested before flowering. As a root vegetable they are better than parsnips, of which I’m also fond, and which have also naturalised in our garden alongside Jerusalem artichokes, nettles, dandelions, mallow and a host of other generous drought-hardy beings. I cut the juicy stem away and add it to the bag. The green mucilage, a
demulcent used in folk medicine for its soothing properties, purportedly aids the cleansing of internal organs, and its swelling jelly is excellent for thickening soups.

Sow thistles are also out in abundance this morning. There has been good rain and I acknowledge to myself that the cold and late frosts of spring make these plants very tender and desirable. I snip a crisp juicy head and watch the milk bleed from the cut before crunching into the bitterness. I remember a friend of mine, Alexis Pitsopoulos, who got me started on eating weeds, saying that this milky latex sap (also prevalent in wild lettuce and petty spurge) is good for ridding worts and sun spots, although it can burn the skin so you need to be careful in applying it. The head, full of flower buds and leaf, has a nutty texture to taste.

It’s evident that health problems today are due often to the absence of a just gathered, low-sugar, bitter diet, coupled with the oversupply of high-sugar and highly processed foods. The Australian Bureau of Statistics published a survey in late 2012 stating that a third of Australians over eighteen years old were obese and another third overweight. It also stated that only five percent had an adequate daily intake of fresh vegetables and fruit. English writer Tom Standage (2009) argues that “[d]ental remains show that [early or proto] farmers suffered from tooth decay, unheard of in hunter-gatherers, because the carbohydrates in the farmers’ cereal-heavy diets were reduced to sugars by enzymes in their saliva as they chewed.” But to observe fundamentally healthy teeth, we don’t have to go back to dental remains prior to agriculture 10,000 or more years ago. In Australia we only need look at Indigenous teeth prior to colonisation, only a handful of generations ago, to understand how walked-for food that is directly accountable gives such premium whole body health; good teeth are a significant indicator. When it comes to human health and land health, the empirical evidence is everywhere for those who hold old knowledges and unwritten commonsense. Various university research projects have been conducted recently that also show the benefits of returning to a pre-agricultural, diverse diet. In 2010 Dr Karen Adams from Victoria University stated that the “rise in the cost of healthy foods had put pressure on Aboriginal families, with many running out of food before their next pay. Encouraging the development of community gardens, food shares and the hunting and gathering of traditional foods was vital to healthy eating and food security in the [Wathaurong] community... There has been a real focus on how you can recreate your culture in a modern colonised world.”

We walk on. The forest on the southwest of the town has a cold presence. The marginal ecologies on the outskirts of town, between the town’s gardens and the Wombat State Forest, are known as novelty ecologies; but I think they’re better described
as transitioning communities. They are significant places for more-than-human experimentation in resilient living, experimentation from which we have so much to learn.

New flora, fauna and fungi guilds have formed or are forming in these places that I believe can teach us much about how to function and adapt in a post-glyphosate, post-extractive, post-fossil fuel era. These new guild communities are consequences of the powerful forces of globalisation. The recent arrivals have nativised with the old to become dynamic new ecologies, demonstrating that struggle, companionship and mutualistic relationships pay off. With a first glimpse of the day’s sun Zero licks my face. Still shivering, he is slowly warming up. Shivering is the mammal body’s intelligent response to being cold; we shiver to generate heat not to express how cold we are. I was raised in a culture that understands shivering and weeds – *plants in the wrong place* – as bad news, not as commonsense responses to a predicament.

I harvest some young curly dock. Like most autonomous plants, the younger the leaves the more palatable they are. Curly dock is a sour tasting vegetable related to sorrel and is high in potassium and vitamin A. It is also a rich source of protein and has a high concentration of iron. I nibble a leaf; it breaks away easily in my teeth, particular to plants in the Polygonaceae family. The leaves have a high oxalic acid content so it’s best to eat them in small quantities. Dock leaf is also a traditional remedy for stinging nettle stings. My eldest son, Zephyr, recently chased a ball into the large nettle patch in the garden from which we make nettle leaf pesto and nettle leaf tea, so I masticated a number of nearby dock leaves with my teeth and rubbed the green mash on his legs. Within a few minutes the stings had completely gone and he resumed chasing the ball around the garden, only now with a much keener eye. Over winter we harvest the roots of dock too. Peel, cut and dehydrate them in a warm place over several days before boiling and steeping them for three hours. The tea, drunk lukewarm or cold, is a tonic for purifying the blood and contains no oxalic acid. Like eating sun-fermented hawthorn berry fruit leathers, drinking this old tea connects those of us originally from Europe and western Asia to our aboriginal ancestors through the sensory pleasures located in our creaturely mouths. These are plants with which we have ancient relations, temporarily forgotten. From the civil privileges of history, of prehistory botany or Ethnobotany, we now know various hollies and oaks were local here in the time of Gondwana. But if we entertain our intuitions we can see that these relationships are explicit. These are old relationships with plants and soil that are renewed; just as dock root tea is with our saliva and blood. Another such tea to drink, prepared in a similar way, is dandelion root, which is purported to fight and kill off the myriad of cancer cells, now so prevalent in hypertechnocivility.9
I had never before this morning seen sheep’s sorrel so tall and stemmy. Presumably this groundcover was named as such because the leaf matches a simplified silhouette of a sheep’s head. Usually the leaves, which are high in beta-carotene, are only good in soups, juices and salads; but this morning the stems are also very tender. I pick a bunch to add to the bag. The sun finally shows through and we are at that point of the walk, the body oxygenated and enlivened, where things shift and the worlds of the world start to become wonderful places again; cars, trucks, European literature and pesticides backgrounded, the sensory and sensible once more foregrounded. Apart from gathering food, this is why I walk – to find home, to be at home. We have collected a large bag full of herbs and vegetables. Small finches flick across the path here and there to brew or feed their hatchlings. I call back to them, “I too understand your brilliant living.” Zero squirms to get down and runs off along the creek’s path, his nose and mind taking in a million signals emanating from the ground. Those who seek dominion forget that the ground is the source of life; to mindlessly poison and mine it demonstrates what we have become as hypertechnocivilians, divorced from the non-tech brilliance of the land and its communities.

Weeds are simply various species of plants collectively given a bad name. The word weed is only ever ideological; it has no real value. Like human behaviour over the past 100,000 years – spanning our close relationships with dogs – these autonomous plants are autonaturalising pioneers; they have followed us spreading out across variable soils, fixing themselves wherever they can make, unmake and give back life. Not so long ago we humans gave back too. Weeds like vetch, an early relative of lentils and chickpeas and supposedly the first cultivated legume, are excellent nitrogen producers for soils. Vetch that grows autonomously is generally a good indicator of a low-nitrogen soil, and this delicate and quite tasty plant is able to draw nitrogen from the air and fix it in the soil as it matures, dies and decomposes – makes, unmakes and gives back. I harvest only the soft tender tips. Chickweed – another edible plant reasonably high in vitamin C, calcium, magnesium and potassium – is an indicator of a very fertile soil. Sheep’s sorrel indicates an acid soil, so where it naturally occurs it’s a good place to plant citrus, blueberries, strawberries and other plants that like such a soil type. Annual weeds prepare soils for ecological repair. They keep appearing on soils that have been burnt, razed or ploughed because they benefit from the restoration work they have to do there. The relationship is mutual; they get a place to live and make life while they repair soil and set seed for more life. They are the earth’s volunteer emergency health workers. In most of the world’s worlds a forest environment is generally the default ecology, and robust soil-conditioning pioneer
plants help provide the conditions for soils to fuel up with plant nutrients and gradually regrow forests by an ecological process called succession. Annual weeds are usually the first stage of ecological succession. Perennial weeds then follow, further stabilising the earth from erosion while fixing nitrogen and building humus (soil fertility). Small trees and larger shrubs follow in succession until eventually, if unperturbed by human development, a diverse forest ecology is flourishing.

The Japanese farmer and former agricultural scientist Masanobu Fukuoka (1978) tells us that he very intentionally incorporated annual, biannual and perennial weeds as combined food and medicine for his soils to feed his plants. His experimental do-nothing farming techniques revolved around his understanding that “when you get down to it there are few agricultural processes that are really necessary.” Fukuoka would roll crop seeds into small clay pellets, dry and disperse them throughout his weedy fields. The clay would protect the seeds from birds and other creatures until significant rain arrived, at which time the nutrient rich clay case would dissolve giving each seed a happy little bed in which to germinate. He would only cut down the weeds after the seeds took, leaving the weedy organic matter to lie where it fell, forming thick nutritious mulch for the seedlings to push up past into the light. This spontaneous biomass, or weed mulch, would also assist to conserve water in the hot months. Observing Japan’s uptake of chemicalised agriculture imported from the US post war, Fukuoka writes: “It is impossible for specialised research to grasp the role of a single predator at a certain time within the intricacy of insect inter-relationships.” Using chemicals is not a problem for the botanist or entomologist alone, he continues: “Philosophers, men of religion, artists and poets must also help to decide whether or not it is permissible to use chemicals in farming...” And I would extend this list to every organism dependant on the soil’s health for its living. When the science departments of chemical warfare quickly became after 1945 the shareholder science departments of industrial agriculture, other industrial chemists simultaneously helped create a multibillion-dollar synthetic pharmaceutical market. When the medicine is removed from our food we need to engineer our medicines. It is still common for many civil beings to claim longer lifespans as the proof that technological progress is working. I believe this argument is perennially flawed. Consider the time we civil beings spend working in jobs that often are boring and meaningless, only to be put on a cocktail of synthetic pills after (and often before) retirement, supposedly to extend our lives. Work refusal, school refusal and the refusal to be socialised or engineered to accept the estranging imperatives of hypertecnocivility are therefore fundamental activities if we are to stop this chain of damage we call modern life. Walking for our food and medicine is still possible, and no job, school, city, car or herbicide is needed – only knowledges spoken and passed on.
However, reinstating this pattern of existence takes time. We have lost so much knowledge in quick succession courtesy of cheap crude oil.

Narrow leaf plantain is my seventh gathered herb this morning; it is a medicinal plant used by western herbalists as a tea to treat stomach ulcers, regulate digestion and administer for kidney problems. It's nonetheless fine cooked with many tastier weeds in a soup, and a tender bunch finishes a required harvest for the night's pot. Ecologist Tim Low (1988) writes that there are 24 species of plantain found in Australia, and the way they get around is similar to cleavers: “When heavy rains drench the seeding stalks of plantains, the tiny seeds swell into balls of jelly, which stick to passing animals and thereby help spread the seeds.” The jelly is mucilage, he continues, “a traditional [Aboriginal] herbal cure for constipation. European herbalists administer seeds of African and Indian plantains [to treat diarrhea], which swell in the stomach and add bulk to the faeces.” Plantains are found in all temperate areas in the world and like many autonomous plants can grow in a wide variety of soils and conditions. My favourite plantain to eat is Buckshorn, which forms as a flattened rosette with intricate horny cuts along each of the narrow ribbed leaves. It makes an excellent nutty flavoured salad green.

Zero and I have returned home. The cloud has lifted well and truly, the soup bubbles away on the stove, and the sun warms the soil and the new tender leaves of the fruit trees. I’ve added to the soup Mt Zero organic green split peas (204 food kms away), salinity salt from the agriculturally-impoverished Murray River near Mildura (452 kms away) and the last of our garlic from the previous year’s crop, which I caramelised with sliced spear thistle stem in olive oil that was grown and pressed on a nearby small farm (10 kms away). Because so much of the food we grow or forage for is relatively free, we can afford the small farm grown supplements to be organic or biodynamic, although we usually buy these direct from the farm or through our not-for-profit local bulk food networks to keep the costs down and support local people. My partner Meg, who is also an essayist, volunteers her time writing newsletters and blog posts for these organisations. The inevitable challenge is to have all our food within walking (or bike riding) distance. On an income not much more than the dole we live richly, generating little pollution, gardening food at home and with community, hunting and fishing autonomous fauna whose numbers are robust or that are considered pests and ferals by ideologues who are wholly dependant on the monetised economy.

Weeds, rhizomelic plants, bacteria and fungi are all able to disperse and self-renew, make and unmake, and continually remake new foods. These are the key sources of life we follow for our household’s transition from anthropocentric, polluting and monological hegemonies based upon growing capital and private relations. Foraging offers up an
autonomous alternative. It both respects and models Aboriginal patterns of existence. It demands reclamation of our own aboriginal food heritages and commons (even if the boundaries of which are reduced to a few street weeds), and it demands we engage once again with our earthly others in non-monetised and unclocked ecological time and space. Foraging allows for an intimacy with the world’s worlds, an understanding of ecological flux, chance and uncertainty, an understanding of the walked local. The autonomy of weeds and autonomous bush plants, their resilience, their ability to adapt, and the type of foods they can create to fuel what I call permapoiesis – these must necessarily involve the composting of symbolic clock time (wage time). This in turn necessitates the composting of monetary economics, or at best for now, the backgrounding of these damaging things.

Only in desperate times would we live on weeds alone, but when regarded as supplementary foods and medicines they are pure wealth and sit within an ecological economics of the home and local community. The project of rebuilding human ecological societies involves ceasing the poisoning of weeds and so-called feral animals, and by extension the land and its kin, and beginning to incorporate into our diets these robust, self-accruing species. Many weed or so-called pest species are edible. Only market whims and cheap fossil fuels have degraded their worth as such. They’ll be back in our mouths again and probably sooner than many might think. The question is do we want to purchase these things with money acculturated in the very violent globalised economy? Or should we, while there is still some affluence to make some significant changes, apply local knowledges and open ourselves to the possibilities of a local commons where just free food can proliferate, and where monocultural lands increasingly lie fallow, open again to diverse interrelationships and thought?

We are all at the table. Meg, Zephyr, Zero, a local teen-aged boy called Liam (who is on work experience with us) and me. Meg is serving out the thick luscious soup and I’m running through the ingredients, an inventory of the morning’s walk, sans the cursing, black mood and political entanglements. There is colour in the soup, richness, and there is colour at the table. Blessed be the weeds.

Notes
4. Mary Shelley’s book Frankenstein (1818) was also titled The Modern Prometheus, which concerns a scientist who invents a monster. See the Introduction for an explanation of the significance of Prometheus in relation to industry science and dominion ideology.


9. see the Introduction for an explanation of this term.


11. ibid. p27.


14. ibid. p123.

15. Hepburn Relocalisation Network (HRN) and Hepburn Wholefoods Collective (HWC).


17. see the Introduction and Glossary for an explanation of this term.
2. At arm’s length
Systemic blind violence and accountable killing

Dingo baiting spread death around the place so that living things who came for sustenance might actually be harmed or killed. To the extent that food was disguised as poison, mutual care was perverted. This violent work disguised death as life; it wrenched the process of life away from flourishing mutuality and toward indiscriminate death. And death itself was perverted, since an animal that had been poisoned would become food for other animals and would poison them as well. 1080 instigates waves of death. No longer is life making and unmaking itself in country. The unmaking is taking over. Rather than death being turned back towards life, it is amplifying.²

A local man recently introduced himself to me with the line: “It’s because of you we killed three roosters last night; so much fun; so delicious...”. His hetero-camp exuberance, his mediated-ironic vernacular, “so much fun”, could have been ignored easily, but instead it stayed with me, as did his “it’s because of you we killed...”. His language choice seemed out of place within the town in which we’ve both made our homes, and yet very much part of a broader cultural meme, where animals exist solely for our pleasure and amusement, and resource accountability is someone else’s business. I take no pleasure in killing an animal, it’s never fun. However there is pleasure to take in being accountable for one’s household resources. It’s empowering and life affirming to garden, hunt and forage for food, and no factory, supermarket or laboratory can vouch for such immediacy, intimacy and accountability. To give this guy some credit, I think accountability is what he really meant by “fun”.

The man is a friend of our friend Anita, to whom I had recently given a lesson on killing a rooster; Anita had then passed on the basics to him. Non-monetised knowledge has a generous way of disseminating in our community. Only one or two generations ago many more people knew about such things, and it was, until recently, second nature to kill our own food, be it a carrot or a chicken, and bring to the table these unmediated gifts of the backyard garden. Anita came over one afternoon with her two young girls, and as they played on the tree-swing I began to demonstrate to their mother the process of killing a rooster in preparation for cooking. Before she arrived I had got a hot fire going in an old metal washing machine, which I had converted previously to an outdoor fireplace. With the grill from an old BBQ I had made a simple stovetop that we regularly use for cooking in the garden. I placed a large stockpot of rainwater on the grill, stoked the fire underneath and
left it to come to the boil. Earlier in the day four roosters arrived, brought over to us by a community friend we call Rooster Mel. We keep around fifteen chickens, a rooster and some ducks on a quarter acre. Mel lives out of town on a much larger plot of Jaara land and has hundreds of fowl of all combinations. The roosters had been sitting quietly for a few hours in a large, well-ventilated cardboard box in the dark of the tool shed. We have for some years now entered into an ongoing barter with Rooster Mel where she brings us any number of roosters at one time, we kill and prepare them for cooking, and she collects half in return.

Because I was raised in a family that occasionally killed their own poultry, none of this is especially new to me. However, I sense that this is not the case for most Australians, particularly those under the age of forty. For many, killing an animal raises a myriad of emotional and intellectual complexities; most are clear that killing for fun or for sport is unacceptable, but the position seems to shift or become less pronounced if we kill to feed ourselves. Killing for food is as old as our species and much older in other creatures that share our evolutionary traits. But killing for food – taking life to make more life possible – has only become an extraordinary question in affluent societies that are estranged from the land. Killing that is not outsourced to specialists has become a very strange thing, unless you’re glazed behind the wheel of your car.

The water is bubbling furiously as I take Anita over to the tool shed. I’m not sure what she knows about handling poultry so I take things slowly. I reach into the box and feel around for a pair of legs, keeping the lid of the box as tightly sealed as possible. I grope in the dark, gently gathering my left hand around some young spurless legs, and bring to the top of the box a fine red-plumed cock. I continue to hold him upside down, which hypnotises the young rooster, becalming him. I place a weight on top of the cardboard box to keep the others in and walk with the bird and Anita over to the fire. Above us are a series of galvanised wires I have tensioned across the garden as a growing trellis for grapes. They are handy to hang out washing upon, as well as roosters. Before Anita arrived I had tied half a meter of blue baling twine to one of the wires and hung a butcher’s hook on the end, repeating this three more times, one for each bird. Around the fire sit several large tree stumps that we use for simple seating; one is used as a chopping block and shows the wear of the axe and the patina of death, old feathers deeply creviced into the darkly stained wood. I take the neck of the bird in my right hand and pull firmly away from my left, which is still gripping the feet, twisting the neck as I pull. The bird is immediately unconscious and I lay its limp head on the chopping block and bring down the axe across its neck removing the head in one clean cut. I hold the bird’s spasming body over a nearby garden bed so as the blood feeds the soil and when the last throes of its life have given way I tie the
feet together and place them over the butcher’s hook. Anita’s daughters have come over to watch, intrigued by this less than everyday event; they observe the blood dripping from the neck feathers and look curiously towards their mother who is now calmly following the procedure with a second rooster.

By contrast, killing for sport is a fairly recent phenomenon. Such killing signals a loss of a proper relationship to death and dying. Similarly, industrially killing an animal for food via slaughterhouse conveyor belts signals a systemic unwellness that has been wholly normalised under the brutal banner of supermarket idolatry – a worship of blind violence. The correlation of slaughterhouse killing to torture is well expressed and understood, and for the great majority of us industrial slaughterhouses are unacceptable, at least in theory. However, it seems likely that many assume our café, restaurant, supermarket, tuckshop, or romantic dinner has nothing to do with unaccountable violence. Interior designers do not usually style cafés, supermarkets and restaurants to demonstrate the brutality behind the food they serve. The violence is mediated away from view by design. The places in which we get our food – including vegan, vegetarian and omnivore consumerables – are emptied of the pain and suffering of our earthly others. Commercial grapes used for making wine, for example, require protection from wild birds just before harvest. Wild birds therefore are shot, gassed or poisoned regularly on point of harvest in order for us to enjoy a drink with our meal, be it vegan, vegetarian or omnivore cuisine.

Anita struggles with the wringing of the rooster’s neck, stating she hasn’t quite got the strength. Distressed, the rooster begins to bleat out and I instruct her to go straight to the chopping block. The axe comes down and only half cuts the neck but another blow and the rooster’s dying body is flapping out over the garden. Life is transmitted from one being to another, or many others of the soil. “Pretty good for a first go,” I say, and recommend bypassing the neck-wringing stage in future until she is more comfortable with the process. While we all perform such tasks differently, I have come to understand that wringing a rooster’s neck, owning the death of an animal in one’s hands, is an animal’s rite of passage and is akin to digging the soil and working it with one’s hands. Whereas tools are useful, they also mediate us from direct experience. A problem I have with some vegan and vegetarian ideologies is the frequent assumption that humans are not really animals, that we’re not part of inter-animal relationships of living and dying – predator and prey contracts that perform and carry on life, which of course must include death. I am suspicious of many western vegan- and vegetarianisms because they are ideologies that emerge from affluent, ecologically abstracted societies. Even though I agree with the arguments that the west is eating way too much meat and global overpopulation is a
significant environmental problem, this does not exactly equate to being meat-free and abandoning procreation. We simply need to eat and breed again to the capacities of our local lands, something we cannot know when we transport in our resources. Eating animal protein from breast milk onwards and caring for children defines us as ecological creatures. If we continue to define ourselves only as technical beings, godlike and superior, we will never attend to the myriad problems we’ve created under such ecological intransigence. Animals know how to function on earth; technical-mediated-superior humans do not.

When my eldest son Zephyr reads Tintin comics he giggles joyously. *Tintin in the Congo* is his current read. Drawn by his pleasure I venture over and he asks me to read with him. He’s on page 12; Tintin has just landed in Africa. On page 13 after narrowly escaping being chomped by a large crocodile Tintin inserts a rifle into the creature’s jaw and walks off grinning, leaving her to suffer on the bank. On page 16 Tintin kills fifteen antelope with his gun and jests to his trusty companion Snowy, “Well, at least we’ll have enough meat.” The corpses, however, are piled up and as the sportsman and his friend move off it is clear the antelope will be left to rot under the intense African sun. On page 17 Tintin kills a monkey in order to make a disguise for himself. We don’t see or sense the monkey’s wasted remains; only the joke of Tintin in a monkey suit is presented on the page. On page 18 Tintin tricks and beats with the end of his rifle another monkey who thinks Tintin is one of his own. A general tone — *all primates (except for Europeans) are stupid* — is amplified on page 19 as Tintin comes in contact with local tribes people who are all depicted to look like monkeys. By page 22 Snowy has bitten the tail off a lion and by page 24 Tintin is leading the noosed creature to the village saying, “Perhaps we could tame him...”. On page 31 Tintin blows off a snake’s head with his rifle. On page 32 the villain of the book — it’s asserted there’s only one *bad white guy* — beats Snowy over the head, ties up Tintin and hangs him from a tree over another crocodile infested river. On page 33 a Christian missionary comes to the rescue in a canoe paddled by a number of monkey-depicted converts. He shoots all the crocodiles, which are subsequently left to die. Snowy wakes up from his knock to the head as the bloody massacre floats upon the river and the hero Tintin is saved once more. The comic continues in this way for another forty pages. This is what I call *hypermediated* life, art designed to make children laugh at colonialist violence and by doing so annul the wrong of it. Somehow I missed out on reading Tintin when I was younger and never knew the accepted abuse of colonial violence represented in Georges Prosper Remi (AKA Hergé’s) children’s books, which are still so popular in the Daylesford Public Library.

*Tintin in the Congo* first appeared in print in a Brussels newspaper in 1930 where it was serialised over the course of the year in the children’s supplement. In the film *The Monkey In
The Machine and the Machine in the Monkey, Adam Curtis illustrates the relationship between Belgium’s violent colonialism in the Congo between 1885-1960 and the continuation today of that violence and ecological damage. He details how Europeans strategically instigated such bloody hatred between previously tense but never genocidal ethnicities, the Hutus and Tutsis. Curtis argues that Europeans extended the Rwandan war into the nearby resource-rich Congo where today the raw materials for our computers, mobile phones and other electronic devices are still sourced, mined, raped and murdered for, and where animals other than humans are suffering too, including our closest living relative, the bonobo.

With all four roosters now hanging in the garden I show Anita the next stage of preparation. I dunk the first rooster into the stockpot of boiling water, count to ten, hang him back on the hook and start plucking out the feathers. They come easily and I ask Anita to join me so that pretty quickly the bird is completely naked. We repeat the same task with the others until a layer of feathers has built up around us. None of these birds resemble the bleached white skin of frozen supermarket chickens. Instead they are often dark in colour and sometimes blue depending on the breed.

Australian writer Deborah Bird Rose (2011) wants us to stay close to images of the slung remains of shot or poisoned dingoes on fences, whose trophied, atrophying bodies are kept from making a return to soil, kept from re-entering the continuum of living, dying and renewing. They are the images of settler indifference that continue to haunt Aboriginal people today, and continue to attack the we ethic of Aboriginal inclusivity, an ethic that extends well beyond the human. But it also haunts us more recent settlers – for we have also been we folk, and not all that long ago. Rose lived for a number of years as a student of Aboriginal thought within the Yarralin and Lingara communities of the Victoria River Downs region in remote Northern Territory. It was here that she experienced directly a communal ethic of we: “[w]e’ve gone fishing, hunted and collected food together, eaten together and exchanged food with each other, buried the dead, wept, and welcomed new people into the world. I have come to understand that my teachers experience kinship with plants and animals at close quarters. Their relationships are tactile, and are embedded in creation, ethics, and accountability.” No immediately apparent hierarchies exist in traditional Aboriginal societies. Specific roles and laws apply but class struggle does not. With privatisation and monetisation comes the desire to make Aboriginal people middleclass and estranged from land. Aboriginal people know better than most that having access to land enables life without money, life that encounters the world’s worlds in very different ways. Civility deliberately attacks the ‘we’ ethic and seeks to replace it with individualist and anthropocentric thought. In Aboriginal cultures animals are food
or kin. Never are they fetishised as pets or for sport or any other mediated reality. Pulling or pushing Aboriginal people into deepening civility is a form of veiled genocide. It is we settlers who must reinvest in non-civility if we are to respond intelligently to ecological crisis, climate change and worsening mental and social states. Without such a shift our relationship with more-than-human entities remains essentially loveless. We remain estranged beings of no place living in symbolic territories, in images and under civil ideology, mediated, lost, eternally away from home.

Rose writes that Aboriginal people worked “with a relatively simple tool kit, the basic element to subsistence was neither technology nor labour, but knowledge... knowledge was coded in song and story – not so much as maps to places unknown, but as condensed ecological history, and as guides to understanding variation and stability.”8 In dispensing with ecological knowledges and foregrounding labour and technology, the colonisers, in just a handful of generations, have radically overrun some of the most sustainable and classless societies ever to have existed on the planet. This dispensing of considerable knowledges for vast tool kits is at the heart of mediated civil life – hypertecnocivility. Civility arrogantly believes it has both, but privatised knowledge doesn’t count; the market engineers only more war, it cannot make love or peace with the land and its communities. Battery hens, factory farms, slaughterhouses, prisons, gas chambers, drone missiles, gas fracking, climate change, roadkill – these are things of hypertecnocivility. “And so it is that life within a system of cross-species kinship,” Rose writes, “is in dreadful peril at this time.”9

Rose’s philosophy is always bodily. It has breath; spirit. And with this spirited and oxygenated breath – fished, hunted, collected, eaten, exchanged, buried, wept, welcomed – the abstract is not over privileged, as so often occurs in western thought. This is something Rose has understood by being engaged intimately with Aboriginal people, land and their thinking, which she recognises as being performed; not deskbound, alone, sedentary and sedate. The etymology of the verb sedate, which means to calm, comes from the Latin word to sit. A German scholar, Hajo Eickhoff, has contended provocatively that chairs are sedatives used to create an obedient, politically inactive population.10 This suggestion adds weight to the view that this significant technic of civil engineering – the chair – is a strategic instrument of control that begins in civility’s classrooms. The body is motionless, absent when we sit in the classroom.

Similarly, Rose is not a bystander when it comes to killing. Her philosophy suggests a locavore ethic contiguous with Aboriginal land informed intelligence and a ’fessing up
to the fact that we ourselves are indeed predatory animals: “[a]n ethical response to the call of others”, she writes, “does not hinge on killing or not killing. It hinges on taking responsibility for one’s actions.”11 Rose isn’t squeamish about predator–prey relationships provided they take place within an ecological context. She tells us that her understanding of death and killing matured during her years with Aboriginal people.

However, something other than death, Rose tells us, has stalked Aboriginal people for decades “under the name of colonization and in the form of massacres, starvation, influenza, syphilis, leprosy, and much more.”12 Her “two big contexts of death” provide great clarity for those struggling to identify how intransigence to Indigenous and ecological communities continues to cultivate itself in a highly mediated, simulated and urbanised country:

The first is the fact that death resides in life... Death, as a corollary to life, happens to all of us complex creatures. It may happen through old age, or illness; it may happen through hunting or killing; it may happen on larger scales through events such as cyclones, earthquakes, or volcanoes. In this context, living things are bound into ecological communities of life and death, and within these communities life is always making and unmaking itself in time and place.13

This first context of death marks life for most of human and pre-human history – right up until money and private relations, fences and industry science, bourgeois art and entertainment, and civil life took control of the world’s worlds:

The second context differs from the first in being a uniquely human invention: man-made mass death. This form of death arises out of a will-to-destruction that seems to be confined to humans... The will-to-destruction can most vividly be thought of as death work. It involves imagining a future emptiness, and then working systematically to accomplish that emptiness... In ordinary life, death is the necessary completion of life. Man-made mass death is not necessary and does not complete life. Instead it is a massive interruption, a negation of the relationships between life and death.14

Rose’s second context of death, “man-made mass death”, really calls for a wide-ranging critique of technics and associated “death work” within settler epistemologies. Western culture has not been able to contain its lustful anxiety for new gadgets and I believe this has to do with centuries of displacement, agitation, restlessness and involvement in the processes of mass death. The arrogance of technological progress is rarely questioned within our culture, and the direct relationship this so-called progress has to mass death is rarely entertained. Yet man-made mass death only aggregates with the imperatives of civil industry and corporatism.
In order to be economically viable and meet standards the dominant culture must truck crammed and terrified pigs, poultry, cattle and sheep to industrial torture factories for processing. Modern agriculture's death work is always at arm's length, unless, of course, you're a farmer or abattoir worker. A culture driven by technics and money, and that is intensely mediated, allows for the privileging of arm's length mass violence against the world's worlds and the fabricating of the illusion that one is not a participant in this violence. According to the few who have actually seen it at work, for instance, stun gun technology – supposed to hypnotise an animal before a kill takes place – is horrific and brutal, often misfiring and leaving the animal to continue still conscious and suffering along the conveyor belt of death. Some see this abattoir technology as civil progress. My friend Anita's first killing of a rooster was not ideal, but her will to perform a painless, respectful death was always present, and something she will achieve soon enough through practice.

Through Rose's teachers we get an incredible insight into Aboriginal thought, especially in relation to animals. Her teachers taught her to experience a world of uncertainty, a world of shapeshifting and flux and of cross-species relationships: “Hobbles Danaiyarri, another of my great teachers,” she writes, “was a barramundi before he became a human. His father speared the fish, his mother ate some, and the spirit became the baby who grew into the gifted analyst and storyteller.” This animism, this hands-on nearness to and crossing over into another life, another species, seems to enable or engage the philosophical maturity that Rose reveals through her Aboriginal teachers. With shallow anxious breath (not allowing for deep oxygenation of the whole body), with civil restlessness and intransigence, this animism is nonsense. Industrial era science here often refuses to see its own religiosity, its very own dogma, which is in the business of excluding and isolating for the sake of industry's imperatives and not for science. As reported in New Scientist we may soon see laboratory-grown meat for sale. Such a food, which requires a myriad of technical apparatuses including antibiotics and bought by funds acculturated in the militarised economy, extends my definition of hypertechnocivility. Lab meat doesn't solve the problem of estrangement. The maturity that Rose speaks of lies with accountability, a value almost totally eradicated in hyper-litigious urbane Australia, where youth (and the pursuit of its permanence) is fetishised, and aging, death and decay are feared or loathed. Maturity within such a world is not possible, but other human worlds have possessed it, as Rose explains:

The philosophy Old Tim performed had a name. He called it the Beginning Law...
Life wants to live, wants to be embodied, and keeps finding its way back into life. Life is always in a state of metamorphosis, across death into more life, crossing bodies,
species, and generations. Through the juxtaposition of story and context, Old Tim affirmed metamorphosis in action, offering a philosophy of the will-to-life in which neither birth or death is to be exclusively foregrounded.  

In contrast to the dominant forms of human life experienced and expressed in Australia – bookended by hurried, induced, cut-open birth and prolonged, passive, drugged-out death – Old Tim's philosophy is not born out of any school but rather out of the country itself. Another of Rose's teachers, Riley Young, explains the importance of country in relation to birth: “Aboriginal people bin born onto this ground... No hospital, no needle, no medicine... Because this ground is the hospital. Even me, I bin born onto this ground... I never been born by top of the hospital. I bin born by ground.” Young's spoken statement critiques mediated hypertechncivility. It sounds out the voice of earth-embedded intelligence that now is so foreign to many of us. This intelligence comes from the land itself, from being with. The teachers are the creeks and variable creatures, roots and leaves, clouds and catastrophes hurled from the sky. There is no school of thought here; thought comes from the dirt, which Aboriginal people know is the source of terrestrial life, and know it is sacred and to be respected.

To go it alone as a species – to have trusted in symbols, monotheism and now in shareholder or industry science – is to participate forever in mass violence. To go along with anthropocentrism and the violent ways we obtain our basic resources is to go along with the dominant school which foregrounds dominion and dominion's child – pollution ideology. Rose, through her Aboriginal teachers, offers another way: “[t]o live in the world, to live in connectivity, is always to be living in proximity to death as well as to life, to cause death as well as to nurture life.” This locavore ethic, this call for relocalisation, this reacquaintance with one's local land and one's own aboriginal past, demands that the fences come down post by post. That we work together towards reopening the commons and live again in cross-species union, where autonomous dogs, our kin, and other assaulted beings are left to lick their wounds and heal themselves, free from the systemic brutality of arm's length violence, and free from a dominant culture driven insane by technics and a dominant ideology that mistakes newness for renewal.

For the final stage of the butchering lesson a very sharp knife is needed to remove the entrails and organs. I cut a small ring around the bird’s anus and a small incision is made from this ring up towards the chest so as I can get my hand fully inside the bird to clear out the kidneys, heart, lungs, gizzard, liver, intestines and other digestive parts. The bloody warmth of my hand is a comfort in such cold weather and the garden fire offers another place of warmth as the sun wanes west. I show Anita the incision that's required from the neck,
cutting out the crop, which is usually full of seed. I then demonstrate the cutting off of the feet and a final rinse of the bird. The chicken feet, as the Chinese are well aware, are delicious and require another delicate skinning process after a further boil. What our Jack Russell Zero doesn’t eat of the remains goes to the chooks, who dart at the added protein thrown to them. Otherwise the remaining offal goes to fuel one of the compost heaps along with the feathers.

I don’t believe the domestication of animals for food is a long-term solution to sustainable protein, and ethically the domestication of animals for food is very problematic. If one can be a locavore-vegan better still, but all the vegans I know are heavily reliant on industrially transported and produced plant proteins. While private property still reigns and before we have understood again the benefits of eating autonomous insects and other autonomous animals close to home, I have found that keeping chooks in a forest garden is at least a transitional step towards modalities of accountability. The political agency of being off the industrial grid with all of our food sources has far reaching consequences. In obtaining our basic resources, those required to make life, are we to go along with man-made mass death or are we to become again accountable beings of place?

Notes
4. The third programme from his three-part TV series All Watched Over By Machines of Loving Grace, BBC, 2011.
5. Also famously depicted in Joseph Conrad’s Heart of Darkness (1899).


3. At close quarters
Re-encountering the sensible

The scientist does not randomly choose a specific discipline or specialty, but is drawn to a particular field by a complex of subjective experiences and encounters, many of which unfold far from the laboratory and its reified atmosphere.

Taking Zephyr out of school has been a long-awaited relief and I’m slowly developing a parent teaching method which is increasingly simple, involving only walking and being open to what we find. Learning can’t be quantified when we happen across a jelly fungus called Yellow Brain (*Tremella mesenterica*), an old and highly sophisticated organism that attaches itself to its food source. This saprotrophic fungus, like many fungi, helps decompose dead matter and turn it into soil for more life to become possible. This understanding of life and the directness of contact with earthly processes make our walks about relationships. Today we walked across the town’s lake bridge and noticed the degrading pebble-mix concrete barrier and the lichen covered cherry plum and the grey melancholy of deep winter. Our blood and woollen-warm engagement with these cold elements and our closeness together as father and son brought about a quietness to us both, a simple joy that encouraged openness and stillness. In the forest on the edge of town we noted that the numerous little mounds of rabbit droppings are often partnered with an ancient moss (*Polytricum spp.*) and when we later bumped into a friend on his mountain bike traversing another part of the town’s edge we learned that it is the buck rabbit that makes these little mounds as territorial markers, or nitrogenous cairns. The spores of such moss obviously gravitate to them in order to make an easier life.

As we walked and talked of such connectivity we discussed the many different types of relationships that exist in life – the mutualistic, the parasitical, predator-prey, the advantageous and the loving. None of which are necessarily exclusive to each other and none exclusively human, as Zero likes to remind us in his own particular way, nearly always joining us on our home-ed adventures and using senses we’ve long lost but surely need to rescue.

In his chapter *Philosophy on the Way to Ecology* American writer David Abram (1997) attempts to pinpoint the west’s strange indifference to other animals and the living earth. He critiques the tradition of the so-called neutral sciences objectifying life through measurement while devaluing that which can’t be quantified such as everyday life. And he is by no means alone when he singles out Galileo and Descartes specifically as co-creators
of this myopic science, European in origin, and questions the validity of such a science of objects studied at the exclusion of everything else. Through lived relationships with indigenous and shamanistic communities, and through the study of phenomenalists such as Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, Abram is able to arrive at “the living world – this ambiguous realm that we experience in anger and joy, in grief and in love – [that] is both the soil in which all our sciences are rooted and the rich humus into which their results ultimately return, whether as nutrients or as poisons.” And it is here in the worlds of everyday intimacy that a context for political dissent enables Abram to embark on his transition from philosophy to ecology recognising that we come from mycelial (and not cybernetic) networks, therefore we are.

Abram begins his more recent book *Becoming Animal* (2010) with a further call to the sensual, the immediate, the creaturely and the bodily: “[o]wning up to being an animal, a creature of earth. Tuning our animal senses to the sensible terrain: blending our skin with the rain-rippled surface of rivers, mingling our ears with the thunder and the thrumming of frogs, and our eyes with the molten gray sky.” This elegant writing is at once almost lost in its own primordial reverie, while at the same time the writing is very audible and pushes towards a tangible poetical presence on the page. By using sensible (after Merleau-Ponty, 1962) in this context Abram conveys an acute perception of the maturity, intelligence and eroticism inherent in functioning ecologies – in ground, in air, in water. To the mind of the anthropocene or within a sanitised corporate or bureaucratic domain this statement is no doubt ludicrous. The idea of owning up to being animal is a far away concept for the hypertechnocivilian, something Abram articulates in his case against institutional schooling while observing his daughter’s experiential reverie for the world:

The child’s spontaneous affinity with the objects and entities that surround her is a pleasure to behold, but it remains only an amorphous and tentative solidarity. If it were to unfold throughout the course of childhood, intensifying and complexifying as she herself unfolds through adolescence, this early collusion with things would quietly deepen and mature into a nuanced respect for the manifold life of the world, a steady pleasure in the profusion of bodily forms and the innumerable styles of sentience that compose the earthly cosmos.

Abram recognises how the fore place of words and formal schooling in our culture helps aggregate human estrangement: “[w]ords are human artefacts... to speak or to think in words, is necessarily to step back from the world's presence into a purely human sphere of reflection.” *Becoming Animal* most evidently attempts to take philosophy out of the chairs and away from the desks that inadvertently dictate and constrain bodies and thus thought.
But ultimately in this work the human being continues to remain in a place mediated by technologies where food is not gathered, hunted or really even grown in cycles of living and dying. I have much respect for this imaginative thinker, but in the cobwebbed gardens of my home and within the close quarter communities of living and dying in which we dwell, Abram’s poetical sensing of the earthly, the cosmological, the creaturely, seems to lack an animal pragmatism. Rather unwittingly Abram’s cultural ecology assumes that food – the life force of all beings, all creatures – is already on the table or at least in the fridge.

In *Becoming Animal* there is one entry regarding food right at the end of the book which necessarily speaks to a transition away from a globalised industrial food supply. It is excellent commonsense: “[o]f course, shortening the long and complex trajectory that food takes from the soil to our mouths – backing off from buying so many fruits imported from elsewhere, while learning to savor the tastes of what grows in our region – this is another obvious way of bringing our body’s imagination back to the living land where we dwell. Growing some food ourselves provides a fuller grounding, and a steady opening of the senses.” But a book that wants us to own up to being creatures again and therefore reclaim a proper relationship to land and home place, to be fully sensible, needs to foreground the edible, the consumable, as our relationship to food is not just another obvious “way of bringing our body’s imagination back to the living land where we dwell”, but the fundamental activity in which all the senses are activated and awoken. Walking for food, being in ecological time and place, killing another animal and preparing this being for food for kin with the harvested produce from loved soil and foraged knowledges, is the fundamental way of bringing ourselves, not just our imaginations, back to the living land where we dwell. This view, if regarded sensibly, necessarily demands our critique of the central power of cities and the mediated spells they cast over so many of us.

The dandelion coffee I finish as the previous line appears on the page came to me windblown. The seeds planted themselves within walking distance of our home, they grew without synthetic fertiliser or human management, self-forming intelligent taproots that gently and slowly break up clays and provide a two-way stream for multiple life forms, nutrients and water to move through the soil and improve its composition. Then as the plants matured they flowered, each floret drying into dozens of self-propelling seeds under the sun’s brimming gaze. The wind dispersed them and the rain sowed them and before long almost exact copies were growing in ecological time and place. Then I entered their world, our shared worlds, pulled some up, while leaving others to mature and set seed. I washed and cut the roots, roasted them with fallen wood collected within wheelbarrow distance of home and waited for the smell of an earthy-chocolate to fill my nostrils.
I ground the roasted roots with a mortar and pestle and brewed them as I would with any coffee in a pot. This self-sown plant root soothes me as I drink; it brings restorative calm to the embodied trauma of industrial civility. Dandelion, one of the plants in the wrong place we anthropocenes spend billions of dollars globally poisoning each year, is a good tasting, non-caffeinated, free and renewable resource found commonly throughout the world’s temperate climates. It is for many peoples ancestral medicine, a liver tonic that can be stored without refrigeration; and if boiled and steeped raw, a powerful anti-cancer treatment.

English writer David Flemming’s entry for larders in his epic life’s work Lean Logic: A Dictionary for the Future and How to Survive It (2011) projects some light on Abram’s fundamental oversight: “Larders. Cool food-storage rooms. North-facing in the northern hemisphere. Thick stone shelf to keep some of the night coolness circulating during the day. Window with fine wire mesh to keep out the flies. Uses no energy (except, perhaps a light-bulb). Large enough to allow entry, followed by extended reflection on food, and some petty theft of a bit of moist, aromatic chicken if there is one in residence. Sadly displaced by the fridge, which uses a lot of energy. And hums. And uses noxious gases. And costs. And needs to be made, transported and then unmade. The larder is temporarily obsolete. It will be back.” And this near return of the larder marks the transition to descent technologies (or what David Holmgren in person has called the salvage era) that necessarily must assist with reversing our estrangement process, lessening our dependence on technology. This is not to suggest that energy descent will be a direct mirror image of industrial ascent; rather the trend will be the simplification of tools as fossil energy goes into decline or becomes too expensive to mine due to collapsing, bubble-bursting economies.

Our little home is built on timber stumps that aggregate with the slope of the land so at the south-east end there’s room enough to duck under into a small room where we are currently storing garlic, onions, potatoes, cider, beer, elderberry and other summer fruit wines. Despite it being only partially complete the cellar temperature is already ideal for food storage. We have been working on it slowly over the past two and a half years in order to be in a position not to replace our slowly dying fridge. As we dig up rock in the garden we use it to make up the cellar walls under the house. The sedimentary rocks that are removed from the soil and thus make room for plant roots to branch out and extend their territories become the walls that cool and extend the life of this food well after it is harvested. A very small amount of cement is used and brickies sand has been delivered to constitute the bulk of the mortar. The cost to build our cellar so far has been about sixty dollars and I guess we’re about half way complete. The walling technique is generically called hidden mortar which shows off the stone on the outside face (so it appears like a dry stone wall) but more importantly the
gaps and crevices where the mortar doesn’t reach allow for wasps, spiders and small lizards to use the wall as a habitat. On the inside of the walls the frugal use of cement mortar requires a clay-only render to fully seal it. The clay mud comes from digging the foundations for the cellar and to help bond it is mixed with dried poa tussock grass growing in the garden. There is care in our making of this little room, although with better intelligence the mined and transported cement and sand would become redundant materials.

We can harvest the poa grasses twice a year and we have started to use this indigenous straw for the chicken’s bedding, transitioning from a further reliance on industrial agriculture – straw bales. The poa straw is tough and takes time to break down in our composts. By going through an intense nitrogen soaking process in the coop it is ready for a faster decomposition complicit with the other elements in the compost such as oak leaves, kitchen scraps, cardboard, pine needles, autonomous floras and horse manure from a nearby riding farm. Once fully composted it is then used to condition our poor sedimentary soils. Year-by-year the soil’s fertility builds and year-by-year transported foods become a thing of history, of twentieth century idealism powered on cheap crude oil.

In her *Nourishing Traditions* (2001) American food writer Sally Fallon piercingly challenges mainstream thinking around food. She unpacks all the multifarious conduits of how industrialised food has seriously compromised our health and vitality, while anthologising the food processes and preparation techniques of our ancestors, of nonindustrialised peoples, and how they “serve as the model for new eating habits.”9 One of the first myths Fallon debunks is mammalian vegetarianism:

Careful examination of mammalian physiology and eating habits reveals that none of the higher animals is strictly vegetarian. All primates eat some form of animal food. Gorillas – mistakenly labelled vegetarian – eat insect eggs and larvae that adhere to leaves and fruit. Other primates eat crickets, flies, rodents, small antelope and other animals. Neither can cattle and other ruminants be labelled vegetarian because they always take in insect life adhering to the plants they eat, and because their stomachs and intestinal tracts contain enormous amounts of protozoa. These microscopic animals help digest grasses and in turn are digested and utilized by the cow. Small insects with their larvae or eggs left on plant foods prevent B12 deficiency anemia among Hindus in India. Hindus also eat milk products, and some sects consume termites. When these Hindus move to England, where the food supply is subjected to strict sanitary regulations, the incidence of pernicious anemia increases dramatically.10

We have been torn or have drifted so far away from physically and accountably performing our thought that we have normalised the non-sensible. In only a handful
of generations foraging-hunting-gardening traditions (including small-scale agrarian farming) have become marginalised and treated contemptuously or ignored as pitiful responses to global populations. Younger generations increasingly are raised fearful and overly cautious of the land and its naked foods, limiting the scope of what it is to be sensible creatures of place. David Flemming’s *Lean Logic* is a timely compendium to rethinking the many senseless attributes of ascent culture – what (sense) we have lost. Flemming’s summary of David Holmgren’s permaculture principals illustrates once again the alternatives that enable us to move past the dominant myths, false sciences and religious-like economics of our culture:

> There is emphasis on close observation and personal interaction with the ecology, on the need to adjust our own intentions in the light of what we observe, and on creative response to changes in it... Permaculture has application both to food production and to whole human habitats. It aims to build complex mosaics of ecological exchange, producing a rich flow of food and materials with the minimum need for intervention.\(^\text{11}\)

Another writer important in this context is John Michael Greer. His *The Long Descent* (2008) demonstrates mature thinking that crosses energy, ecology, metaphysics, politics and descent. Early on in his work he critiques two of our most dominant apparitions: the myth of *progress* – that human brilliance and technology will always find solutions to whatever problems society poses, and the myth of *apocalypse* – that human life will pretty much end in one catastrophic McCarthian\(^\text{12}\) doomsday event. His theory outlining our civilisation’s decline is fairly unambiguous and compliments David Holmgren’s *Future Scenarios* (2008). Like Holmgren, Greer wants us to entertain a third paradigm to break apart the progress/apocalypse dichotomy: that is, the *long descent*. Greer is in little doubt that civil society is incapable of solving the interrelated problems of fossil-fuelled violations and climate chaos. He writes, “[t]he chance that today’s political and business interests will do anything useful in our present situation is small enough that it’s probably not worth considering.”\(^\text{13}\) Therefore, rather than a problem to find a solution to, Greer argues we now have only a predicament to work with which requires not a solution, but many varying responses:

> The difference is that a *problem* calls for a solution; the only question is whether a solution can be found and made to work... A *predicament*, by contrast, has no solution. Faced with a predicament, people come up with responses. Those responses may succeed, they may fail, or they may fall somewhere in between, but none of them ‘solves’ the predicament, in the sense that none of them makes it go away.\(^\text{14}\)
Greer articulates the parallels we can make with the declines of previous civilisations. He argues that the slow but steady erosion of soil fertility is synonymous with the descent of Mayan civility:

All the achievements of Mayan civilization rested on the shaky foundation of swidden agriculture – a system in which fields are allowed to return to jungle after a few years of cultivation, while new fields are cleared and enriched with ashes from burnt vegetation. It's a widely used system in tropical areas around the world, but, like dependence on fossil fuels, it has a hidden vulnerability. Swidden works extremely well at relatively modest population levels, but it breaks down disastrously when population growth takes over and farms can no longer return to jungle long enough to restore soil fertility.15

Using current geological data Greer projects that by 2040 oil supply will fall to what it was in 1980, but with nearly twice the amount of people on the planet. The picture is not pretty; we will have escalating climate change and expensive energy to try to combat it. Most of the cheap oil has been extracted. The more difficult to extract will not renumerate as pleasantly for industrialists and those of us who have hedged our bets on industry’s continuing progress. In his *Future Scenarios* (2008) Holmgren suggests that the energy descent scenario may spawn entirely new cultures:

The energetic contraction will force a relocalisation of economies, simplified technology, a ruralisation of populations away from very large cities, and a reduction in total population. Over time there will be a redevelopment of localized cultures and even new languages, although these developments may be outside the time frame of the peak-oil and climate-change scenarios...16

Post-industrial, relocalised salvage economies will for a very long time use industrialism’s products until they too will turn up in the layers of rock formed by our anthropocene dusts.

Dogs in our neighbourhood bark out to each other from their respective quarter-acre or half-acre lots. A deep nonchalant but consistent bark drifts over from Fulcher Street, east of here. Smaller dogs, including Zero, retaliate all around. Spring is finally beating fast. This is *True Spring* according to the six local seasons.17 The soil is warming and all forms of life are poking up or setting down. Bees strum through the blossoms. Magpies swoop any suspecting or unsuspecting predator who may be looking to rouse up an omelette. Zero barks and chases back. He and I are gathering leaf mulch from the forested land next door. We have our rickety blue wheelbarrow and a grass rake to help us.
All of we neighbours who border this land ended up at the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) over the proposed development of this half-acre from where I now poach these leaves. I’m only robbing this future soil fertility because this lovely forested wet gully, home to a colony of sugar gliders, possums, countless birds, fungi, insects and microbes, is going to become home for five suburban households covering the land in hard surfaces with up to 50 car movements each day (a local Shire planner informed me). Despite being unanimous in our approach and consistent in our argument we six neighbours fantastically lost the case against the developers. This is yet another story of allopoetical (external, colonising) forces trouncing autopoetical (local, self-organising) communities. Our arguments concerning biodiversity were regarded as ludicrous and irrelevant over such a small area.

A forest cannot bear life of any real value on such a scale, according to VCAT, despite demonstrating that this biohub freely supports diverse fauna, fungi and flora and therefore supports the growing of pesticide-free human food in its neighbourhood due to the multifarious predator-prey relations produced by a healthy forest. Pests do not get the upper hand in a healthy, biodiverse ecology. Pests and plagues are things developed by monocultural agriculture. Forests create free ecological wealth that in turn support humans and more-than-humans in countless ways. Somehow governments, who think primarily in terms of monetised business, forget this implicit and non-polluting exchange of energy. Our schools don’t foreground these relationships, and they’re mostly not even in the background. Once a forest is disappeared and biodiversity declines certain species begin to dominate, and this can negate the health of that environment. Four of we six neighbours that surround this forest grow our own food. We do it because it is affordable and we know it is good for our health and the land. Only in depleted diversity areas do pests and disease take hold we argued to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal. We also argued heavy traffic and drainage issues on an existing wet gully, but all ears were plugged tight.

David Holmgren was our pro bono expert witness and David and I designed an alternative plan that aimed to reconcile human and ecological needs reducing the profit margin of the developer. But to the urban-centric builders, engineers, planners, business people and lawyers involved in the decision-making, our thinking was trivial and unworthy – despite all seven of our local elected councillors unanimously voting against the developer’s proposal. The decision was made in Melbourne, a four-day walk from here, on behalf of Melbourne developers. What far-away court has the right to dictate another’s local ecology? A question Aboriginal people must ask routinely.
Composting is probably the purest form of biomimicry. Garden composting mimics the way a forest creates its own food, its own fertility for renewal and growth. Layer by layer of plant litter and animal wastes, a bank of wealth builds from which all members of the forest benefit. Life teems in leaf litter – the joyous, earthy pollutions that help make more life. Often when I collect aged leaf litter or humus I recall my mycologist friend Alison Pouliot saying leaf litter constitutes the most biodiverse ecologies on the planet. My little blue wheelbarrow that travels far and wide powered by the electricity from my legs is already in a state of decline. As it rusts and unravels with the globalised industrialism that made it, it is lovingly repaired without monetary cost. If it is stolen or broken beyond fixing at some point in the future then leaf litter and animal manures will be collected in old sacks or baskets or on salvaged bikes. Paul Dempsey, a community gardener who has lived at no fixed address since he was fourteen years old, is often seen walking the streets of the town with a sack or two of gleaned biomass on his shoulders. It is a lovely image. Not an image of hope, as some may be propelled to comment, but rather an image of pragmatic poetics, sensuous, joyous – Paul and the bags of leaf mould bee-lining to one of our five community gardens.

At close quarters we can have political agency, at close quarters we can be accountable peoples of place again; we can regain our once implicit togetherness with animal pragmatism and community. At close quarters we can begin to compost the traumas of civility and reach into the intimate world’s worlds for our learning, being open to the generative, to relationships. This is of course ideology and human centricity mediated in printed text. But the aim of this thought is to challenge us to think about the dominant ideology and its damaging, extractive and loveless characteristics.

Notes
10. ibid. p28.
14. ibid, Greer, 2008. p22.
15. ibid, Greer, 2008. p25.
4. Gardens of Love
A poethical call to garden communally

I went to the Garden of Love,
And saw what I never had seen:
A chapel was built in the midst,
Where I used to play on the green.

And the gates of this Chapel were shut,
And “Thou shalt not” writ over the door;
So I turned to the Garden of Love
That so many sweet flowers bore;

And I saw it was filled with graves,
And tomb-stones where flowers should be;
And Priests in black gowns were walking their rounds,
And binding with briars my joys & desires.¹

It’s March 2011. Six of us are sitting in a backyard garden in Daylesford drinking tea. We’re plotting to overtake a very ordinary, long-term vacant lot of land next to the town’s library to grow food. The land is boringly flat, regularly mowed and poisoned with glyphosate around its perimeter earth now very hard and dead. There’s nothing all that new to such tea-drinking scheming. This kind of plotting to expand local food not wholly reliant on that big bilious balloon of hot air – the global pool of money – is happening everywhere as progress-capitalism falters and food and energy prices rise more and more steeply. It is, however, more an oddity in Australia as industrial affluence treads water while many countries are already drowning or building lifeboats. As my grandparents’ generation are all but departed, there are few left who understand serious economic contraction unless they have immigrated more recently from war torn and economically unstable countries. This country comparatively is still very much swaddled in cotton wool.

Local council administers the little flat parcel of land we’re discussing. It’s considered crown land because a few centuries ago it was claimed by some arbitrary English family who have no intimate relations with this part of the world and who wear jewel-encrusted crowns on their heads. We’re scheming to grow community food here, to build a community garden using permaculture principles, dismantling the private property model for food generation. We know we could ask council for permission, but those of us who have asked for such things before or have worked on council-community committees know it would take years to get approval; you just establish a relationship with a council officer, councillor
or working group and begin to achieve something positive when suddenly this reality disappears, and all those months of work just dissolve. We want to act before the economic unravelling turns to panic. We still have a little time of this momentary affluence to make some significant transitions back to the local.

We hatch a rough plan, which we then develop over the next few weeks through random meetings in the street and the odd email and phone call. Chance always plays a significant hand in this kind of organisation. Someone puts out the word for materials and a few days later someone else makes a call and says “so-and-so has some topsoil to give,” then some lend their utes and trailers and others bring old fashioned brawn along with their shovels and wheelbarrows. Before you know it people have their sleeves rolled up and endorphins are kicking around busily with the happy soil bacteria.

It’s now early Friday evening; the council officers have gone home, the policeman on duty is Facebooking for love, and a number of us are throwing farm-gifted straw bales over the back fence onto our new, freely acquired plot. We then get to work staking the bales into a large circular raised bed with a bale path down the middle. The ground has been heavily compacted due to the persistent mowing, which has disallowed ecological succession. We decide to build up this first garden rather than dig it in. The donated organic material arrives via a small train of car trailers on dusk. We fill the bed with volcanic topsoil and horse manure from a nearby farm, again acquired as gifts. Gleaned traffic cones, op shop fluoro vests, and an attitude of purpose are our authoritative props. Only questions of pro-communal inquisitiveness are aired on the street despite our clapped out cars and trailers looking anything but municipal. Then, the following day brings about twenty-five of us together at the garden. We come with transplanted herbs, vegetable seedlings and seeds we have saved. It is a joyous moment as we begin to learn to garden communally, garden a common-pool resource, whose benefits according to David Flemming “are shared amongst people who use it or live in it.”

Several weeks later we’ve arranged for activist, gardener and unconventional TV presenter, Costa Georgiadis, to come and launch our humble beginnings. He was enroute to Ballarat to open a permaculture event there when we snaffled him off the train at Ballan and chaperoned him over to our small town. His words are loaded and urgent as well as having us in stitches. He holds the children by his charismatic way of eating a young lettuce leaf, pointing to the ground, his mouth, his stomach: “Local!” Then a council officer who we’d invited strategically along, with the local press, whispers in my ear that we’d better start planning a response to the unauthorised planting of a garden on council land because council is “all in a flap over it.” I query back, “Our response?” To
which she pauses, then replies, “Ah yes, you’re right, it’s council who needs to respond – you’ve created this.”

That night, after the excitement of the day, I wake up buzzing at around 3am and start devising what a proper response from council might look like. I decide that the most democratic thing to do is draft it for them. After all, when the word democracy is unpacked etymologically from the Greek it simply means community rule.

Council’s response:
1. Council applauds the efforts of this community group to work towards food security in the Shire.
2. Council recognises the need for community-led organic food systems to attend to the health crisis that nutrition-low, carcinogenic-high fast food and supermarket food has delivered to its residents.
3. Council recognises the social merits of such a project, and encourages other community groups to work together to prepare for worsening climate change and energy descent scenarios, and therefore further rising food and energy prices.
4. Council recognises that we are all squatting on Jaara land, including the Town Hall and council offices. There has never been a proper sale or transfer of land either under Aboriginal or European law.
5. Council is thrilled its community has taken over the maintenance of this site, and that council workers no longer have to use polluting resources to maintain it.
6. Council would be happy to work with this community group to help them relocate to another site for community food production if the library next-door needs to expand or some other public building of merit, such as a sustainability resource centre, needs to be built on this site.
7. Council recognises that although this mode of community participation is different to its own form, it nonetheless values such independent, creative and positive responses from its residents.
8. Council recognises that its own processes for change are heavily bureaucratic making positive change such as this impossibly slow, and that residents will naturally move faster working in small groups attending to the fast pace of global financial, climatic and ecological crises.

After circulating this response amongst the group for comments and editing we sent it on to council, which to our surprise had an immediate positive effect. After many months of holding our council accountable to a response of our own making, we secured not one but two central properties for the purposes of community food production. Both these properties were to be sold off and given over to private ownership, and we managed to lobby the seven elected councillors to unanimously back us and keep the land for
Fig 6. Daylesford Secondary College food forest, plan, 2012
community food production. A number of the councillors were incredibly passionate in their defence of our actions and our purpose. By this time we had large numbers of supporters in the town. Community food security is an issue that few find contentious regardless of your politics. It really surprised us that the councillors were calling the shots and overriding the CEO, who drove from Melbourne each day on a wage over $200,000 pa – six times that of the average local wage. We began to see that there was actually one level of democracy that still has a little life, existing in the locasphere where direct accountability is at its most possible.

Several other plots are now being planned for future food gardens in the town, such as the establishment of a five-acre community food forest at the secondary college, a community food garden at the local neighbourhood centre, and a children’s food garden at the Community Park Reserve that has been driven by the local homeschool network. And some gardening remains guerrilla style. A number of us have been planting food trees, plants and seeds in public areas throughout the shire for many years, and there is quite a history of this sort of thing beginning, of course, with the Jaara dispersal of yam daisy seeds over thousands of years for non-monetised public food consumption. The current dominant private model is a mere speck in the history of this local land’s continuous food commons. Local council is now wholly behind our endeavours and has even given us some money for plants and mushroom compost and waived fees for water and leases. There have been no long months and years of tedious and unproductive meetings; once we established the grounds for positive change and started work we just signed the dotted line as a formality.

The second plot we fought council for, Rea Lands Park, is half an acre of volcanic soil with a gentle north-facing slope. A former mayor, the late Betty Rea, generously donated it as a community park in the 1980s. It is a rare piece of land, once private, now public. It is not often land ownership flows that way. In August we planted out a food forest on this land – a community orchard designed to mimic a flux-like polyculture of a natural forest system. Over fifty people joined in on the day and transformed the park and ourselves into the bargain.

Almost all of the community gardeners who co-ordinated the beginnings of these gardens are creative folk – artists, poets, ceramicists, dancers, furniture and instrument makers and musicians. It seems that the misfits, we odd balls, those of us who weren’t wholly corporatised in school, who didn’t fully swallow the propaganda of the institution, the careerism of the art world or industry science, are the change agents equipped with the logic and free thinking to prepare responses to our predicaments. The relationship between making art and craft and making food is an ancient one that well precedes agriculture, and one that locates poesis, making, in the present and to the near land.
Through simple actions of guerrilla gardening, poets, artists, permaculturalists and other social pioneers are establishing the grounds on which food and ecology again can commingle. Creating environments in which ecological knowledge comes forward and is shared, and industrial technology and labour are backgrounded, will enable us to transition to far healthier more resilient communities where everyone has a place to inhabit and seek non-poisoned, low-carbon foods. In William Blake’s poem *The Garden of Love* (1794) he laments his beloved garden being torn out and a chapel erected on the site where “priests in black gowns [are] walking their rounds, binding with briars my joys and desires.” This poem was written as the early years of the industrial revolution were dawning in England and coalmines were beginning to spring up throughout the land. Blake’s priests in soot black cloth represent all forms of destructive authority that wager private human values as above others and oppress the bodily, erotic, sensual and intimate.
In these community gardens that we’re establishing there are no private plots mimicking private property relations. Everyone is welcome. There are no high fence gates that block entry and there are no bureaucratic committees, just monthly working bees where at any one time around fifty gardeners of all capabilities and experiences come together to garden. There are few if any rules, just the simple unpolicied ethic of take and return. Take fruit and nuts and herbs and vegetables, and return compost, seeds, seedlings and some tools and labour. These gardens attempt to mimic foraging-gardening traditions; expanding the commons so that walking to obtain our food in communion with others, nonhumans and humans, becomes again an ordinary way of life, and a way of healing the gaping wounds of toxic industrialism as industrial oil peaks and climate destabilises. Unless some new and equally abundant energy source comes on line fast enough to make up for fossil fuel depletion, argues John Michael Greer (2008), “we will find ourselves back in the same world our ancestors knew, with the additional burdens of a huge surplus population and an impoverished planetary biosphere to contend with.” Do we wait until we’re pushed to respond to the inevitable crises we face this century (including climate change which is essentially a by-product of hypertechnocivility), or do we transition more gradually, while we can, to become again accountable creatures that can work together in our bioregions? To bookend the short, impoverished history of industrialisation we can take Blake’s tragic 1794 poem and reperform it as the gardens of love.

Notes
5. Gifting economies

The political and ethical imperatives of non-monetary economies

Non-market socialism means a money-less, market-less, wage-less, class-less and state-less society that also aims to satisfy everyone’s basic needs while power and resources are shared in just and ‘equal’ ways.¹

Until I became a permaculturalist and a keen student of traditional Aboriginal economics, I probably would have dismissed the sentiments expressed in the quote above as utopian wishfulness. When living in a highly urbanised and prosperous country with so many expressions of material entitlement, *life without money* seems like a flaky, even ridiculous ideal. It is perhaps little wonder that Anitra Nelson and Frans Timmerman’s international anthology, *Life Without Money* (2011) – which has Australian editors and demonstrates the Australian concept of permaculture – could only find a willing publisher in London. I can’t think of any publisher in Australia who would take on such a work. In the United Kingdom over the last decade numerous towns and cities have been modelling new socio-economic alternatives, including new forms of currency² and non-monetary exchange. Having driven the industrial revolution full steam from the outset, ignoring Malthusian notions of limits, the country now finds itself an economic basket case. Within just 300 years it has overextended and overpopulated its land base to such an extent that it’s now dependent on global imports for almost every resource, most notably food. This makes the mastermind of industrialisation extremely vulnerable to global economic and climate crises, especially in an era that marks the end of cheap crude oil.

As a result of the United Kingdom’s poor economic status, the Transition Towns movement has been promoting the idea of resource relocalisation, which necessarily includes ecological restoration, community food systems, community-owned renewable energy and the slow dismantling of the dominant economic hegemony. In developing the Transition Towns concept in the 1990s, sustainability pioneer Rob Hopkins was influenced by David Holmgren’s work, namely his *Permaculture: Principles and Pathways beyond Sustainability* (2002). Hopkins understood from Holmgren that it was in household and community economies that resilience to global crises could be found. Holmgren’s work has been published in many countries and has influenced sustainability practices across every continent. In Australia, however, it remains largely self-published and undervalued. Despite permaculture being arguably one of Australia’s most significant intellectual exports of the past forty years, there is almost no understanding or acknowledgement of
it in Australian mainstream publishing or media. Again, this is due in part to material entitlement – a never-before-seen and never-to-have-again comfort zone – and in part because permaculture enables a move away from dependency on monetary economics. As people further understand the impermanence of the fossil fuels upon which our economy is built, permaculture gains more traction.

Our household has been practising what David Holmgren calls “voluntarily living within a depression economy” for a number of years, reducing waste and spending, applying permaculture principles and living a form of creative frugality on less than a taxable income. This has not made our lives more difficult; it has actually improved them. Living without a car and walking every day means we have reduced the income we once required by forty percent, giving us much more time to grow or forage for our resources, and do the things we want to do. I therefore find the main premise of Life Without Money – building fair and sustainable economies – not at all wishful in a pejorative sense, but manageable, achievable and critically necessary in preparing for unavoidable and ensuing crises.

In his essay Age of Disposability (2013), American writer Henry A. Giroux writes of the absence of moral outrage and care in the aftermath of hurricanes Katrina and Sandy. He describes an “ethically cleansed” American public and suggests that “[o]ne reason for such historical amnesia and ethical indifference may lie in the emerging vicissitudes of an era eager to accommodate rather than challenge global warming, an era in which freakish weather events have become such commonplace occurrences that they encourage the denial of planetary destruction.” Similarly, it is taboo for the Australian media or public to mention “climate change” just after another extreme or catastrophic weather event takes place. This incredible phenomenon recalls Basil Fawlty’s farcical “don’t mention the war” scenario at times when Australians could be persuaded to make positive changes. When big money dictates to our media and our media largely determines public opinion, it is little wonder however that ethical cleansing is so widespread. To mitigate this we need to turn away from big politics, big media and the big polluters we ratify with our day-to-day spending. We need to overhaul our economic structures starting with the household and community economies where change is most achievable. Such change, if triggered by millions of ordinary people, could shift the bigger political paradigm. But if we continue to work exclusively for the monetary economy and remain hopeful that two-party politics will serve our needs we will continue to contribute to unethical development and global injustice. The less we participate within the industrial military economy that the two parties endorse, the less
power we give it or them. Nelson and Timmerman’s book is timely as it begins to detail how we might make these transitions in our daily lives.

It is important to note that in *Life Without Money* the editors give equal weight to theory and practice. The first half of the book is dedicated to more theoretical works and the second to more practical responses and experimentation. But the editors stress, “[a]ll of the theoretical discussions are quite practical. Scholars who are also activists have written them.” As a movement of both theory and practice that was seeded at the time of 1973–74 global oil crisis, permaculture features strongly throughout the book. Permaculture demands we become energetically savvy again, understanding limits and how to move away from extractive and return to generative economies. The subject of theory and practice arose in a recent private conversation I had with Holmgren. I asked him whether he felt there was still a place for knowledge specialisation in a culture that is preparing for financial collapse, energy descent and climate chaos:

Certainly the lack of connection between theory and practice has been one of the major symptoms of cultural breakdown and a collective loss of intelligence... practice has become more hypnotic; a machine-like behaviour because there’s not any thinking going on associated with it. The more it becomes mechanised and under speed and pressure within a monetary economic model, then there’s no place for any of that musing associated with theory. This separation of theory and practice is a primary form of specialisation pursued in the name of efficiency. It has now got to a point where it has created blindness...

Despite all the theorising over the last forty years, permaculture is one of the few movements or concepts to come out of the 1970s that actively works towards creating non-polluting societies by taking a generalist approach to life. Any theory that lacks practice and experimentation is of little value to us now; such things in the past have been products of ascent thinking, of rising affluence, and thus of waste. Of course specialisation (the division of labour) and the advent of money have shared histories. Permaculture moves us away from such thinking. It argues that being skilled and having knowledge across a wide range of areas, especially relating to land and its soil, strengthen household and community economies. Permaculture in other words demands we foreground ecological knowledges as our land-intelligent ancestors once did.

Permaculture is thus a natural critic of the capitalist principle of fabricating demand (and thus fabricating unnecessary supply). It bases its principles on ecological functioning rather than unchecked human desire. While it’s true money’s exactly calculated value is efficient for exchange, constructing the illusion of demand –
capitalism's great agenda – instantly negates this efficiency creating instead colossal waste. By mixing individual desire with capital ideology and fossil fuels we have enabled tremendous complexity, which has in turn accrued an ecological debt for which subsequent generations will pay dearly. In *Life Without Money* Nelson and Timmerman ask: “[h]ow many contemporary developments and proposals actually make little social, cultural or environmental sense but are assessed as sensible money-making ventures?”

Contrary to its own propaganda there is nothing lean or efficient about progress-capitalism. Holmgren has suggested at many public talks that instead of endlessly building houses that are barely occupied, we need to retrofit the suburbs and turn them from settlements of pollution into ecological habitats. The home mortgage or debt we owe to the landlord each week is at the heart of our monetary system. Debt and waste are synonymous with capital systems and work relentlessly against the agency of humans to function ecologically. American anthropologist and debt-activist David Graeber (2011) suggests that if we are to understand how the monetary economy works, the moral and cultural challenges of debt are equally important to focus upon: “[c]onsumer debt is the lifeblood of our economy. All modern nation-states are built on deficit spending.”

Exorcising debt lies at the heart of ridding society of the prime place of money. But this notion is often disabled by the strange, nonetheless common view that we have to pay off our debts regardless of the immoral ways they have come to burden us. This is especially true when it comes to property. Graeber recounts the popular myth about money’s origins as presented by economists since Adam Smith:

> We teach it to children in schoolbooks and museums. Everybody knows it. ‘Once upon a time, there was barter. It was difficult. So people invented money. Then came the development of banking and credit.’ It all forms a perfectly simple, straightforward progression, a process of increasing sophistication and abstraction that has carried humanity, logically and inexorably, from the Stone Age exchange of mastodon tusks to stock markets, hedge funds, and securitized derivatives.

Graeber goes on to debunk this myth of pre-monetary exchange, observing how in many cultures exchange was nuanced and calibrated to local resource availability, local skills and ceremony.

In chapter six of *Life Without Money*, simply called ‘The Gift Economy’, sociologist Terry Leahy presents a related case for why a gifting economy might move from “crazy anarchist delusion” to pragmatic reality. He begins by making a defence of utopia: “[c]urrently, utopian schemes have a tenuous legitimacy in the social sciences. [But] I defend utopian writing as no more fantastical than ideas underpinning every other social order.”
I tend to agree, especially once you take money out of the frame. In my discussion with David Holmgren I asked him what relationships he saw between permaculture and utopian thought:

[Bill] Mollison said we might be searching for the Garden of Eden, and why not? There’s always been an element in permaculture of utopian thinking. You could say it is even quite strong. I suppose for me the important thing that would distinguish it is living here now, reacting to whatever the situation is, wherever we find ourselves, and yet also acting as though the world we imagine as functional, viable, possible, desirable, is actually happening.

When I was speaking to Holmgren we were sitting in his family’s forest garden, Melliodora, accompanied by chickens and goats, food, medicine, fibre, fodder and fuel producing plants and countless other ecological players – frogs, lizards, birds, mycelium, groundcovers, earthworms, lichens, mosses, leaf mould, and many other beings that are more secreted but nonetheless play important roles in this biodiverse ecology. Leahy brings Holmgren into his chapter early and notes some of the most crucial requirements for gift economies as they have worked in the past:

Holmgren discusses classless societies as typically reliant for subsistence on crops gathered in different seasons from trees grown over a wide area. Wildernesses of classless societies are dominated by tree species useful to, and encouraged by, humans. A typical tactic in breaking the resistance of these societies has been to burn and fell these forests, forcing the population to depend on annual cereal crops that are easily controlled by armies and given and withheld by ruling classes and their enforcers.

At public talks and casual meetings in the twin towns in which we live, Holmgren, myself and others have spoken about the importance of reimagining common land as community accessible and productive earth. We have expressed this in a number of ways over the years. Holmgren has worked with his neighbouring community in Hepburn Springs to manage what he calls a wild urban space known to locals as Spring Creek, developing non-monetary, non-chemical and low-mechanical land management strategies. This community has worked on fire reduction measures and developed small-scale agro-forestry, food forestry and soil rebuilding techniques for an impoverished streamside ecology that was violated in the nineteenth century by the pursuit of gold. Holmgren has written extensively about these things, and regularly publishes material of such nature on his website. All this work has been gifted over twenty years and presents successful models of non-monetary community-managed land. Similarly, in nearby Daylesford, I have worked with local gardeners and permaculture activists to
establish the early stages of a community food network which includes community gardens, a foraging-hunting commons and building relationships with local farmers and small garden producers.

According to Leahy, broad self-interest is a key component of a functioning *gifting economy*, a term popularised by the Situationists who in turn borrowed it from French sociologist Marcel Mauss. Leahy builds on Mauss’ work:

The gift economy is a reversal of key aspects of capitalism and class societies in general. A selfish interest operates in the gift economy. Gifting can be a self-centred desire for pleasure, a way to enjoy social prestige and affection. Producing focuses on use for oneself or known others, whether locals, kin or friends ... The structure pays off as a total system to benefit all of us. Gifts are necessary for everyone to live well. It is treasured as a system that works better than alternatives, which have already been tried with such calamitous effects.

Mauss’ essay *The Gift* (1923) has influenced thinkers of alternative exchange models for nearly a century. But his work just makes more palatable and western what indigenous peoples of place have known all along. The Jaara people were the first inhabitants local to the place where Holmgren and I live. They are the only demonstrably ecological culture to have lived in the area and practised a self-interested gift economy with neighbouring groups. At a ceremony known as the *tanderrum*, which translates as *freedom of the bush*, the Jaara temporarily gave access to their land’s resources for the exchange of gifts. It was at a similar ceremony that John Batman, giving over some blankets, axes, knives, flour, beads, looking-glasses and other goods, believed he had the moral and legal right to take 600,000 acres of land from Wurundjeri people, where Melbourne sits today.

The Australian *true fiction* writer Gerald Murnane (1990), who has lived most of his life in Jaara country, tells of such woeful theft from the Wurundjeri perspective in his story *Land Deal*:

Of course it was the wildest folly to suppose that the land, which was by definition indivisible, could be measured or parcelled out by a mere agreement among men. In any case, we had been fairly sure that the foreigners failed to see our land. From their awkwardness and unease as they stood on the soil, we judged that they did not recognise the support it provided or the respect it demanded.

Today this same land is seen as divisible, along with its seeds and water – such is the systemic curse of monetised privatisation. It is evident that Batman wasn’t really interested in “temporary access” to Wurundjeri land and resources, as tanderrum barter clearly
involves; just as Monsanto today isn’t really interested in “feeding the world” (as it claims) but rather, controlling the world’s food resources. The same political-economic lineage of damage aggregates from Batman to Monsanto. The Gunwinggu people of Western Arnhem Land call their ceremonial barter dzamalag, which involves the mutual gifting of resources with neighbouring groups. It is clear that barter with kin and within the tribe was not exercised as resources were simply shared without register. David Graeber (2011) states that barter across many indigenous societies only took place “between strangers, even enemies,” which is illustrated by escaped convict William Buckley’s ghost written account of his remarkable thirty two years living with Wathaurong people in pre-fenced Victoria. I was recently asked to give a poetry reading at a locavore banquet in Hepburn. A number of permaculture pioneers were there, including David Holmgren and Su Dennett. We were communally celebrating the winter solstice with local produce including a delicious potato and weed leaf curry saag. I chose to read my William Buckley poem, Portrait. Before I did, however, I introduced Buckley as the original permaculturalist in Australia. In order to have first survived alone and then lived with the Wathaurong, Buckley had married his Green Man land sensibilities from his native Cheshire with Aboriginal knowledges and spirit of country.

The models for non-monetary economies are very old in Australia, having had only a short interruption in recent years. Within an Aboriginal economic system, tied to tribal law, the land is not poisoned, eroded, heavily mined or depleted. And it was certainly not savaged to the point that salinity, rising temperatures, failing river ecologies, catastrophic bushfires, increased flooding or widespread social dysfunction were normative. Australian economic historian Tony Dingle (1988) writes that Aborigines “[w]ere knowledgeable and sophisticated managers of resources who were able to live off the land with a minimum of effort. They possessed ample time to enjoy a full and satisfying spiritual, ceremonial and social life once their food needs were satisfied. Nevertheless, the pattern of their lives was so far removed from the experience of anyone living in a modern industrial society that a considerable effort of imaginative understanding is needed to bridge the gap.” In applying permaculture principles such understanding can become possible. By means of a pragmatic transition we can “enjoy a full and satisfying spiritual, ceremonial and social life,” where food and the land that enables it is once again respected.

But implementing change is extremely difficult while we are indebted to a global pool of money. This is where the mainstream environmental movement largely has failed; it brushes the edges of the problem without addressing the centre – money. Change is possible to implement at a grass roots level if we live without debt, have access to land for
developing perennial food systems, and many local people – friends, community and kin – are leading similar lives. Within local networks of broad self-interest and gift exchange we are less likely to overshoot the resources of the land upon which we depend, and we can actually help replenish it. Such transition to fair and sustainable economies based on stewardship is expressing itself in many forms around the world today, as capital ideology is further understood as being redundant for the centuries ahead. News items like this are becoming increasingly common:

Earlier this month, planners broke ground in Seattle's Beacon Hill neighborhood for what will be the nation's largest free and open edible landscape, the Beacon Food Forest, a project three years in the making. Established on the notion that permaculture infrastructure brings about more sustainable communities and ways of thinking, local agriculturists formed the group Friends of the Food Forest to help realize the dream of creating a public space where food could be grown and shared.

It is useful to study the relationship between broad self-interest and sharing in a project such as this, and indeed, the project in which my family is involved through our community food network. Typically, self-interest as a pejorative expression has belonged to anthropocentric capitalism under which resources are no longer shared in the common-pool but hoarded individualistically. This form of narrow self-interest increasingly makes people abstracted from the land and its limits, generation after generation. As the precursory development to monetary economics, agriculture initially created anxiety around food supply as people became sedentary and urbanised and lost their ecological wits. Such anxiety has only been allayed in recent times because cheap crude oil makes production and transportation of commodities more possible, and super-saturation of markets more invisible. As our food commons have been eradicated and our food knowledges reduced to just a handful of species, we have become extremely vulnerable.

Work also dominates agricultural settlements, whereas for ecologically nuanced cultures obtaining food is often recreational and work plays a much less significant role in life. Bodily, psychological and environmental ill-health are synonymous with ideologies or behaviours that repress pleasure, devalue ecologies and foreground technology and labour. In pre-crude oil western traditions of agriculture long days of toil, or what I call Christian agricultural toil, dominated. A return to this is unappealing and unnecessary with permaculture. Abstracted food and energy commodities become ensnaring devices to lock people into stultifying work for monetary exchange. A by-product of such unhappiness is often drug addiction, whether involving sugar, caffeine, cigarettes, alcohol or other less widespread synthetic drugs that have been made illegal. The common legal drugs of our
Fig. 8. Arts House (North Melbourne), food forest plan, 2012
times are used to excess and are central to the monetary economy’s function. They are, in fact, what helps to drive it; refined sugars and caffeinated coffees are the significant stimulants that keep our culture pumping, and both are farmed monoculturally (anti-ecologically) for money’s sake.

By practising life without or with much less money we will develop hardy responses for the resource and climate crises ahead. As those scenarios unfold, people who have long practised a locavore economy based on gifts and ecological knowledges will cope better. If we raise our children to become generational thinkers of such practices, we can begin to transition to more equitable and sustainable societies. In my conversation with David Holmgren I asked him whether he sees permaculture as a subtle transformation from or potentially a radical replacement of capitalism:

I think the problem that permaculture is attempting to address is bigger than capitalism. I wouldn’t put it on the same level as Marxism trying to redress the deep structural problems of capitalism. In Marxism there is still this belief that humans create wealth, rather than nature creating wealth. So in that sense I would see both Marxist and capitalist ideologies still coming out of the Enlightenment project that says we create our own realities. Now, to an extent, that’s true. Humans have always done that... But the issue of the material basis for existence is really a problem of limits to growth – so it makes little difference whether we are talking about capitalist models of material growth or another ideology. Until we understand the limits of the living systems that sustain us we have a serious problem.28

One of the things permaculture aims to achieve is to make economics a science again, a science based on the limits of the land. This is not science that believes in constructing certainty, but rather, actually participating in the uncertain and the mutable.

I recently spoke with a community friend Jeff Brownscombe, a doctor who has worked for many years with Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory and who has been recently working with the organisation Beyond Zero Emissions. I asked him whether obtaining zero emissions within an economy of capital was achievable. He said that if we move to 100 per cent renewable energy it would be possible; but I countered that because capital ideology demands unnecessary supply, it is not possible to be non-polluters within a capital framework, regardless of what energy system is employed – with which he agreed. Unsurprisingly perhaps, there is nothing on the Beyond Zero Emissions website29 that talks about economics beyond capital. As Leahy puts it in his criticisms of mainstream environmentalism, such an approach “criticise[s] capitalists’ greed and ordinary peoples’
selfish ignorant consumerism, believing the way forward is to spread alternative economic structures within capitalism.”

In the final chapter of Life Without Money, the contributing editors Nelson and Timmerman give an outline of what an alternative economy might look like:

To achieve local collective sufficiency, people would need to take over the use rights and responsibilities for the catchment landscapes that substantially support them. Local, community-based forms of living, producing and exchanging that emphasise communal sufficiency are the most environmentally friendly because they minimise energy and resources otherwise wasted on transport and economise through providing directly for most daily needs.

This suggests, in effect, a model similar to Indigenous economies and now permaculture examples worldwide. Ever-problematic, the issue of private property can be addressed in part by redefining the commons through guerrilla tactics of land claiming: road verges, marginal lands, nature strips and vacant lots transformed into food forests and community gardens that are auspiced and approved by Aboriginal land councils. So we don’t have to wait to compost property relations in order to begin our transition to whole catchment-foodbowl management. Rather, our transition will make it easier to attend to the injustices of private property through political changes that follow these transition ethics, which model land accountability and stewardship cultures.

Here, the ethical and ecological determine the political. If we’re growing productive, biologically complex, mycorrhizal-rich soils through composting and non-till gardening; safely recycling and returning our human wastes back into the soil; if we’re planting public fruit and nut trees throughout our streets and establishing community gardens in every neighbourhood; if we’re keeping chickens, ducks and rabbits and take full accountability for their lives as high protein and nitrogen sources; if we’re managing local forests in order to benefit biodiverse communities and as a result have access to renewable fuel, fibre and fodder materials; if we’re digging water-harvesting swales to deep feed our soils, passively hydrating them through our warming summers; if we’re ceasing to drive cars because we recognise the adverse environmental effects of manufacturing and fuelling them as well as building roads, and we recognise that the average cost of owning one, including wear and tear, depreciation, petrol, fines and licenses, is well over $12,000pa; if we’ve cleared the debts we owe to the monetary economy and refuse to be in debt again, so that we can enact our transitions; if we give up the polluting idea that the world is our oyster and cease indulging in air travel; if we’re giving up the belief that having children requires us to get more paid work to pay for
endless polluting products including bigger cars; if we’re giving up the purchasing of polluting gift products that cause damage in their manufacturing and transport; if we’re giving up trying to control terrestrial environments with diesel machines and glyphosate chemicals; if we’re no longer supporting anti-ecological food depositories such as supermarkets and fast food outlets, and replacing each of these things, step-by-step, with either nothing or a local, non-polluting and just alternative; then life without money, or with much less money, becomes slowly possible.

Given the relationship money has to manufacturing anthropogenic pollution, the less we have or earn, the less we spend and therefore pollute. Work refusal is not just about taking back the more relaxed and carefree lives experienced by our highly knowledgeable aboriginal ancestors. It’s also about attending to aggregating globalised pollution. Similarly, school refusal states clearly that the general knowledges we need for the coming centuries will not be found in specialised hypertechnocivility, but rather in and of the soil. Transition to a non-monetary economy is occurring already within our own household and within the community in which we participate. Each year we are becoming less reliant on the global militarised economy. As a result we can sense we are building greater resilience to the multiplicity of challenges that lie ahead, while passing on these old-but-new-again knowledges to our children. An accountable economics does not involve money and money’s implicit damages, and an accountable culture that takes responsibility for its actions is not predetermined by a monetary economy. These currently strange ideas will have to become more normative if we are to transition to an ecological society. In the meantime, we can begin to enact changes one household and one community at a time, pragmatically, poetically, politically and economically.

When I first came to live in the Daylesford and Hepburn region almost twenty years ago, at a time when Victoria was suffering a severe economic recession, a formal barter scheme was active. It was called LETS – Local Economic Trading Systems, which are still practised in many countries today. A community friend and archivist Julie Ingleby describes LETS as “a non-profit community based trading network that operates by way of a locally created currency.” With a rise in monetary prosperity in this area, LETS gradually faded out. Over the past several years that prosperity has again shown its vulnerabilities and many of us have begun recreating similar, albeit more informal, networks for exchange. These have involved pulling down fences or cutting in gateways between properties to enable easier non-monetised exchange between neighbours of locally grown produce; attending communal working bees in private gardens and at the various community gardens, at which we share our knowledges about soil and plant health; and organising harvest
swap meets that encourage surplus produce to be bartered not wasted. Slowly, we have been remodelling the non-monetary economies that have come before us – following those communities who lived respectfully with the land and who understood the real basis for their wealth. It is to Aboriginal peoples – their culture, land-management, and economies based on gifts – that we must now turn.

Notes
2. The Totnes pound is the most celebrated example.
3. David Holmgren in conversation with Patrick Jones at Melliodora, Hepburn Springs, February 2012.
7. David Holmgren in conversation with Patrick Jones at Melliodora, Hepburn Springs, February 2012.
10. Debt until death, or life sentence, taken from the Latin meaning ‘contract til death’.
15. Both Bill Mollison and David Holmgren are the co-originators of the permaculture concept.
17. A significant permaculture model that is regularly open to the public and to students as a living educational resource.
20. Mainly European avant-garde intellectuals, artists and political theorists active between 1957–1972 who critiqued capitalism; Guy Debord’s Society of the Spectacle (1967) being the most famous publication of the movement.

6. Walking Jaara country

Local geographies, spirits and relations of home

I walked past a tall dead gum tree and looked up its giant smooth grey stump until my eyes focussed on those of a powerful owl sitting at the entrance of its hollowly home. For some time I stood admiring this lovely creature until I felt the owl had had enough of my presence. I walked on through the forest but before I had moved very far the owl attacked me. He swooped again and again and each time I tried to grab his feet, only blindly, fearing his strong talons would tear out my eyes if I kept them open. He came at me a final time and I managed to grab one of his powerful legs, pull it into me as I would a rooster, force the other leg beside it and fold in his enormous white wings under my arm. As soon as I had done this I began to run with the bird firmly held and as I ran the majestic predator began radically changing form. By the time I had stopped running the once giant owl had become a small meek white puppy, a timid little white ball of wiry hair, just like our Jack Russell, Zero, when he first came home to us...

Zephyr and I are at Eaglehawk Station awaiting our lift. Zeph, who is ten, sits on the ground making a small world with materials he has found lying about. We have left home for the week to be WWOOFs on a fifty-acre property north of Bendigo called Bunjil Park. It’s been two hours since our train arrived and so far we’ve enjoyed the morning’s gentle sun and the somewhat unpredictable situation of our so-far no-show lift.

The first time I visited Jude Perry and Uncle Brien Nelson at Bunjil Park just six weeks earlier, I spent three days walking there from this same railway station. I walked through the impoverished Whipstick State Park to Neilborough and on to Summerfield via Raywood with the scantiest of hand drawn maps, for the most part relying on the sun and an occasional road sign to guide me. On this first visit I had wanted to meet Uncle Brien in his own culture’s time and place and I figured walking there, at least for the last three days of the trip, would help achieve this. According to Jude, Uncle Brien is the last Jaara elder to be living on country. To my mind my slow arrival on foot was my way of generating a respectful traverse across his ancestral lands. On the second morning of my journey I arrived in the small town of Raywood and spent time recuperating after the previous day’s 18km walk with a heavy pack under a relentless sun. I made camp between the train line and the recreation ground beside some peppercorn trees. I wondered whether I would be lucky like the previous day and find a dam with freshwater mussels I could harvest. It was hot and the dry annual grasses were highly flammable so I found an old sheet of corrugated iron, made a small fire on top of it and brewed some tea.
I’m surprised the train doesn’t stop at Raywood, a small town with a train line running through it yet nowhere for passengers to alight or embark. After finishing my tea I lie down and sleep until a few hours later the sun finds its way into the tent. My mental state is calm. Walking this country has brought about much stillness. I wander up to the main street, which consists of a garage, a butcher, a general store and a hotel ordered by roads and footpaths and a few street trees. An old wooden bench sits empty outside the store. It is shaded by a footpath-wide eave. It’s cool here. I sit sleepily and watch the town go about its easy business. The townsfolk seem fairly relaxed. Traffic doesn’t dominate this environment but it’s clear people are very reliant on their cars and trucks. I become aware of a public notice board to the right of where I’m sitting. It posts only a handful of notices. I realise by this absence how much I enjoy community notice boards brimming with scribbled advertisements and announcements; they are an expression of the life of a place. I cheekily scribble down a little notice of my own and pin it to the board.

**ARE YOU READY**

**FOR THE END OF CHEAP OIL?**

Join the Raywood Peak Oil Society

Meets Raywood Hotel

Last Friday of the Month, 5pm

5pm on the last Friday of each month coincides with the global bicycle event Critical Mass that takes place in over 300 cities and towns around the world. My partner Meg and I started Critical Mass Daylesford a few years ago, not long after we made ourselves carless. Critical Mass is a bike awareness event that aims to ride against pollution ideology and make motorists more aware that many of us are out there, just skin and bones on wheels and bitumen. Since we became carless, walking and bike riding and occasionally waiting around for buses and trains have enabled daily opportunities for entering what I think is a reacquaintance with ecological time. For many years driving through southern Jaara country, where our little tribe lives, I felt I wasn’t really part of it, that my passages between places were never fully accountable in a material sense, and never bodily real. I still experience this abstraction and senselessness on trains and buses, but fast travel is no longer my everyday experience. Cheap crude oil has enabled untold travel opportunities and families have scattered widely around the world. Just as the term *food miles* is now in the common lexicon, *love miles* will no doubt become a more common term as families and loved ones cease to afford moving around so freely, or choose on ethical-political grounds to opt out of long distance travel. The global monetary system that relies on cheap fossil fuels, especially oil, ignores carbon cycling
and just about every other cycle that doesn’t comply with its hegemony. I guess this paragraph forms the long hand of my little public notice left on that hot afternoon in Raywood.

Jude arrives in her ute after two and a half hours sitting at the station watching Zeph’s imaginative play in the dirt. She apologises for being late and I reassure her it doesn’t matter. We throw our backpacks in the tray along with Jude’s supplies and hop in the dual cab. She takes us onto the back roads, “to avoid the bitumen”, and after about twenty minutes pulls over and shows us a stand of scar trees. “The one on the right,” she explains, “was cut for a canoe.” It’s about four metres high and about a metre wide. The scar evidently has shrunk back around the tree since it first was removed skilfully. Jude tells us the canoe would have carried around four, possibly five people. Another tree to the left bears the scar of a coolamon. Coolamons were used for a number of purposes including collecting and preparing food as well as cradling small infants. Jude tells us there had been quite a flood here a few weeks ago; the flood debris and the plague of mosquitoes now constitute an after party. We retreat to the civility of the ute.

It doesn’t surprise me that it floods badly out here. The soil is severely compacted, a result of switching from perennial to annual grasslands and hoof and horn animals. Bill Gammage (2011) in his epic work *The Biggest Estate On Earth* reposts Thomas Mitchell’s claim that you could easily sink your thumb into “1788” soil throughout much of Australia. This soil analysis is supported by permaculture modelling that shows how perennial ecologies generate productive friable soils. Compaction by hoof and horn animals, erosion of topsoil by annual crop cultivation and over-grazing no longer produce the kind of soils Gammage argues existed prior to 1788, soils that better coped with heavy rains and allowed for greater moisture penetration. “Soft soil let water soak in rather than run off, so less rain sustained more plants.”

We drive on a little further and back onto the sealed road that I had walked six weeks earlier. The farmland spreads out flat in all directions, fenced. Cars occasionally drive with long tails of dust blowing behind them along the intersecting back roads. Fairly soon we come across another scar tree that registered a smaller canoe cut. I hadn’t noticed this tree on my walk six weeks ago, but it was at about this point in the road, with my pack and the heat weighing heavily upon me, that I had experienced a very brief but nonetheless precise vision. It was similar but not the same as other experiences I have had after long periods of walking with few or no interrupting technologies, in which I increasingly become calibrated to the land and to the more-than-human, my body more part of the ground and the earth’s sense of time. I wrote it down:
After four or five kilometres [from Raywood, heading towards Bunjil Park] I start rolling my head backwards and forwards to stop my neck from crinking, the wind is cutting across me from the south, my eyes flash from field to bitumen to trees to field again and suddenly I see, and then realise I am, a young Aboriginal man. Smiling first at me then smiling outwards as myself. I stop my head’s movement and absorb the moment before it fades to my over thinking.

According to my friend the Indigenous scholar and poet Peter Minter, this experience could be assessed as “nativising the settler to help process white guilt”. The thing that was most extraordinary however about this encounter was how the boundaries between things were dissolved. Fence, tree, land, road, race ceased (momentarily) to be political entities. I have been captivated by all indigenous peoples of place – their fundamental tools and the simplicity and clarity of their livelihoods – since I was a young kid sitting around a campfire of my own making, with all clothing but my underpants removed, sharpening my spear with flame and rock unaware of such things as guilt, genocide and assimilation at the far end of my parent’s five-acre property on the Mittagong’ Creek in southern NSW. But the smiling Aboriginal man I saw, and then became, had a 1950s rural haircut and workingman’s clothes. There was no lap-lap and spear – it was not a vision of Anglo “totalitarian kitsch”, to cite Minter again – this man was not just surviving domestication and industrialisation but enjoying himself. He was, it appears now, a young Uncle Brien come out to meet me.

We soon arrive at Bunjil Park. Bunjil, the eagle, is a sacred totem of Jaara people as for many neighbouring clans including Wurundjeri and Wathaurung. The wedge-tailed eagle is the largest raptor in these parts. Closely following in size is the powerful swamp harrier, a bird of prey for which I have had a profound love since I moved into this country nearly twenty years ago. About ten years ago I had another vision, this time of a swamp harrier hovering just above me until I again became the being I was admiring, a vision that fundamentally marked the beginnings of curing myself of chronic anxiety.

Our packs and Jude’s supplies are covered in dust. Jude had been bogged two weeks before just outside the property; but now dust rains down. Uncle Brien comes out to greet us, along with a swarm of mosquitoes. The two dogs, Tigarook and Fidel, have also come out as part of the greeting party. We ferry the supplies into the house with tails excitedly wagging and mozzies biting our carrying hands. Jude shows us to our room and makes everyone lunch. We sit at a glass top table in the cool mud brick home eating sandwiches. Jude asks whether I can help her with a grant application for their educational and cultural centre after lunch. By now it’s getting on for two o’clock and applications close online at
five. I call the government department that auspices the grant to see if we can get a time extension. “No” is the curt reply. I spend about forty-five minutes trying to download the form but as the modem keeps dropping out we decide to abort the hopeless task and head outside where I’m asked to put up a fence. This task is disturbing ideologically, and I’m a little horrified about its significance. It does nonetheless have the practical job of keeping the horses from entering and eating the produce and herb garden. Uncle Brien, Zeph and I spend the afternoon setting up stringlines, scavenging timber from around the yard to reuse and digging holes to set posts in the ground. By late afternoon it has begun to warm up and the heat has temporarily forced the mosquitoes into retreat. We pour a quick setting concrete into the postholes and walk away from the job, leaving the posts to set hard overnight. On our way back to the house Jude, who has come out to inspect our work, shows me a shed door which had its hinges blown off in a recent storm. Before the evening meal I repair it then come inside to join the others.

Meg and Zeph and I have hosted WWOOFs for a few years now, only we’re not registered in the WWOOF handbook and instead we call ours SWAPs.9 Travellers normally find us by word of mouth when they come to town, or online through our various blogs. The idea of a SWAP is to demonstrate the many relationships of art and food making while developing non-monetary exchanges that are equitable for all concerned. SWAPs work in our produce garden weeding, planting, turning and stacking compost; learn some basic building skills if we happen to be doing a project; come out foraging with us; or accompany us to work at one of the community food gardens. They labour for three hours during the day plus one hour helping around the evening mealtime – washing up or cooking, preserving or fermenting food – the rest of the time they work on their own creative projects. SWAPs stay in a little room we’ve built in the garden out of scrap and second-hand materials called the Shed of Interrelation, or the SOI. It’s another way in which we are building a household economy not based on monetary exchange but on gifts. But despite being hosts numerous times, Zeph and I have never been guests within such an understanding. Part of this trip is to understand being on the other side of such an alternative economic arrangement, something Meg experienced in her twenties when WWOOFing around New Zealand for six months.

Zeph and I wake on our second day to a cacophony of birdsong – flocks of galahs, parrots and a few currawongs sing in the new day. The sun breaks through the woodland trees with the shambolic chorus and its low beams penetrate the house in patches. Outside the morning’s light is distributed evenly as there are few European trees to make thick shade. Uncle Brien and I spend the day working on the fence. Zeph flits between helping
us, chatting with Jude in the house, working on a drawing or writing in his notebook. Every time he looks a little restless or bored I ask him to collect up a wheelbarrow load of horseshit from the paddocks to dump on the compost pile. As the day goes on he seems to have lost any semblance of a bored look and sometimes when I look up and our eyes meet he starts busying himself with the most nearby thing. After the day’s work, which isn’t clocked by time but rather through what feels fair and how hot it is, Zeph, Uncle Brien and I go down to the dam to swim.

We walk across great swathes of creeping saltbush that in many places are the only groundcover growing under the intermittent eucalypts. In recent years Uncle Brien and Jude have been encouraging this important perennial back into the soil. Some graziers are now using it to rehabilitate saline soils. Saltbush is high in vitamin E and is a powerful anti-oxidant, making it ideal fodder food. Uncle Brien plays lifeguard by the dam and stays dry. He asks Zeph if he can feel any yabbies biting around his toes. “How big are they?” Zeph asks worriedly. “Oh, about this size,” Uncle Brien gestures about twenty centimetres with his hands. “Whoa!” Zeph jumps out of the water, looking behind him fearfully. Uncle Brien and I laugh out aloud. Our joking hubbub has startled a wood pigeon above us who flies off in the direction of the house. We take it as a sign to return for dinner and we walk back across the saltbush carpet. On my first trip to Bunjil Park Jude prepared a meal that included creeping saltbush and I tasted for the first time this delicious plant, the small succulent leaves of which can be ground into flour.

While we worked together that afternoon I had wanted to ask Uncle Brien about Jaara fire management. There’s so much I want to ask him but it doesn’t feel right for me to fire off questions. Part of the agreement of our WWOOF exchange, which I had previously arranged with Jude, was that we would trade farm and garden skills and labour for food and board and the chance to ask Uncle Brien questions about Jaara culture. As a guest I’m constantly wondering if I’m holding up my end of the barter: am I working enough, giving enough? A few of our SWAPs in the past have been incredibly slack and we’ve felt taken advantage of. This situation is on the other foot now, and perhaps my discomfort is about the exchange itself. Was it fair or indeed ethical of me to tack on “the chance to ask Uncle Brien questions” when this sort of exchange generally occurs by developing relationships in their own time, and not as part of an economic barter?

My second night’s sleep is again restless. Zeph is a kicker and thrashes his limbs like a quadropus when he’s sleeping and we’ve been sharing a double-size bed. Perhaps it is the black tea I’ve been drinking. I’ve been caffeine-free for quite some time now. But I feel it is more than Zeph’s sleeping habits or cured camellia sinensis leaves and buds.
It’s strange being in another’s home, living so close to people we barely know. Uncle Brien is quite frail at seventy-one years of age and according to Jude he has already lived some seventeen years past the national average for Aboriginal men. My thoughts keep returning to work; I know there’s so much I could do around the property that could assist Uncle Brien and Jude.

The following day Uncle Brien, Zeph and I work together again to build a new coop for the chickens and ducks. Down at the poultry yard the mosquitoes are the worst we’ve experienced. They become thick around our heads and shoulders and Zeph runs back to the house to get some tea tree repellent. Eventually we settle into the day’s work under the shade of some large gums. Two horses are also contained in the poultry yard and they spend the morning approaching the wheelbarrow, sniffing the tools and materials wishfully, being startled away by our hammering and cutting before quietly reapproaching. Out of the blue I ask Uncle Brien about fire. “We whitefellas don’t seem to understand it.” He smiled and nodded. “We burn too hot and at the wrong time.” He nodded again. “We have to burn cooler, more often?” I asked. “Yep”, he responded. I felt I was forcing the conversation and let it go. I had heard a theory that the reason our local forests are so damaged is because fire management is governed by clock time. Workers burn too hot, too quickly between 8am and 4pm, rather than spending three to four days to burn gently when the conditions are just right. We work on with the mosquitoes, the heat and the dust. There’s so much to do here; it’s exasperating. Fifty acres is a lot to manage for two people who also run educational tours and a cultural centre, and are consultants to archaeologists.

As a result of ignoring Indigenous land management practices we have needed to apply great quantities of labour and technology that were unnecessary prior to 1788. Before the first wave of settlers arrived, land was managed collectively with few tools but considerable knowledge of how it functioned. Prior to occupation land was not dominated and controlled but rather shaped and made into such that plants and animals were abundant. “Across Australia newcomers saw grass where trees are now, and open forest free of undergrowth now dense scrub,”10 writes Gammage. He argues that time and time again, point of contact observations and diary entries by Europeans reveal the surprise of newcomers at finding parklike country dotted with trees and perennial pasture grasses, free of dust and full of medicinal fodder for grazing animals and edible roots and tubers, leaf vegetables, fruits, berries and seeds for humans. Gammage goes on to explain that fire was used as a precision tool to create new life and hard edges between varying ecologies that collectively favoured diversity. These nuanced fire strategies today have been replaced with diesel and glyphosate as the dominant technics of land management.
To counter the limitations of historical prejudices and geographical evidence, Gammage attempts to show what Indigenous people such as historian Bruce Pascoe and the Gunditjmara have previously argued: that Aboriginal peoples were a combination of free-ranging graziers, aquaculturalists, builders of stone house settlements, yam daisy gardeners and ecological shepherds, as well as hunters and gatherers. Some were settled, some were equally settled and nomadic, and some were only nomadic. The Jaara word Larr, for instance, refers to nest/house/stone/camp, demonstrating the many possibilities of dwelling place. But all Aboriginal people lived within strict territories in which their stewardship was pronounced. Bruce Pascoe (2008) argues that the hunter-gatherer label alone is inaccurate, or worse, strategic: “[t]erms like hunter gatherer do not sufficiently describe Indigenous food production in Australia but are part of the prejudicial and politically loaded vocabulary of the invader.” Pascoe, who has Bunurong and Tasmanian heritage, has also written something that may help us form a broader thesis that Aboriginal societal modes are indeed our future models:

The First Australians had all the same desires and abilities and could attack each other with efficient weapons, so why didn’t they invade one another’s territory to take possession of land, to become colonists like nations elsewhere in the world... Is it too naive to wonder whether the answer to that investigation may provide diplomatic tools for the modern world?

Uncle Brien and Jude’s property is lightly to moderately treed and heavily fenced by the previous owner who had attempted to farm emus. The property falls away to acres of grazing land and further on into heavier patches of forest. I’m beginning to realise that this pastoral land, even in its impoverished and fenced off European version, is really more in general attributes than most state forests and national parks are today. Increasingly, those forests and parks seem to me to be whitefella’s construction of wild, empty terra nullius Australia. The ideological separation between the European construction of nature and human food and energy production is how we have arrived at such an abstracted mainstream environmental movement, where for the most part people continue to obtain food and energy supplies by industrial means while fighting for little tracts of so-called wilderness. Words like wild and nature didn’t exist in Aboriginal lexicons pre-invasion. Wild and nature, landscape and lifestyle are estranged Europe speaking. With so many extinctions in such a short period of time, it is not surprising the mainstream environmental movement concentrated its activities in conservation and lock-up. But this contradictory ideology is challenged, albeit it indirectly, in Gammage’s book as it is in the writings of permaculturalists David Holmgren and Bill Mollison. Those thinkers favour land management strategies that follow the lead set by Indigenous groups, and that generate
perennial food and energy ecologies favouring great diversity. As long as the environmental movement continues to eat, travel, heat and cool itself out of the oil drum of monetised industrialisation, we will never reclaim the sensible patterns of existence established by Indigenous Australians.

It is exasperating looking at everything that needs doing at Bunjil Park, which is still heavily under the influence of agriculture’s illogic – the dry, the dust, the soil compaction, the fences. Jude and Uncle Brien inherited eroded soils and an anthropogenic dumpsite from previous owners. There’s still so much to sort out, salvage or send to the giant scrap bin in the great radiating anthropocene sky. I wish I could stay for a month. But Zeph is already getting pangs of homesickness, and Meg is nearly five months pregnant and will need us to help keep our own household’s economy going. After we finish work Jude offers to take Zeph and I over to the Bunjil Education Centre that she and Uncle Brien have established just across the yard. She has asked him to come and tell us about his possum skin cloak and his collection of traditional tools and weapons. Everyone is a bit hot and tired but I’m especially keen to film Uncle Brien speaking about his family’s most significant textile. I turn on my camera, start to film and ask Uncle Brien to describe it. He struggles with the heat and the demand to perform and an awkwardness enters the room. I suddenly feel like I’m in extraction mode again. Peter Minter (2011) has argued in another elegant paper distinctions between extractive and generative behaviours within colonial and Indigenous epistemologies. He makes a point with which I’m evidently still struggling: that the generative is relational. These thoughts avail themselves as Uncle Brien, over-tired and overwhelmed by the day’s activities, treats my question like a throat lolly that he plays with in his mouth. He is not going to perform on cue.

Zeph and I wake early and lie in bed talking until he becomes restless and ready to rumble. Yesterday was a difficult day, and after another disturbed night thinking about the challenges of gifting and non-monetary economies, volunteerism and extractive and generative behaviours, I’m determined to get a good start to this one. We head outside into another startling cloudless morning and walk around examining all the old plant pots lying in piles about the garden and in the various old stockyards. Jude asked us the day before whether they could be collected up, size sorted, and put into one of the many little former emu sheds dotted around the yard. Before breakfast we give a chosen shed a thorough rake out and remove some nailed-in sheet metal that Uncle Brien and I will need later on. We head back inside and join our hosts for toast and tea. There are thirty years between Zeph and I and another thirty between Uncle Brien and me. We are three precise generations and each of us has quite differing needs and motivations. I feel a little strained
in the middle. After breakfast we leave Zeph to order and stack the multiplicity of varying sized pots, while Uncle Brien and I scour the various yards for long lengths of hardwood to set up as perches for the chickens in their new coop. “Were canoes used for getting eggs from nesting water birds?” I ask him. I’m more comfortable now and the question just pops out casually. “Yes, swan eggs,” he answers smiling, our hands gripping two ends of a piece of tie wire that holds in place one of the perching timbers. I realise later why the question is more relaxed. It is relational; it inhabits the shared activity of what we’re doing. We put the old nesting boxes under the new perches and wrap the salvaged sheet metal on the weather side of the coup, help Zeph finish his job, then all go inside for morning tea.

It’s already getting very hot and I’m pleased to be given an inside job that involves changing the deteriorating flywire on a flyscreen door for grey shadecloth material found in one of the piles around the yard. It’s about this time that Jude hears from my friend Alison Pouliot, a mycologist and photographer who worked with Uncle Brien when he worked for Parks Victoria. Alison was to conduct a fungi workshop at Bunjil Park tomorrow but hasn’t got the numbers to proceed. Apart from some giant puffballs I’m not sure there is much to find here right now; unlike at home, which is considerably more moist, and where we’ve already been hunting fungi for over a month. Yet even though I think the land here is still too dry, Alison’s talent for tracking mushrooms is superior, and her sharp eyes would probably find several species that have fruited after the recent flooding. This decision to cancel the workshop has implications for Zeph and I. We were to get a lift back home with Alison after the workshop. Because of the lack of public transport on the weekend we decide to head home tonight.

After lunch Jude gives us our last job. Happily and ironically it involves the removal of fence posts. This is a gift job to end our stay and a job that all three of us fellas have a lot of fun doing, joking about like a bunch of boys; we two older ones following Zeph’s lead in heaving and hoeing the star pickets out of the ground. At the time of leaving Uncle Brien took my hand. “Come again,” he said, “it’s been good having you here.” Having been side-by-side for four days working on common projects, we are now facing each other. I return his care with a hug. I didn’t learn much more than I already knew about Jaara fire management, but I did about other less tangible things. Through sharing common activities side-by-side it is possible to begin to generate relationships of care, and we understand this by being and doing together. In this last task of fence post removal it was not the articulation of the politic of removing them, which is of course such necessary work, but rather the joy, the jokes, the mutual bodily strain that were shared in our doing together.

During our stay a box of photos of Uncle Brien’s family sat on the kitchen table. Over several meals we all pored through this life in frozen images showing his parents, country,
children, community and other loved ones going back a hundred years. This home no longer represents an Aboriginal community, much to Jude and Uncle Brien’s sadness. Rather, it shows a direct link to a people who didn’t wall themselves off from the world’s worlds, who didn’t aim to create protective zones between humans and other animals, who didn’t commit themselves to *man-made mass death*, and who didn’t commit the world’s worlds to anthropogenic climate change. The gifts produced within such non-monetary exchanges are much more than beds and meals swapped for skills and labour. They are about being together, laughing and making together, sharing sadness and joy in union with one another. These things can’t be accounted for economically. Instead they require slow movements, and relationships that are arrived at slowly with one another and with the land.

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Notes
5. ibid, Gammage, 2011. p.103.
7. From the Gandarangara people’s language meaning *little mountain*.
8. ibid, Minter 2012.
14. ibid. p117.
7. Taking the old tea

Plant sentience, brewed love and a dose of cheap oil shamanism

Before all representational grasp, before a consciousness and its subject, before science, and theology, and philosophy, there is that: the that of, precisely, there is. But ‘there is’ is not itself a presence, to which our signs, our demonstrations, and our monstrations might refer. One cannot ‘refer’ to it or ‘return’ to it: it is always, already, there, but neither in the mode of ‘being’ (as a substance) nor in that of ‘there’ (as a presence). It is there in the mode of being born: to the degree that it occurs, birth effaces itself, and brings itself indefinitely back. Birth is this slipping away of presence through which everything comes to presence.

We arrived at the temple in the early evening and after some casual talk and herbal tea drinking in the little kitchenette we got changed into our white clothes. In preparation for sitting in the circle and taking the old tea I had purposely read nothing about it, I wanted the experience to be personal; I didn’t want to overload it with background noise. What little I knew about this plant medicine came from our friend Dave who had been SWAPPing with us for several months. My friendship with Dave was my way into this discreet business, a business that no doubt will increasingly raise the ire of the authorities as it becomes more widespread in Australia. We can’t have people entering intimate relations with psychoactive plants; where will that end up? With my interest pricked, when an opportunity came for an ayahuasca shaman to visit our neck of the woods I booked in and paid up.

Each of us was asked to prepare an intention for the circle. We were asked to fast for six hours beforehand and observe a restricted diet in the three days prior. We were also asked to abstain from any aged or fermented foods, meat, caffeine, sugar, sex, alcohol and anything else that may cause hypertension in relation to the medicine or affect one’s communication with the plant. We were encouraged to eat a diet of steamed fish, rice, whole grains, fresh fruit, fresh vegetables, sesame seeds, tahini, honey, almonds, sourdough breads, popcorn, soups, salads with light dressings, onions, garlic and herbs, herbal teas, juices and plenty of water. The diet was relatively easy for me, although we don’t have fish at this time of year, only eating in summer what we catch out of the local waterways. We do eat sauerkraut almost daily that Meg ferments from cabbages and sometimes kohlrabi, so having a short break from these beneficial probiotics only held a novelty value. Abstaining from my home-brewed pale ale or stout was probably the most difficult thing for me. One in the evenings
is my daily treat, each bottle with its contents costing around forty cents for the barley malt and yeast, each bottle and screw cap reused over and over again, meaning that this treat comes with almost no waste.

My primary intention for joining the circle was to better understand plant expression and love, but with this intention I also brought some small fears. The first was a fear of wearing white clothes in the company of people who labour words like energy, flow and blockage. The second was more pronounced, it was a long-established fear of a psychoactive substance taking me away too quickly, overwhelming me or feeling ensnared or trapped by it. This not so uncommon fear was developed in my early twenties when experimenting with synthetic drugs among flaky peers. I did not, however, bring any fears about what the tea might reveal. Dave had said it could show up some unpleasant and rather truthful things and that purging during the ceremony was part of such revelations. But my fears were only concerned with the human – with shysters and with symbolism. What if the tea was synthetic or laced, and the ritual full of New Age bullshit? Or, “What if this was Jonestown all over again?” one from our group joked. But if the tea was going to expose something I ordinarily didn’t want to see or feel, then that was OK. Plants I can trust. In my long love affair with plants, a fear of being deceived has never been entertained. Hemlock, the plant that is supposed to have killed Socrates, autonomously grows in our garden where the soil has been disturbed. We know not to eat it although once dried it can be administered in small doses as a sedative, antispasmodic and as an antidote to Strychnine poisoning and tetanus. We also know how much good it is doing for the soil as its taproot is working to break through the clay. Plants lovingly give and they have never, in my experience, deceived me. I simply couldn’t imagine ayahuasca being a tea of deception.

In the Quechua languages, which are spoken in the Andean states of Ecuador, Colombia, Bolivia, and Peru where ayahuasca grows, aya means “spirit” and huasca means “vine”. The word ayahuasca, or yaje has been variously translated as “vine of the soul”, “vine of the dead” and “spirit vine”. An ecologist friend of mine, Snu Vooglebreinder, writes that the “complex pharmacopoeias of the peoples of this large [Latin American] area are noteworthy, though unfortunately they are vanishing. Deforestation, pollution and ‘westernisation’ of indigenous peoples continue to diminish the extent to which traditional knowledge can be passed on to concurrent generations...” Understanding plants as loving and generous is to understand land as generous and giving – a source of truth that our technical poisons and machines too readily violate.
We entered the temple at around 8pm and each of us set up a small camp with bedding, pillows and blankets. We were each given a white bucket to purge into later in the night. There were eighteen of us forming a circle around a small altar table which the medicine sat on. I knew nearly everyone in the room, although most not well. We were asked to bring something to put on another little altar nearby. People brought charms and crystals mainly. I had forgotten about this. I had a hand full of broad beans in my jacket pocket that I’d saved from last summer’s crop, something I keep on me at this time of year for spontaneous opportunities to plant, however they were in the change room. I wondered whether I should go and get them. I guess my lack of attention to this aspect of the circle demonstrated my scepticism of altars and sacraments. Still, I checked myself for not being more participatory and quietly went and got some to make my offering.

Incense burned, candles dimly lit the room, and music played through a quality sound system. J the travelling shaman welcomed us. I liked how he did this, he was casual and relaxed and I immediately detected sincerity. He gave an introduction to the tea, describing its chemistry, ethnobotany and general safety. The tea is prepared from the *Banisteriopsis spp.* and mixed with the leaves of dimethyltryptamine (DMT)-containing species of shrubs from the genus *Psychotria*. He mentioned ayahuasca had survived a patent claim in 1981 when Loren Miller, director of the California-based International Plant Medicine Corporation, took it back to the United States to privatise it. Another reason the tea will be on the radar of the authorities – it isn’t yet in corporate hands.

J prepared us for a potentially rough ride. He said he had taken the tea once a week for sixteen years and had experienced his own death many times. He said that the tea is used traditionally as a preparation for death, as a rehearsal for a present and conscious death. He said there were no rules in the circle but asked us to remain open and present, to breathe deeply through any discomfort, and where possible not to disturb our fellow travellers.

We went around the room delivering our intentions. Many brought much sadness and suffering; they wanted something very specific from the plant. J doused us with burning dry sage leaves, filling the room with a sweet smelling fog. Some coughed quite badly as the smoke was thick at times. He lit up what looked like a fat joint, inhaling and blowing an aromatic tobacco (mapacho) smoke into the ayahuasca bottle. Each cup was served in the same shot glass after being measured out in a small medicine vile. People were called up to the altar to drink one-by-one in a clockwise order. I was third in line. There was no sacramental cloth to wipe away each other’s microbials. I liked the communal aspect of this. It brought us together through a community of saliva traces.
I didn’t care there were sick people in the room with hacking coughs and dribbly noses. Again, I trusted the medicine. I also liked the taste of the tea – a cool, smoky-bitter syrup akin to some Chinese medicines I have had. I didn’t take a lemon slice as a neutralising chaser after my first cup. I wanted only ayahuasca. I went back to my little nest and watched my fellow travellers come to drink, each with their own way of accepting the tea, some quite casual, others religiously adorning the cup to their foreheads before drinking. I thought of my father, and the way he used to kneel down and cross himself before entering his pew in church. I generally found it comical, but for him there was also something very intentional and personal about it.

The music switched from sound system to live instruments and we all sat listening to J singing in languages I could only appreciate as musical texture while he picked his guitar, accompanied by his travelling companion A, a gifted percussionist. My mind was switching between the gentle joy of the experience and being critical and harsh. I felt no effect of the tea from the first cup and began to have cynical thoughts. “Is this just some hippy placebo and we all get off on the candles and incense and folk music?” But then I thought how beautiful J’s voice was, so unpretentious, so unvirtuosic and yet so clearly calibrated to his string picking. “If this is the entire experience then it’s pretty gorgeous; what is human love anyway but a gentle environment and a restorative song?” I had time to think about my family. The people I share my life with, particularly Zeph and Meg and how much I love them and how wonderful they are in my life. I missed them, and I thought of walking home after the ceremony, which was supposed to end at 3am. I’d probably arrive in time for breakfast and we would all laugh together about the funny hippies in our shire. Then J sang a song in English littered with soulful clichés that made me cringe and I swung back into left-brain attack. I came here to better understand plants, so enough of all this human shit, enough of words and of labouring the symbolic.

After about an hour we were asked if we’d like to take a second cup. I remember thinking that I might need more than this. Each time I go to the dentist for major work the first needle barely does a thing, I’m not easily numbed. At the beginning of the ceremony J had said that first timers would have two cups, although if anyone would like a third and felt confident in themselves then he would administer another. This time I again skipped on the lemon and returned to my night nest, laid down as my back was beginning to ache and meditated on the flavour again.

It wasn’t as smoky this time as J hadn’t repeated the ritualistic blowing of the mapacho smoke into the bottle. And this time I had mild visualisations of something like technicolour
stringy bark moving above me, the bark-like strings constantly transforming like writhing snakes. This was not really exceptional, although the colours were exceedingly intense, primary. I have many times closed my eyes lying under the sun or under the shade of a tree in summer with shows of light, travelling particles and my imagination all combining and colliding to produce some lovely visions. This was a little like that and considering the room with its incense and candles and music it was not surprising to have a small display of otherworldly visuals.

I really came with few, if any, expectations. I didn’t come to be healed, I didn’t come for proof of anything – I already accept that plants are sentient and giving because of how they perform in life – I didn’t come to be amazed or bettered or transformed. I wasn’t closed to these things; I just didn’t come with any preconceptions.

I laid back and thought about our baby that was on the way. I was mulling over the possible sleep arrangements, wondering how we will all cope in our small house with little sleep Qi. I saw the glow of what looked like a golden uterus that I could see into and I think I just saw a baby move gently inside. My mind wandered and I kept asking myself if I was about to fall asleep, am I dreaming? I sat up crossed legged. The music reverted to a playlist as the musicians rested. It all seemed very human and I guess I was getting a little bored. I transfixed on J’s MacBook screensaver that was pulsating technovisuals over to our side of the room. It seemed so incongruous to the candles and incense and made me think about the largely uncritiqued violence of such technology, the faceless factory slaves who make these things and the mined minerals from the war torn Congo.

Another thing that bothered me was J’s drinking of bottled water. What sort of shaman pollutes even when he drinks? We are so close to Lalgambook here, the Jaara people’s sacred mountain, a landmark more familiar now as Coca-Cola’s symbolic Mt Franklin, renamed after Governor and Lady Franklin, demonstrating the comparatively short lineage of damage from colonialism to corporatism. I can play music with family and friends, I can light candles and sit around a campfire and take magic mushrooms, I can walk down to the mineral springs and fill up reusable bottles all for free, with nominal if no pollution. And why are we all dressed in white here? What is white really symbolising to a bunch of white people? Why are there all these corny words in these songs? I ask the same of my own wordy creations and start reflecting on the importance of my biophysical poems where nothing is written, but rather just performed in time and place. The poetical is as physical as it is imaginative and yet nearly always tied to the page and to langauge. Why do we over labour the world’s worlds with words? I thought about my more political poems, surely it is the political predicament of damage and dominion that
has grown this obsession with language, this need to speak ourselves out of our trauma. In his *Ensouling Language*, Stephen Harrod Buhner (2010) writes, “[e]verything that you love is everything you stand for, everything that you will fight to protect.” But hate is part of this love because without hate our love is complicit with many problematic things, like bottled water. Again, Buhner articulates this:

> Everything you hate is everything you stand against. It is everything you oppose, that you write to change, that you want to be part of changing, that you must participate in changing in order to respect yourself. They are the things that if you do not speak against them, you will be complicit in promoting, merely by your silence.

After some more singing J mentions to us that the tea is very mild tonight and invites us to take another cup. I’m really pleased to hear this and I start to trust in the ceremony again. We each go up one by one to receive it. It is very much like Holy Communion but without the guilt or the wiping cloth or the priest standing over us. J sits cross-legged reaching over the altar to place the glass in our hands, the hierarchy is minimal, we are not kneeling in submission to him or a greater being. We settle into our third cup and J and A resume playing their instruments. The room drifts away into all its private places again. I consider the medicine bottle running dry before we’re all high on ayahuasca. There are times now when the music is so beautifully clear and profound; the percussion instruments make so many delicious sounds. J throat sings. I wonder whether I will experience death tonight. I wonder what’s coming. I rub my forearms. They have become incredibly achy. I think about how they are used to slaughter roosters, how they help strangle and cut off their heads. It is unusual for me to have such aching forearms and I meditate on killing animals, on being predatory, on domesticating them as part of our long march to civility. I can’t quite believe how conscious I still am, how sober, how thinking. I relax and lie down again, looking up into the ceiling, along the painted rafters, occasionally propping up my head to see what percussion instrument produced a particular sound.

Music really is the blossom and fruit of all human arts, so fundamental and giving to breath, to spirit, to human life. I fall deeper into a reverie of very chilled thinking, like a midnight daydream, a song being sung.

The next thing I sense is a tap on my arm, my neighbour whispers “a fourth cup?” I sit up. “Yes.” I sense anticipation in the room, possibly even some annoyance. It has been several hours and we’re all still waiting for the tea to really kick in. I go through the same routine, kneel at the altar, thank J, down the hatch, skip on the lemon and return to my nest. I watch the the circle drink in a trance-like state that I put down to tiredness. Time
elapses. Then almost suddenly the PA blasts out a strange and amusing female voice, something between Patti Smith, Bjork and Joanna Newsom singing earthmothering lyrics at a hobbit convention. I can hear giggles from some girls in the room. This triggers my own giggling and relief. I’m lying on my back; the roof has become multidimensional. It fills with space and light. I’m just conscious enough to hold in my laugh. I giggle like a child again, trying to muffle the sound. Then I let go. I am filled with an extreme happiness and an immense love. I am riding a joyous sea with the music, my body worms quietly in this joy. I rub my forearms; the aching has subsided, I rub them selflovingly. The music is at once contiguous with the plant, then at odds, which brings about more laughter. Then the most intense visions begin. Streaming primary colours surge through twisting veins. Some climb up and some around just out in front of me. This is ecstasy. I am filled with a very rare form of joy and I can feel how broadly and openly I’m smiling. I laugh at all there is to the human, I laugh just for the sheer bliss of it. I tell myself this is the gift from the plant – laughter and looseness. It is relief. I know that it is. My ribs are so happy; they are open to everything. My eyes are wet with a crying joy. Zeph comes to me. I’m so immensely in love with my son. I smile at him; all my parental worries evaporate. I see him so strong and capable; I trust in him. I am glowing with the love of my family. Streams of colour occupy my vision again. I didn't find out that one of the two plants ayahuasca derives from is a vine until after I got home when I was researching this essay. Perhaps J mentioned this in his introduction, but I didn't hear it then. But this was significant to my experience because the extreme technicolour visions were like watching multicoloured vines growing as though by time-lapse photography, as if the plant’s autonomous and wordless spirit was growing before me.

I thought of Meg and saw her patience and love for us and I relished the love I have for her and how much I enjoy sharing my life with this happy soul. I have never experienced such ultra bliss. I thought of her growing belly and the vision of the glowing golden uterus returned. I still couldn’t quite see clearly the child inside, but sensed this little being. I lay there looking up at all of this for quite some time; the ceiling disappeared and was replaced by light and sound that went on forever. I smiled with such interior and bodily peace. I thought about all the poems I’d write with just chuckling and giggling sounds. I thought of a life with much more laughter and children’s joy. What gifts. Not only do plants love us with phytochemicals, they also bring us wisdom about our suffering. This was such a momentary reprieve from the totalising trauma of civility. I thought in all these visions and sensations time must have done something strange, I was disoriented by the length of the night, it felt like I’d been here for days, I was slowly coming out from under the spells of the vine.
I began to hear the sobering sounds of vomiting ricocheting around the room. I felt a slight discomfort in my stomach but otherwise I felt extraordinary. Some of the purging was violent and explosive with wailing; some was much less dramatic, more accepting or hardened of the condition. I lay there thinking that I didn’t want to vomit but wondered if I would, whether it is in fact unavoidable. I wanted the medicine to remain inside me for longer; for now I felt it was at home there. J had mentioned earlier that the purging is both the ridding of toxins from the gut and also the exorcising of emotional or psychological toxicity. He claimed that the medicine did not remove any of the gut’s beneficial flora and I guess empirically I can attest to this as several days on my stomach is as it always is.

I didn’t feel I needed to purge. I just lay back and enjoyed the end of my visions and joy. Wow! What immense pleasure, what incredible clarity of feeling and vistas and senses of love. I could smell the vegetable soup being heated up in the kitchenette. I could sense people were clearing away their buckets and dispersing from the circle. I began to hear quiet chatting and then some laughter coming from outside the temple. I just lay there, thankful, thankful for everything that life is, thankful and relieved and tired and hungry.

When I finally came back into the focus of a communal room there was much gentle warmth between people. Some were outside crying or keeping very much to themselves, others were quietly reflective but nonetheless sharing their experiences. I found it hard to contain my excitement and joy and at first thought that was what others had experienced too. But it soon became clear just how varied our experiences were. I spoke to some about the plants themselves, how far away they are and how they don’t have an ecological relationship with our home place. We talked about how magic mushrooms, *Psilocybe spp.*, otherwise known as gold tops or blue meanies, really are our local ayahuasca, and how this fungi sentience is what such an intentional communal ritual really should be based on in terms of relocalisation in the future. It is unclear whether a Jaara doctor – barnbungal, barngbar-knul, bangknar, barnbuyal⁶ – would have used these common mushrooms as medicine, but it is difficult to think it wasn’t a possibility. Stephen Harrod Buhner (1998) writes, “[t]he normal range of human consciousness and the behaviour that derives from it has never been so narrowly defined as in our time. This narrowing process (an attempt to provide a safety net not inherent in life itself) is becoming ever more extreme.”⁷

The following day after breakfast we all sat in the circle again. We were asked to share our experiences with the group. Everyone had such differing encounters with the medicine. We laughed and cried and giggled and sang and strained to truthfully express ourselves
to each other. This coming together, being together, momentarily diminished the western I we all brought with us. This briefing out and brave recalling, especially for those whose travel was so difficult, enabled us to understand the plant medicine as relational and loving. No one felt duped by it, stoned or hungover, even those who faced such horrors spoke warmly of the medicine. This was not some synthetic party drug engineered to make us all behave the same way, this was nuanced plant life entering the human in a very old and fundamental way. Ayahuasca enabled me to renew my love for the people around me and asked me to trust in my happy visions.

Notes
2. our household’s form of WWOOFing (Willing Workers on Organic Farms), a SWAP stands for Social Warming Artists and Permaculturalists.
5. ibid. p70.
8. Literary stiles and symbolic culture

Returning to the problem of writing

It is our fall from a simplicity and fullness of life directly experienced, from the sensuous moment of knowing, which leaves a gap that the symbolic can never bridge. This is what is always being covered over by layers of cultural consolations, civilized detouring that never recovers lost wholeness. In a very deep dense, only what is repressed is symbolized, because only what is repressed needs to be symbolized. The magnitude of symbolization testifies to how much has been repressed; buried, but possibly still recoverable.¹

Dear Maya,

This letter is prompted by your book, *The Comfort of Water: A River Pilgrimage*, a complex account of your twenty-one day walk along the Yarra from mouth to source with three friends and a seemingly endless cohort of supporters. You set off at Williamstown and make your way through the noise and fanfare of the city, the suburbs, then into quieter territory, country that isn’t as heavily trodden or written upon. Gradually it unfolds that your walk is a kind of initiation back into life, life not dominated by symbols and machines.

Your book has prompted many questions about environment and home place, dispossession and estrangement, but none more immediate to me than the place of writing in society and its role in mediating life. I want to share with you some critical thought I have about writing, thought that attempts to consider what might be at the root of ecological estrangement and, by extension, a dominant ideology that ratifies pollution and other forms of suffering. Of course, even before we have written them down words can be powerful things. They can enact love and tenderness and they can fuel heartbreak and war. Stephen Collis (2008) in his volume of poems titled *The Commons* problematises, as you do in *The Comfort of Water*, enclosing English common land, stopping the collective use of it by privatisation’s burgeoning fences:

as words not
woods will make
fences…²

Whereas words spoken can arrive first as political weaponry, words on paper – authorised and made concrete by the surveyor and governor’s quill – more than make the territory, at least according to private property relations. Writing *Lot 42* over common or indigenous land is unmistakably an act of civil (by which I mean veiled or at arm’s length) violence. Civil violence really begins with the fence and reaches its pinnacle today in drone
warfare. We know what writing is good for; it is essentially all we hear if we hear anything at all about literacy, such is its common place. Writing is for politics and for individual self-expression. But I would also argue writing is a curse, it ratifies the symbolic in a very powerful way; it is a thing that comes between things, like a fence. Writing always seems to be storing something while transporting it from one place to another, and in this way it is an obvious extension of the modes of agriculture. Perhaps the best writing can be is a stile that gives access from one place to another, to make the fence permeable. But the stile is not the land, it is a metaphor; the stile is a technic, and only required because the land has been fenced off.

Since I first read her book *Words To Be Looked At*, I have thought often of Liz Kotz’s (2007) description of words:

> By their nature, words are both here – concretely and physically present on the page, or in the moment of utterance – and yet also elsewhere – referring to, evoking, or metaphorically conjuring up sets of ideas, objects, or experiences that are somewhere else.³

I think the description is accurate but it doesn’t problematise writing’s natural ability to mediate and separate. To read the eye is the favoured sense and yet the eye is the most distancing of senses. My pre-literate five-month-old son, Blackwood, puts everything into his hands and mouth. Everything, for now, is touched and tasted into existence. The failure to recognise our adult selves as mediated by words is systemic. Bruno Latour (1993) argues that we know more about peoples of place, “them” (through anthropology), than ourselves, “us”, and because of this “[o]ur intellectual life is out of kilter.” It is asymmetrical.⁴ By “us” Latour means those who have fallen under the spells of “Greek mathematics, Italian physics, German chemistry, American nuclear engineering or Belgian thermodynamics.”⁵ In other words, fallen under the spells of symbolic life. In a material sense each individual letter or numeral scribed or printed in a text constitutes a sea of representations on the page or across the screen that favours the eye and its distancing sensibilities. In widening the disciplines of western thought to include the social sciences, Latour believes “all have their privileged vantage point, provided that they remain separate.”⁶ Even though there has been some effort to address this divide over the past twenty years, estrangement remains emphatic and mediated life only aggregates. In his essay *The Failure of Symbolic Thought* (2002) John Zerzan writes, “we live within symbols to a greater degree than we do within our bodily selves or directly with each other.”⁷

I wonder whether our colossal failure as a society to love the human and more-than-human worlds of the world is because a direct, unmediated love of land and place barely
exists. Such lovelessness is expressed in an absent outrage for the brutality, illness and suffering that symbolic, technical life has brought to country. A love of symbols exists – coats of arms, flags, teams, brands, a postcard of a sunset – but a love of country doesn’t really exist at all. Symbolic love transpires as symbolic nationalism through the mediums of art, tourist brochure, film, object, photography, war and writing. According to symbolic culture the land doesn’t really feed and nurture us, corporations and stock images do, therefore what is there to love about the land? The land is dirty, dangerous and hostile. It stings and bites and burns and floods and strikes and punctures and irritates and poisons. It is better witnessed therefore through mediums we can access from a chair, as an image. An image of love is a loving of something that is monosensical (mainly of the eye), and I think this goes someway to explaining our intransigence to ecological crisis and how this lovelessness – this love for symbols, for phantasms – also transforms into psychological crisis. We are never home.

So what leads us to writing, to representation, to mediating the worlds of the world in printed symbols? What does it really mean to be someone who writes environment, place, ecology – the watery, earthly, creaturely – someone who writes it down for examination and enquiry by others? The two of us are reasonably practical people – gardeners, permaculturalists, people who love to feel soil in our hands and pull out and taste its fruits, people who walk, and people who have been involved in forest campaigns and other forms of direct grassroots activism for many years. Writing is something in which we increasingly have immersed our lives in. We are marginal voices, but with writing we have voice and the means to be heard. Marxist theory, at least in post-Marxist revision, observes that class difference between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie is essentially a thing of privilege, between those who are voiceless and those who are voiced. Such class lines today are evidently more blurred, yet despite our marginal politics we are privileged by virtue of our education, our literacy, our productions for being heard, more so than our economic means.

Something else occurs when we are literate. We are not only reading and writing from the position of the stile, but the more we inhabit it the more we are forgetting or disappearing the land and its intimates. Socrates was concerned, or so goes the handed-down myth, that writing made lazy thinkers. When we’re on the stile we do not inhabit earth, we do not observe and interact closely with the land. We instead become reliant on abstract messaging (from other stiles) to inform us about it. From the vantage of the stile the sensory loss is startling, but art and literature normalise this loss by making their subjects refer only to other stiles. As writers, we are desensitised by the abstraction of writing even when we are conscious to include all the senses like your friend David Abram
(2010) does so well. The more intimate senses – smell, taste, touch – are disappeared through such mediums as writing. A thing that is supposed to preserve sense and thought may, I think, act against such preservation. Writing preserves something, for a time, as a physical archive, but what does such archiving, such historicising really do to the writer and, more importantly, to the reader? Writing asks the reader to be in indirect time and place. To know, perhaps, before knowing.

I think you’d agree that oral voicing, story telling, is quite different to writing, and that oral societies are significantly more ecologically functional because story and thing, story and land, are made and remade in the present and in place, passed on from generation to generation and therefore not stable or fixed, but adaptable to change and ecological flux. It is not by accident that oral societies are fenceless societies. Western culture is still so heavily involved in the colonial project of contempt for such people and such being. It is however today more subtle than in the past; the mockery forms as self-praise for our technological achievements and our individual complexities. Indigenous peoples must fold into the west’s symbolic order or be left to self-destroy or titillate as cultural spectacle. Even as the west’s neurosis worsens, choking on its symbols and pollutions, it holds that living simply and directly in relation with more-than-human communities is romantic foolishness. Animism in the west is long dead, although we have occasionally seen traces of it since William Blake’s *The Fly* (1794), since the beginning of the industrial revolution. But animals today are spectacles, resources, symbols, fetishised pets and wildlife, and things to be studied. They are rarely kin or self, eaten and made into.

The abiding fear that those enamoured with symbolic culture hold is that a new dark age will appear if we turn our backs on symbolic life; by lessening our symbols and associated technics we will become more creaturely, books will turn to dust, machines will rust and glitch and crash, and order will be lost. But will this really be the case? Would the lessening of symbols and technics destroy politics? We have never seen such disinterest in politics and yet symbols and technology envelope our lives in an unprecedented way. Why can’t we ask instead, what intelligence have we forfeited in order to be such complex, abstract, non-collective, discursive, technocratised and destructive beings? My friend Alison Pouliot took a group of high school students into a nearby forest to show them the importance of fungi there. She asked them a question about the forest and they all immediately looked down to their iPads and started to research the question.

A question you may be asking me now is why am I writing all this down? The simple answer is that once educated on the stile it is difficult to get off it, and writers don’t usually
attack their tools to such an extent they stop using them. Yes, writing is voice and the means to be heard. I’m not ready to give up politics just yet, but I am interested in understanding all the parts behind ecological crisis and society’s intransigence concerning it. In his 1982 poem, *Ecology*, Lionel Fogarty, a Yoogum and Kudjela man, begins by listing all the earthly forms that he is: “I am a frilled necked lizard... king brown taipan... pelicans... roots, nuts... dugong, kangaroo, cockatoo and grasshopper... termite, better still butterflies are my beetles... goannas.” The poem reads as though he is taking us on a walk into the places where life with kin is performed. He aims to be heard, to have voice through writing, but he also wants the symbolic tools of the invader to work against the symbolic imperatives of the invader, as we’ll see more clearly shortly. About half way through the poem he stops, turns and pronounces:

I am death
harmless.

Here is where writing stands on the back of my neck, becomes bodily; here my comprehension of death is amplified through the printing of four words on a page. Words become a sensation and they are felt not just seen and heard. In all his cross-speciesness, in all the killing that has to take place there, Fogarty is saying harm is not possible. He is tempting us to consider death in an “ABORIGINAL” sense, which he declares is harmless because it is of land in both intent and law – “our systems woven from an eco-system.” Fogarty understands harm to comprise human activities that work outside of or against ecological functioning, those that are mechanised, symbolic and essentially loveless. It is not that Aboriginal cultures are without symbols, or indeed technology, rather that these things don’t dominate to such an extent that they mask violence, falsify love and estrange people from land. Fogarty ends his poem, our walk together through his country, with a plea:

so don’t send us to pollution
we are just trying to picture
this life without frustration.

*Ecology* is a poem written for 1982 and continues to be a poem that so well encapsulates the present – *don’t send us to pollution*. I first encountered Lionel Fogarty in Melbourne at a poetry symposium held at the State Library of Victoria. The only words I recall from those few days, where hundreds of poets and scholars assembled and read papers, came from Lionel looking up awkwardly, angrily from the opulent podium and shouting: “You, you academics! You make an industry out of our suffering.” My regard for Fogarty, the brief conversation we had where he asked if he could stay if ever he came by our way, his awkwardness in such white halls of civic power, his anger and his poetry all touched me
greatly so as later when I read “I am death/ harmless”, the words were already infused with an intimacy, a knowing, a skin on skin holding.

In *The Comfort of Water*, Maya, it seems you have wanted to address Fogarty’s plea – *don’t send us to pollution* – in its fullest wisdom by walking us there. You take us on a slow river pilgrimage, make us aware of what that time and space might be, to do the most ecological of acts – to walk in the world’s worlds, to be in ecological speed and among the ecological communities (weedy and Indigenous) that the Yarra supports. In trying to picture a time when this was not the way life was performed, you ask us to imagine the land as it was then. No shopping centres, sushi bars, car washes, morgues, pubs, flats, temples, terraces, take-aways, cafés, churches. No eight hours of televised sport every day of summer, no BBC historical dramas, no “reality” shows or surreal SBS offerings. No internet or Google Earth™. No overseas trips. No overseas even imaginable! And no books on anything. No books.” Even as a writer clouded by my practice and past education prejudices, I believe I understand the significance of “no books”. The dilemma about being a writer is that we probably know more than most what is lost when we immerse ourselves in books and writing. Yet the subject of this separation is rarely spoken about, which seems to prove Latour’s point about not knowing ourselves and how Zerzan’s critique of symbolic thought is almost completely silenced. But plenty of writers have addressed this subject indirectly. Colin Thiele (1963) romanticises “no books” in his short story *Storm Boy*. Thiele is another writer who attempts to describe the basis of an ecological education (No books! No screens!) as taught by his character “Fingerbone Bill, the Aboriginal”, to the naturalising child, Storm Boy:

Fingerbone knew more about things than anyone Storm Boy had ever known. He could point out fish in the water and birds in the sky. He knew all the signs of the wind and weather in the clouds and sea. And he could read all the strange writing on the sandhills and beaches – the scribbly stories made by beetles and mice and bandicoots and ant-eaters and crabs and birds’ toes and mysterious sliding bellies in the night. Before long Storm Boy had learnt enough to fill a hundred books.

*Storm Boy*, an exposé of four main characters (two men, a boy and a pelican) living what could be identified as harmless, energy intelligent, materially poor lives, ends with an intercession of harmful, wasteful death. Shooters, who kill for sport, kill Storm Boy’s closest friend Mr Percival, the pelican. In the story Thiele insinuates the ethical distinction between harmless death – the accountable killing of animals by animals (including humans) for food, and harmful death – the killing of animals (by humans) for sport, for fun, for cruelty. I had long since forgotten Storm Boy’s response to Mr Percival’s unnecessary death; a death that could only be manufactured from within a culture that was severely unwell.
The opportunity arises and Storm Boy opts for boarding school in the far away city. I have just read this book to Zephyr who, like I once did, has struggled with the imperatives of formal schooling and is now home educated. Storm Boy’s love for the creaturely and watery, himself, his kin and for his home place dies in his painful witnessing of harmful, wasteful death and he makes the decision to go to boarding school, to learn to read and write. This decision enacts a suicide of a kind, and he is remade in the other place, in symbolic culture, where harm and its pollutants are normalised in the name of civilisation, of the city, for middle class imperatives.

You express forgetting in your book, Maya, in a way that I understand it too when you express white loss and how it transfers as harm against others: “We have been made by our history; enclosures, colonisation, the scientific revolution. In the process of gathering up land, cultures, knowledge, much has been forgotten.” No one being on the planet, Latour’s “them” or “us”, is now unaffected by such forgetting, such disappearing of accountability, of home place. The dispossessions, the fences, the industries of the past three hundred years and more are all part of the aggregating story of climate change. Lovelessness cannot go on without becoming wholly destructive. No doubt reading Storm Boy as a child helped locate my own grief, my own loss, when school – the intensification of symbolic culture – began to dominate the intimate, bodily life I had established along the Mittagong Creek in New South Wales. But it was reading and writing that were very much part of the loss of such sensory intimacy. Romantic books like Storm Boy seek to console our loss, our estrangement and dispossession, but they often have the adverse affect of cementing loss and disabling repair, keeping us in romantic time and place as hopeful subjects unable to exercise our judgements pragmatically and work towards the composting of symbols and lovelessness.

The story of William Buckley has long been close to me, and thank you for recommending Strandloper (1996), yet another book based on the remarkable life of this sole 19th century European reversing the trend of dominance in another’s land, albeit through necessity not ethico-moral choice. It is profound but not chance that the novel begins with Buckley being taught to write in his native county Cheshire from where Alan Garner, Strandloper’s author, hails. Garner’s story of the Cheshire proletariat being taught to write is encased with political intent. As the vicious landowner Stanley has the practically illiterate and land dispossessed Buckley cuffed for the spurious claim of treason (as evidenced by pen-marked paper), Stanley snarls, “[t]his darkness must end… They shall not write.” Buckley is shackled and sent to New Holland, ripped from kin and community, his lover at the alter and his trees, the great oak forests that begged his intimacy, immediacy and stewardship.
Since European invasion great suffering and loss have aggregated in Aboriginal story telling. Wurundjeri elder, William Barak’s (1882), only published public letter to the authorities is a desperate plea that precedes Fogarty’s by one hundred years:

...we have heard that there is going to be very strict rules on the station [Coranderrk] and more rules will be to[o] much for us, it seems we are all going to be treated like slaves...16

Barak learns to write and as a result of this technology has been given a voice in the new world. So for a brief moment he is no longer “very lazy and useless”17, as Noongar woman Bessie Cameron (1886) writes nearly four years later of how her people have been reported in the media. Rather he is noted as being industrious, modern, playing by the rules enframed by the invaders. Even so it does Barak and his people little good, as the tragedy of Coranderrk attests. Buckley could have well known Barak’s people; both belonged to tribes that have been described as ‘Kulin’ nation and both share Bunjil, the eagle, as their principle totem. Barak would have been a small child by the time Buckley was known as Murrangurk, the one who came back from the dead. They may have even shared the same camps from time to time. Alan Garner once again fictionalises the power and problem of writing through an unhappy exchange that Murrangurk and Nullumboin, a respected shaman of the tribe, share together. Nullumboin finds Murrangurk, pining for his beloved Cheshire Het (Esther), scratching her shortened name in the sand. He asks Buckley what it is he is doing, to which Buckley replies he is making words:

“Show me his big name.”
Murrangurk scratched ‘Bunjil’.
“That is ‘Bunjil’?”
“Yes.”
Nullumboin shouted and rubbed out the mark with his foot.
“Is it still there?”
“No,” said Murrangurk.
“But you could cut it in another place, and it could stay? In wood or rock?”
“Yes. It is how to make words.”18

As the conversation continues Nullumboin becomes increasingly distraught. In the county of Cheshire Buckley’s learning to write was supposed to be an act of empowerment, of equality. But in this country the idea was akin to disaster. Nullumboin cries out in disgust and horror:
Then all will see without knowledge, without teaching, without dying into life! Weak men will sing! Boys will have eagles! All shall be mad!\textsuperscript{19}

This is an extraordinary perception of literacy. Garner understands acutely what is at stake here; what Nullumboin fears so incredibly – the undermining of his ecological community through the foregrounding of symbolic life. When Buckley walked into Batman’s camp at St Leonards on the Bellarine Peninsula, the fully nativised Murrangurk had long since lost his Cheshire tongue. It took some work for English to return to him. Only Buckley and the original inhabitants can really know what this strange language is capable of, first voiced and then cloned in print. It is akin to asbestos and it spreads out fast and furiously. It is noise and the land begins to hum with an industry that has only aggregated. You write in your book, Maya, that you “haven’t heard a world quiet enough to hear the voices of the stars,”\textsuperscript{20} but you like me sense the cosmic music and know it to be possible. Your pilgrimage, your walk to reappear a semblance of such quiet, begins with William Barak:

Knowing the story of Barak changed our journey. It seemed that if any mode of travel could do some small justice to his memory, then a pilgrimage was the way to do it. To travel with the sacred in mind meant walking mindfully, with sincerity, clarity and commitment. These qualities we would need if we hoped to walk in his footsteps. I rang my friend Ian Hunter, a Wurundjeri elder and Barak’s great-great-grand-nephew, to invite him to our launch. He said he’d try to get there. In case he didn’t he wanted me to know that the Yarra is a Songline.\textsuperscript{21}

It is the song or songs of the river that you sense as you walk the Birrarung, and which cause you to question your own:

What are our songs, our stories? Do they come from science, whose method of driven curiosity has, in the best of minds, borne children of awe and wonder?\textsuperscript{22}

Song not word makes call not fence.

Your identification with and recollection of indigenous people’s stories appears as a mountainous lament for intelligences lost that I too have felt so intensely since I was a child. As a car driver I have also sensed this loss. Books and cars travel us fast and far but what countries have we truly walked upon? We have learned the masterly tools of civilisation, and accepted them as normative – mined, privatised, celebritised, globalised and consumed for individual use, as instantaneous power, so that [weak men will sing all will be mad.] In many of the writers I have already mentioned, Fogarty, Zerzan, Collis, Barak, Latour, Thiele and yourself Maya, such desire for writing to be anything but harmful is of course
well apparent. And of course indigenous writers, and thank you for recommending Martín Prechtel’s *Long Life, Honey in the Heart* (1999), are more than keenly attentive to the relational—social, ecological, cosmic—as you attest:

I read the stories that indigenous people the world over have tried to share with the colonising cultures. When I walked the river these were the stories that made the most sense. Now these are the stories that best explain what I felt. For indigenous people know, I think, that the real world is not a metaphor.23

Indigenous writers are incredibly good at understanding ecological estrangement; often the culmination of those who have a foot in two camps—one planted within the ecological collectives of their kin and their ancestry, and one schooled in civil individualism, in order to be heard by the coloniser. But there are other ways than writing to hear Indigenous thought, ways that require slower burning relationships. Deborah Bird Rose (1992, 2011) tells us that her Aboriginal teachers from the Victoria River region in the Northern Territory perform their philosophy, they do not write it down. This performance is spoken out or sung while sitting on the very country that is their unambiguous wealth and their immediate educator. Song here is relational and generative, deeply sensed, not to be extracted within the strictures of clock time and industry’s imperatives. In stark contrast to performing thought in ecological time and space is writing at a desk, above the ground, air-conditioned and alone. Writing can express the senses, express the sensible, but it cannot be sensible itself. When a story is told or sung, when it is performed, the body gestures, the whole body’s intelligence tells the story. Writing and reading sedate, the body stoops and lounges and falls into disuse.

Is not literature still following its original distancing precept, the word of God to man? And if so, is it then not only a thing of agriculture but monotheism and monotheism’s architecture—cities: estrangement from land, production of pollutants, reliance on distant, refrigerated and unaccountable resources as though coming from heaven or some other place? Literature seems to me the embodiment of the city, of civility, and thus the embodiment of ecological estrangement. Its benefits can be identified only within the contexts and imperatives of civility, of the polis. I’m not sure these imperatives apply to envisaging future ecological communities and how we might address the woes of capitalism and its pollution ideology. Literature’s distancing nature renders it far too narrow to be ecologically inclusive. How then are we to have voice? How then do we teach our children, the little ones who currently meet elephants and monkeys, kangaroos and trees as symbols printed in books, objects that are themselves made from polluting materials normalised for the sake of globalised civility and the market?
A few nights ago, nearing the completion of this letter, I had a dream about the Yarra. It went roughly like this: I was walking with a group of people along the riverbank, somewhere in the city although a place I didn’t recognise. For one reason or another, perhaps I was leaning over looking in, I ended up falling through a timber railed barricade, a fence of a kind, into the river. The timbers were rotten. On resurfacing I quickly understood just how filthy the Yarra was and immediately was keen to get out. Then in my thrashing attempt to get to the water’s edge I somehow ensnared an enormous fish and dragged it up out of the water with me. My first thought was food and I set about unbuckling my knife just as I met the fish’s rather longing, humanoid eyes. I don’t know whether it was foremost the sadness we exchanged as beings, the river’s pollution or just the impracticality of carrying around a large dead fish until my cohort and I could find a place to cook and eat him. But with some friendly help I instead relaunched this lovely creature back into the muck and he slid away. I’ve never been that interested in analysing dreams; I’ve tended to enjoy waking and leaving the sub-conscious to itself. So I will spare the both of us, and our fellow readers, the tedium of my unpacking it, work that probably in part has been done already through the course of writing this letter; don’t send us to pollution.

I hope I haven’t been too foolish here.

Notes
5. ibid. p98.
6. ibid. p5.
10. ibid. Fogarty, p91.
18. ibid. Garner. p139.
22. ibid. Ward. p175.
23. ibid. Ward. p323.
Epilogue

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Part 4

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Appendix 1:
Maya Ward’s letter in response to *Literary stiles and symbolic culture*

Appendix 2:
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Appendix 1

Maya Ward’s letter in response to *Literary stiles and symbolic culture*

Foraging for food through a weedy tangle of ideas, accompanied by one who walks ahead, who seeks ripe blackberries amidst the brambles, which, although now rampant, will slow if the tall trees grow back.

Or, following cairns, those slowly rising piles of stones, crafted communally by all who’ve walked this way, the way back home.

Or, beginning the doctor initiation on Aboriginal lands, seeking truth from many elders, many terrains.

Or, digging together in the community garden, seeking to sow seeds of permanent culture in changing times.

Or, a manifesto in the form of a letter.

Dear Patrick

I want to thank you for reaching out and exploring a community of thought with me. The community development side of an intellectual culture is one of my joys, it is part of (if you can call it such) my politics and my poetics; to learn from each other, to give and receive courage, inspiration and challenge. To support a culture exploring different ways we need language for our experience, and we need experiences, too, of writing that contains and embodies, if you will, these different ways.

I start with the end of your letter to me; Lionel Fogarty’s poignant words: ‘Don’t send us to pollution’. I wonder if it is too late for an exhortation such as this? For even here in Warburton, in chocolate cake soils by our clear river, when I dig I uncover old batteries, asbestos fragments, shards of glass, plastic oddments. So instead, there is a question I aim to explore; how do I remediate this ground, this ground, my soil and my soul? Soil; well, among the rubbish are the worms, among the weeds are seeds of giant native trees. Steadily I remove the rubbish. That I place it in the bin, that I send the pollution off to another patch of this dear earth, to taint the soils there – this is me implicit with our society’s failure of imagination, society’s incapacity to experience earth as self. This is why the remediation of the soul seems an important quest, the journey of enlarging soul to include the world. What follows is a series of musings, of processes unfolding, that attempt to explore the relationship dynamics of such an intimacy, such a love. I hope in doing so I
address some of your questions to me, and that through our learning here together, we can be useful to what we love.

I often recall Joanna Macy’s “Three Dimensions of the Great Turning” when I need to remember my way and sit mindfully with the choices I’ve made. Firstly she speaks of defending – the holding back the bulldozers dimension. Secondly, analysis of structural causes and the creation of structural alternatives, which often means working in the system to change from within. And thirdly, shift in consciousness, the changing of our perception of reality. After attempting to be a change agent in the first two realms, I know the third way is my way now. Now being the operative word. I am utterly fascinated with the whole-of-body experience writing is for me when I write out of the now. I love how I feel poised on the evolutionary edge, on the lip of my own becoming. I love how my breath feels like silk in my throat, and how soft and wet my eyes are in their – not sockets, that’s too violent a word – in their homes within this head. This writing out of the now I am exploring because I must, it is where life is for me. I’m curious about its creative, inspirational potential; as an activist who values the elegant fusion of heart and mind, emotion and problem-solving, I’m excited.

How do I get to the Now of writing? Well, I find the feel of the letters and the joy of flow yes that’s right it doesn’t take long the trance descending, the making of a soothed plane inside my mind. Bliss is tangible, a cushioning yet enlivening force. It is a source of endless fascination, while also a grateful sense of home. I have been troubled for a long, long time, my actions, my activism, came from the desperate need to make things alright. And things are finally alright now, in my own soul. The world is as messy as ever, but far more complex, subtle, nuanced, unexpected and mysterious than it was when I was younger. It is also more known to me – we (me in this animal form, and the world) have been in relationship for 42 years now. I finally know how small I am, how difficult it is to turn the course of events. When I was young I was going to save the world. I’m not trying anymore, thankfully. I’ve come to trust other things.

I say things are ‘alright’ in my soul. That’s pretty passive. I’m writing, now, in spring, and ‘alright’ is simply not enough, is not like enough to this celebratory earth, spilling over with flowers. My soul desires to fit in this ecological niche. The following explores how I may learn to bloom.
me from the dusk light on the mountains. I love being in their company, the hills, the dragonflies, but soon enough I’m driven inside by the mosquitoes. I wrote about mosquitoes in The Comfort of Water (2011:292). I may return there...

Your letter to me positions writing problematically, and while all that you say may be true, my focus is on a very different experience of writing. This has been a little tricky for me to negotiate, for I want to be present to your deeply felt ways of exploring change. But I have my fascinations; they have become responsibilities. I’m trusting feelings, bodily felt, not because they are to be believed as truth, but because they are a radical act of animal loyalty, loyalty to the animal I am. I’m interested in where they want to go. You speak about the problems of words as symbols that separate body from mind – we both know literary cultures like this and are challenged by them. But my aim here is to make a claim for another sort of symbolic order, one acknowledged throughout the history of Western thought (Combs. 2000)

Patrick, have you ever, in relationship, felt as if there were a third entity, hovering somewhere in the space between you and the beloved? The sense that there is more than two in the field, there is you, there is the other, then there is ‘the relationship’. I’ve felt that third presence since early adulthood, and I was baffled, and moved. My theory is that it's the ‘archetype’ making its presence known. Similarly, when I was a pilgrim, I felt as if I walked within the field of all the other pilgrims who had ever or will ever walk. The archetype, alive around me, luminous, watchful, supportive, guiding, mysterious. The sense of this archetype, this entity, this field, is wildly alive, is timeless, and I know it will exist when this here walker departs. This is what I’m calling the symbolic. I think it is an intimation of Plato’s Forms (Tarnas 1991:6). This here walker brings the Form alive, but she is, as Plato says, just a shadow on the cave wall. That is not a diminishment of me or my physicality, it is a surrendering to grace, to humility, and then from this humble, grateful place I find I am absolutely participant, absolutely necessary for the aliveness of the archetype. I am having the experience of being the ancestor, making and re-making the world, in the only time there is, which is now. I have, therefore, very important work to do. I matter. What I do and do not do has consequences. I think this knowing accounts for the seriousness indigenous people have for their rituals, for their singing up of the land. Eliade (1954) and Campbell (1975:324), talk about this; Prechtel (2004:240) says this is what initiations are for, to give the initiate the experience of being the archetypal bridegroom to Mother Earth, an experience of shattering yet enlarging power and intimacy, to make of the boy a man grown great enough in soul to protect her sacred body.
I’m committed to my own enthusiasms, my being ‘possessed by a god’, because I will not tolerate being anything but wildly alive. This emotion in the language I experience myself using is a clue to something. It points back to my damage; my frustration and despair in being complicit with a culture systematically devaluing the wild. And my damage too from childhood experiences of being surrounded by a family culture of anger and depression. I’ve come to value how this damage has shaped in me a certain capacity of attentiveness, and, in response to my pain, I’ve discovered a healing impulse which manifests as a commitment to speaking my love. I wonder what enthusiasm may be blind to, yet I feel if I can channel enthusiasm well it becomes the change I want to see in the world. It feels to be my job to be a mouthpiece for strong feelings, for intimate, exquisite, ecstatic love of place.

Now to the irony. In order to be that mouthpiece I’ve had to diligently study the artform of the written word. I’ve had to fall deeply in love with the place that is the page. And I have – the rapport I feel right now with my fingers upon the keys is a body delight, it is an exercising and training of the senses in conjunction with the mind. And now it seems that I love it almost as much as wild nature. It is a communion with my own wild nature, a tender, delicate, loving act, a dangerous, beautiful thing to do. I’m astonished at myself, for I would not have imagined when I started writing that there was such a ‘place’ as this to discover.

Perhaps part of the difference between your experience of writing and mine is our personal situations. I haven’t got a family, my love flows to the earth, to friends and community, to my errant, occasional lover. But the times of day most attuned to intimacy; late nights, bed, early mornings, these times are for me and the page. I have so much love to give, and so there it is, an almost sexual force, the tender contact between pen and paper, finger and key, this is the place to be the devotee, and the page is the beloved. A romantic type of love, the projection of the divine onto the other, works quite well here. The page is, naturally, self, but self as unfathomable other. It is the process of unfolding and witnessing conscious self-awareness, with its qualities, when met with a quiet mind, of the vast, humming silence, of trembling potential, a humbling sweetness, a delicate subtle not-knowing, that spins, elegantly, towards the light, towards consciousness.

The state of love is here with me now. There is softness, and that intense curiosity we have for the ways of the beloved. There is the delight of the discovery. The page is the place for being in love. This is a particular writing mode. I’m curious about what it enables. Yet it too may be partially blind.
I want to write about this way of being and knowing as truthfully as I can. I’ve found it hard to understand what is going on when I experience the world like this, so I’m grateful to have discovered *Ensouling Language: on the Art of Nonfiction and the Writer’s Life* (Buhner 2010). He has explained the experience of the writer meeting the alive, loved world, demonstrating its history and significance. He spent hundreds of pages explaining it, so please forgive this long quote.

The symbolic nature of things is inherent *within* them, another layer in the complexities that we know as objects are. If you write the thing true, with the feeling sense active, the symbolic aspect or aspects inherent in the phenomenon are released, activated. The symbolic is a living aspect of the thing you are working with – you can’t make a symbol, you have to release the symbolic that is woven into the world through *how* you are thinking. Through *how* you are perceiving. It then takes on a life of its own within the world of the book. Symbols are living aspects of the world, an inherent layer to reality, woven into and through all things. They can retain that livingness only when the emerge out of our dreaming, out of the part of us that knows that stones talk and hide, that unseen golden threads move our lives, that there are powers far older that the human that still live and determine outcomes. (2010:176) Imagination is not something that happens in the brain but is rather, a different form of cognition, one inextricably interwoven with feeling, one filled with full sensate perceiving. It is the only way we can get to the meaning-filled text that underlies, that resides within, the world of form. (2010:180)

The deep intimacy of the page is, in my experience, not dissimilar to the intimacy I can feel with the wild around me. There is a sense of ‘us’, a delight in the seeming unmediated gifts of life, of aliveness, of growing things. I, in my learning amidst the words, am a growing, evolving thing, discovering new forms, adapting in my terrain. Language is my terrain, I’m finally comfortable enough with it, and comfortable too with the geography of the keyboard. I am, if not indigenous, then becoming native here. I’m nourished with the words I gather and hunt, the ones of my continent, which are only a subset of what is available in the world, but they make up a cuisine of sorts. Loving my ingredients, acknowledging their depths and hidden subtleties – this is the feast of words. I will serve them up for you. Are you hungry?

I am. I’m just off to feel for a ripe plum or two on the tree, pee on the lime, and return... Found three perfect plums by starlight and squeezing. Bladder better. A more settled me can be here now.
I know what the writing process feels like if it is to work its magic on me; by that I mean the sense of being changed, grown somehow larger on the inside. From my experience, when I can write like this it also affects others most deeply. So I hope this manifesto of sorts can help me identify what it is I can share in at these times and why it matters to me. For that is the main difficulty for me - remembering the power I’ve felt when words and land become the one thing, singing each other, singing me home. It’s such a fragile knowing that I feel I must in my PhD explore the nature of this slipperyness - the remembering that is only possible on entry into the depths of the embodied writing experience. It’s a whole body thing - things that come into me via reading can ricochet through my blood like a lover’s touch. It has to be bloody fine writing, of course. Deeply embodied writing, wild writing, as if it were the earth itself finding words. Oh look at me being feeble. Cut the ‘as if.’ I’ll expand on that extremely important point later.

We are innately imaginative, therefore I’m not sure I’m in accord with your assertion that reading strips the senses. I smell, taste, touch things through the page. And more than that, writing makes patterns that can bring the heart vividly present. At the best of times, I feel like I’m reading with the world joining in. I remember my time with David Malouf’s An Imaginary Life (1999), a book about a boy living at the heart of the unfolding, and I was him and Ovid simultaneously, I was the becoming, the unfolding. It felt as if the whole world participated in my being this, winds blew through the house as if enacting my transport of joy. When I finished I ran out into the windy night, and it was, all of it, alive; the whole world was roaring. Yet I get your point about reading not being as fully sensory as life in an alive world. So perhaps the time of reading can be seen a bit like the cave one retreats to in the initiation process – when one comes out, everything is shiny new, everything is singing. That’s how I met the world, upon finishing An Imaginary Life.

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You say, “(A)s David Abram reminds us, whenever we attempt to explain the world conceptually we seem to forget our active participation in it.” I wonder whether this may be partly the fault of traumatised writing, traumatised process, an inappropriate project. If we are writing analogically (Buhner 2010:151), then the way I understand it, active participation is innate to that process. I’m sure there are multiple theories as to why we stopped knowing we must write analogically but I have no time or interest in theorising now. The theory of analogical thinking is new to me – the practice isn’t, but up until now the experience has been a random thing; luck, or grace. Buhner (2010), has helped me understand that I can be much more purposeful, mindful, and skilled about accessing the place from which to write ‘participatorially’ with the world. This is something I’m learning very recently, so my
energies right now must be bent to furthering this practice. When I’m feeling strong and
gracious there, perhaps I will be interested in exploring the move away from embodied
writing, to know why we have moved from this ground.

Oh, but that was quick.

There it is. Just like that! Moved from this ground. Yes, there is my truth, emerging
through the metaphor which is not a metaphor! Boldly perhaps I reference myself; in The
Comfort of Water (2011: 245) I write: “The (dispossessed) farmers, predominantly illiterate in
written matters, were probably highly literate in their understanding of and connection to
the land. Leaving the land, what of their culture was irrevocably lost?” It seems that what is
being said via me participant with the world is that literacy, when it came to those people or
their descendants, came to a traumatized culture, still reeling from the immense loss that
dismemberment from ancestral lands entails. A dismembered language is perhaps easier
than one that must be felt and embodied, with the remembrance and re-experiencing of
painful loss that heartfelt words require.

You quote Zerzan, who writes “we live within symbols to a greater degree than we
do within our bodily selves or directly with each other.”[2002: 2] From my brief reading of
his work I understand ‘live within symbols’ to mean by a life of abstract intellectualism,
divorced from heart. My point above, that trauma may encourage such abstraction, is
something I feel I experienced as a child, and so this is my way in to understanding Zerzan’s
point. If you happen to be one for whom the real world is too hard, whether through
trauma or other circumstance, then a form of the symbolic, the story, can become a refuge.
Like many children who found the world overwhelming and confusing, I retreated to
books. Other worlds became my reality. The stories that spoke most deeply to me became
more real than my life. However – and this is a whopping great however – if those books I
read were written ‘analogically’, my understanding of the concept is that, in part, ‘the world’
wrote them. I was not divorced from the world, I was led gently in through the writer’s love
of the world, a participant love, where the world is active. So, when I was ready, I could be
in the world. And it was a sung world, a world woven with love songs of people, and this is I
feel the great act of the human, to give voice to the layer of love within the world.

So reading gave me true and beautiful worlds to inhabit. This ‘escapism’ into the
innately meaning-making quality of story supported me through trauma. As a child, my
world did not make sense, it did not have happy endings. Maybe because the world was
too much for me. Gregg D Jacobs states that trauma creates ‘heightened sensory acuity
(improved vision and hearing) and faster brain waves for enhanced alertness and mental
reactions’ (2009). Reading was my retreat, but it was also my solace. Perhaps, in writers, I met my kin. In *Writing as a Way of Healing* (2000), Louise DeSalvo suggests that; “Trauma acts as a strong stimulus to the imagination, as the distressed person tries to replace what has been lost or to restore what has been damaged. Creativity, then, seems a basic human response to trauma and a natural emergency defence against depression.”

I’m remembering Eliade’s *The Myth of the Eternal Return* (1954) spoke about Australian Indigenous culture’s immersion in the dreaming as, among other things, a necessary response to the nihilistic nothingness that overtakes a culture not immersed in story. I’m not suggesting that the glimpse of power I’ve felt within the sung world is simply a soothing of trauma (and Eliade isn’t either), yet we are a funny animal, with this brain that can take us so far out of the home of the world.

When I walked the Yarra, a long, highly physical, necessarily embodied journey, the overwhelming experience was that I was on the inside of a story, as if I were being written, simultaneous with a sense of tapping into the “song” of the land. As if there was a creative project happening, and who was character, who author, such distinctions were impossible to draw. Then, when I wrote my book, I tried (perhaps vainly, for I don’t know if I succeeded in this or not) to convey that sense of being within a “spell”, an “enchantment”. I tried to put a “spell” around my experience of being within a “spell”. It was a strange and heartbreaking project. Sometimes I feel I understand what it was all about. Then I forget again, just like that. I’ll see if I can find that knowing. I’m fascinated that this is so difficult for me to bend my bodymind (it’s taking everything I’ve got) to this task, but it’s something like this. Symbolic life and physical life, myth life and tangible life, they can be lived simultaneously. The Forms join with their physical counterparts, there is no separation. This happened to me on the Long Yarra Walk. My feeling, gauged from reading and from experiences on Country with Aboriginal people, is that this is part of the Aboriginal experience of a Songline, such as the Yarra is.

Stephen Buhner (2010:179) calls the writing experience he explained in the previous quote of his analogical thinking, which he says is the same as Goethe’s exact sensorial imagination or Baudelaire’s constructive imagination. Buhner described it as the state where Plato’s Forms can be perceived. When I’m in that state I know the Forms, absolutely, and they know me. Most of the time I don’t know them, I barely understand what I find on my page. At this stage in my creative practice, it appears that I cannot know when I’m not in that state. I find this knowing and forgetting fascinating. And while I say deliberate immersion, I hope that doesn’t disguise the resistances, frustrations and fears that dog my writing journey. Goethe speaks directly to this, when he said: ‘How difficult it is not to put
the sign in place of the thing; how difficult to keep the being always livingly before one and not slay it with the word.’ (Buhner 2010:185) I think this quote is key to understanding the difference between Zerzan’s symbolic and my own. Goethe addresses the difficulty of the writing art, the difficulty of writing out of vastness and subtlety, the sweet bittersweetness of the process, writing like eating through the taut skin of sunwarmed Satsuma, the skin is bitter, the sweetness is within, and the wholeness of the experience is rich and bloody, juicy, nourishing, utterly real.

A similar difficulty of being present to the ‘livingly alive’ pertains also to my walking journey. I still walk, it is one of my ways to seek wholeness, and even though I’ve never experienced the total immersion I had as a pilgrim walking the Yarra, I still encounter mystery. The Aboriginal English word ‘Country’ is land nurtured and nurturing, land where the Dreaming hums. I know that the way I approach land, plus factors way beyond my control (thank goodness!) will affect whether I feel it as Country or not.

When I do, I feel it as an apprehension in the body of a deep sense of the presence of the thing, its power and beingness. Plato’s Socrates believed that true knowledge and intelligence is the ability to grasp the world of Forms with one’s mind. When an experience that resonates with what I understand of the Forms emerges in my writing process, there are worlds I sense, close, but elusive. It’s not a metaphor. These words come and take over my body, I say them over and over again; it’s not a metaphor! Then the state fades, it takes the meaning away with it. It’s not a metaphor is written on my page. I do not know why this meant everything, now nothing, and why I feel bereft.

Something happened to me (with me?) that I’m using to try and investigate this experience.

I was gone 25 days. My little house had been shut tight. But upon my return, on my desk was something that had not been there when I left. It looked like an airy pile of unbleached fleece. Who could have left it there, how could they get in? I looked closer. It wasn’t wool. I reached out my hand to touch it. And then, the strangest thing. As if it wasn’t there, my hand reached into nothing. Tens of thousands of nerve endings on my fingers, yet not one of them could feel this strange stuff that had settled upon my desk. What could it be, why was it here? Finally I looked up. In a vase on the window ledge I had left an arrangement of two bulrushes. I’d picked them from the banks of the river at the bottom of our garden. In the vase, there was only one bulrush. The other was a cloud. That bulrush had exploded; thousands of tiny seeds, each with a head of fine white hairs to catch the air. They were half way through their falling. That dense dark sausage-shape, the familiar form of the bulrush, had detonated. Internal tension caused that spume of pale seeds to parachute gently down.
An artfully wrapped gift that cannot be guessed at from the outside, opening, expanding, from this capsule comes cumulous. Then there is floating, and a falling, like in love, a billow of seeds. The wonder is not the ripening of the seeds, but the way they have ripened me. I have become like this.

After five days of admiring the downy deposit on my desk, I tried to brush it into the dustpan. It rose and filled the room. I had to let it, in its own time, settle back to my desk. Carefully then, I clutched the floaty stuff. That fluff, almost ungraspable, yes, I compressed it into my hands. I took it outside, and I let it free.

The ripeness of the world will fill you entire, till you are fit for bursting. In time will come release, you will be blown with the winds, and when you come down to land, you will be everywhere at home. This is not a metaphor. It never was, it must never be, just a metaphor. This knowing troubles me. It delights me. It will not leave me alone.

What could it be, why was it here? I do not yet know what I mean without the help of the bulrush that burst above and then rained down upon my desk, beside my computer. I may never know without the bulrush. Perhaps that is the one thing, the very thing. The world, exactly as it is, is telling itself, in the only way it can, in the only way it can be known. And it is telling me who I am, and what I am for.

I am listening. I am taking down dictation.

This is where I want to bring back the point of cutting the ‘as if’. This experience was uncanny, there was the sense of something using me as a mouthpiece. A sense of being inhabited. As if I were habitat. When I wrote, an alive question for me was, who is writing? Who am I to say I am not the earth? How, at this level of being, can I not be bulrush? This story is part of my project, for it seems to work to call me back, it is, I’m grateful to experience, a mnemonic. Slowly I’m getting a handle on ‘it’s not a metaphor.’ The bulrushes speak to me of the place where ONLY images connect. It feels that this is the only way to know certain things. Things, in themselves, are irreducible. They are always more than we think they are, but they are not necessarily more than we feel. Through feeling the bulrushes, we can become them. Their human bit. Once more Maya, let’s share it from your flesh, try to join heart’s knowing to your nifty but standoffish neocortex; this is not a metaphor.

The more I stay present with this, the further down it goes. The longer I ponder it, the more profound is the creative experience, the deeper I enter the grace of the making, the making that is being made, the working both ways. The sense of changing and being changed. The slippage of boundary, permeable and permeated, creativity, life force, aware of itself, grateful and humbled. Evolution unfolding, me and the world, together. I am the part of the bulrush that speaks words, so I better be up to the job. That’s a fearful thing, the great thing, the Things they grow us a huge and humble heart.

In this place, matter matters. River existed before river, and it is because of River that I can see and know river. At this moment, I have a startling sense of both timeless unchanging presence and radical change. I am simultaneously transfixed and transfigured.
I feel my seeing becoming part of the river, I feel the river becoming part of my seeing. The world, exactly as it is, intricate, precarious, exquisite, made, and is making, our minds.

My everyday conscious has no idea what I mean by this. My deep self does, but has a hard time surfacing. Therefore my creative practice is explicit in exploring altered states, and my creative product, generated often in altered state, aspires to convey this experience through an aesthetics, a giving over to the capaciousness of things in themselves to alter us, enlarge us. One of my Zen teachers, the Australian writer Susan Murphy, talks about koans in her book *Minding the Earth, Mending the World*. Zen uses these tiny teaching tales to open the student, to ‘mend the divided mind by drawing us back to the ground of the whole mind, and the mind ‘mended’ to its original wholeness is always a more beautiful and capacious vessel – more serviceable, much more fun to use, and far more adept with the unexpected, rather like the whole world itself.’ (2012:211)

I find it a beautiful idea to consider whether this sort of engagement with the world opens up previously unconscious parts of our mind. It is a fancy of mine, but I’m enchanted by it; I’m excited to share it with you. What if there were certain ways of being that enable us to access evolutionarily ancient substrates of the brain, that recall, perhaps, the primary moment of encounter? If, when the developing primate encountered the river, the river impressed itself upon her, and in that imprinting, helped shape the brain of the creature she would one day become? What if, through the technics of poetry or meditation or sheer grace, we meet that part of our own brain, and we re-live the primary encounter? We have come out of this world, this galaxy, this universe; these places have made us, they grew us, they shaped the intricate fold of flesh within this head. The world made me, of course. It made this brain.

They say we are conscious of just a tiny percentage of what our brain actually holds. At times like this, I am aware of a vastness inside my skull, and I am dancing through this vastness. For a moment, all fences are ravelled away, and the terrain spreads wide and free.

I’m not saying the immanent world is all in our heads, for where do our heads begin and end? I am not questioning the aliveness, the immanence of the world, as the field that we emerge from, belong within, return to, for we are holons, we are simultaneously whole and part. I am always changing, my breath and body continually becoming something other, the flesh, the liquid of another. At 70% water I am, it could be said, river speaking about herself. I am cloud and river and snow, cycling through. I am constantly becoming other things, ingesting and defecating. Watering the lemon tree, then drinking my lemon tea.
Creativity fired by spiritual grace and creativity fuelled by the psyche’s attempts to heal trauma. What are the relationships between these?

There is a Zen Buddhist koan, a tiny teaching tale, that I love, that brings the two into rich relationship. It goes like this.

*Medicine and sickness heal each other. The whole world is medicine. Where do you find your self?*

Susan Murphy describes how ‘the koan can allow us to fall past ourselves into something much bigger, vaster and more intimate’. I’m astonished at how accepting of pain and trauma this particular koan is, how it softens suffering into kindness and care. In my own body I’ve felt how acknowledging pain and shame, how being vulnerable, empties me out, unburdens me, opens me to the world. In this place the creative process is unhobbled and can gallop off. I hold on for the ride. I join with a wild energy, and the world and I are mysteriously learning together. At these times there is a sense that there is a thing called Truth and I am meeting it, becoming it. In the moments between thought, waiting is being, is the poise of the moment unfolding.

Yes you may have noticed, my metaphors are mixed, movement and stillness, here together. Reconciled paradox is a hallmark of the state a koan can precipitate. The self is fluid, the self is playful delight, the self is, perhaps, the space between you and me, between the koan and the listener. This reminds me of being in the company of certain teachers. Clear deep heartmind is Zen Buddhism’s Junpo Dennis Kelly’s term for the vastness, the timelessness, the love with no object. Junpo says that ‘Life is meant to be erotic, not neurotic’ (pers. comm.). As in wholeheartedly enjoyable, sensory, deeply loved, something we are open to rather than fearful of.

That’s an approach I reckon we’ve always needed, and will continue to need in our increasingly precarious future. Who knows what sort of world will be here during the tumultuous upheavals that climate change, water wars, mass migrations and rampant resource extraction will form. But what might the trauma of these times create, if we are willing to bring our shame and vulnerability to the process? That koan suggests, I think, that trauma is the very heart of the evolving world. Those wounds, these tears at the ecological fabric, those new niches that must be filled; creativity (ours, the earth’s) enters here. What might be enabled, if we learn to be present, with kindness, humility and curiosity, to what is emerging?

Gaston Bachelard in *The Poetics of Space* speaks of how, in poetry, not-knowing is the primal condition (1956:xxxii). Poetry, Buddhism, both of them are, well I could call them
technologies, but equally I could call them practices of kindness, that seek to share not-knowing. So in the presence of Zen teachers, or in the presence of a great poem, the same thing arises – the one mind of not-knowing, sitting in the space between us. We call up, together, yet guided by the teacher or the poet, a delicate wonder, a great emptiness, a roaring silence. The Forms, perhaps, here with us; Truth, Beauty, Goodness. The magic of poetry is that it can do it across distance, across time – the exquisite meeting of poet and the world-infused-page is replicated later between the reader and the page-unfurling-to-world.

When I said in my book that it is indigenous stories (eg Rose 1996:14) which make the most sense I mean that spiritually. By spirituality I mean the lived experience of the awe-inducing creativity at the heart of, and as the very nature of, our lives, and the sense of being participant with this creativity. Not-knowing is the portal to the heart of this, and out of this heart comes an understanding of how to act in the service of this gift, of tending the lovely and terrible thing it is to be human. The stories I referred to were the ones that speak of becoming the ancestor through the song, of accessing the dreaming, of re-dreaming, of singing the world into being. They emphasize the absolute necessity of doing this. They assert the vital importance of the human, the serious role we have within the world.

It is not perverse to me that the way I have come to understand indigenous cultures has primarily been through books. Texts have been initiations. And they continue to be. Initiation into one’s own depths, initiation into places. The text in itself can be the singing up of land, of me revoicing (via reading) the human part of the land. It is a record of devotion and commitment, suffering and sacrifice, on the path to transformation and the grounding of compassion. The control of the environment that is possible within writing makes for, potentially, a profound initiation ground for the reader as well as the writer. As someone who for years worked with groups to create rituals in celebration of land and seasons and spirit, rituals that attempt to transport and transform, I know how often they can go wrong, be messy, clunky, and bypass the sacred altogether. There are few people skilled and wise enough to do this work well. Books, often, can do it better.

I am moved by the dialogue between Buckley and Nullumboin you cite from Garner’s Strandloper. I can fully believe that is how Nullumboin would perceive writing. It is powerful, a seductive idea, but I’m not sure I believe it to be true. I think writing will only speak to those who already know it, at some level. Then it is a homecoming; relief and recognition, and perhaps the sense of being able to move on to the next level of action/initiation. Sure, once it is written it can be abused, and in an uninitiated society that will happen, and yes, this is a time when ‘Weak men will sing! Boys will have eagles! All shall
be mad!" Much of the vital work of the time seems to be to develop an initiation culture. Prechtel says at the conclusion of *Long Life, Honey in the Heart*; “To have initiations again we’d have to find a way to bring this banished indigenous soul back home to us and we’d have to have communities worth coming home to”. (2004:356) That’s my project, and yours, I think. We’ve found places, and people, and we are doing our work, for what it’s worth.

You quote Bruno Latour (1993) - we know more about peoples of place, “them” (through anthropology), than ourselves, “us’, and because of this “[o]ur intellectual life is out of kilter.” I found that interesting, and I think *The Comfort of Water* (2011) was an attempt to redress this, through exploring the nature of ourselves as people of place. You suggest that an unmediated love of land barely exists. I’m not sure I agree. I love how my book has brought together river lovers, it has given them a voice for their silent love, their unmediated love. They are so grateful that I have mediated it for them, that I have made it something they can then share – that they can say to their friends – read this, I feel like this too about this land. Their gratitude to me is something I honour. I see these people, finding places, doing the work. I think it’s worth a great deal, even if it cannot pull us back from the ecological brink.

One thing I love about reading is the chance to spend time with my elders. Upon reading I encounter extraordinary minds who have dwelt mindfully in places and ideas. These writers explore them thoroughly, and share with me what they’ve learned. Through my own process and the words of other writers I’ve come to understand how writing will not communicate with the best that we are if it is freighted with grief or anger. Pain must be worked through. The resulting words become a testimony of tenacity and courage. In my own life, while having had the privilege of knowing many remarkable people, rarely do I get the degree of depth and thoughtfulness in a face to face encounter that I get from written work – even if that person is a writer. Writings are teachings – deliberately and dearly conceived. The hard work that is writing is usually invisible – by this grace those words become a gift to the reader.

Speaking of elders: during Zen retreat, every day we read the Heart Sutra, a 2,000 year old text. It is long and mysterious and beautiful, and includes this: ‘No suffering, old age and death and no end to suffering, old age and death’. That line really does it for me. There is something almost unbearably compassionate about it. Pain doesn’t exist and pain does not cease to exist. The paradox collapses the mind and I fall back into the grateful body that, strangely, is more fully here the more it realises that it is also not here. Not-knowing arrives like an old friend, unaccountably forgotten.
Having re-entered this territory, I feel that I’ve not been true enough to what it knows. I go for a walk through Warburton, seeking answers. I find myself at the bookshop in the village. My friend the bookseller directs me to the shelf on ancient wisdom. I take a book and sit on the front stoop of his shop. Perched there I look west to greet Little Joe. He is not there. Where Mount Little Joe was is now cloud. Opening the book I find this:

The dharma taught by buddhas
Hinges on two truths:
Partial truths of the world
And truths which are sublime.
Without knowing how they differ,
You cannot know the deep;
Without relying on conventions,
You cannot disclose the sublime;
Without intuiting the sublime,
You cannot experience freedom.
— Nagarjuna, approx 100CE (Trans. Batchelor 2000:42)

The convention I rely upon is words; my quest is to disclose the sublime.

I rise from my stoop. The mountain has returned to his seat at the end of the village, the clouds have lifted. Remember, Maya, how the world will reach back and help hold your longing to belong. Bulrushes, mountains, both are wise elders, initiators.

—

Patrick, it has been a challenge to try to answer your letter with the degree of depth and mastery of both thought and presence required. I wrote the first bit of the first draft to you a week or so after receiving it, but I’ve returned to your words many times over these last eight months and my understanding continues to unfold.

Walk the path and journey to the source. These are not metaphors. They are instructions. *The Comfort of Water* begins and ends with these words, very deliberately. They are explicit and directive in their stance against the disembodied symbolic. Yet I hope the centre of my book works more delicately with the nuances of living within the manifestations of form, while simultaneously engaging with the symbolic that twines around and within her. I think my entire project could be summarised as an integration of the symbolic and the physical. In my experience, life lived there is doubly alive.

Time, Patrick, and patience. Growing into belonging takes time, growing a culture of belonging in a time of endless distractions and choices, well, I can’t see any rational way to make sense of this dilemma. Climate science says we have no more time. We can fall into
depression here. Or, and this is what has, to my astonishment, happened to me; we can fall into paradox and out again into wonder and grace. To work for the impossible seems the only work utterly worthwhile. I have trust and faith. I care about process, product will be what it will.

I’m really hungry now–I must finish this and sit down to my lunch of cherry tomato salad. I remember how In The Comfort of Water (2011:292) I wrote about mosquitoes and their bites. “The itch of my skin is the price of the fit. The itch tells me there is something to respond to”. Yet while being accepting of what is. This response to you feels to be that paradox reconciled, in that I have accepted what is within me, and let it flow, and then found my itch, my politics, is this very acceptance, because acceptance and peace feel to be radical acts, and out of this radicalism, which is taking form through my passionate writing, I sense that my effectiveness will unfold.

Sometime Patrick I hope we can sit around a fire and talk about what has passed between us here. I hope to know how I have been heard, and if I’ve heard you well enough. For, as I’ve discovered here, it can take a great deal of time to learn to hear yourself, let alone someone else. Especially when they say things that don’t feel to be close to your own soul, especially when that person has become dear to you. I mean to me. It seems an edgy, personal thing to say this, but I felt a little sad when you sent that quote to me in your last email, a quote from one of your favourite writers:

Writing…is a dubious business, merely more grist to the mill. And yet… it is even less defensible to refrain from writing than to go on with it, however senseless that may seem. (Sebald 2003:159)

For I want to say, for I want to share with you, to share this sort of experience with you, quoting from one of my favourite writers:

Analogical thinking is one of the great joys of (the writing) craft. It is one of the oldest forms of depth perception that human beings have, one of the oldest ways that we have used as a species to understand ourselves and the world around us. (Buhner 2010:182)

What words, what worlds, I wonder, will come next?

Patrick, thanks for the opportunity to meet with you, to meet with me, to meet with the world, here on the page. If you were indeed foolish, I hope I have responded in kind, and with enough kindness, for it was a fascinating process. Cheerio for now!
Notes

1. A quote from Storymen by Hannah Rachel Bell may help explain this: “A feature of Mowaljarlai’s storymaking and storytelling is that stories happen and are told in the present tense...other Ngarinyin storytellers conform to the same pattern of language. This is consistent with their belief that the past and future exist literally in a continuous present...” I would contend that it is less a ‘belief’ with all the anthropological subjectivity that word implies, and more an experience of living in the now. I say this out of my lived, felt experience of the now, which is a space that Zen Buddhism contends is absolutely NOT subjective. As the Buddha would say, it’s all about experience. As my Mondo Zen training manual states, “...set aside...ideas at least until we have experienced, tested, and evaluated for ourselves a simpler and stronger way of knowing.”

2. The ecstatic path of Sufism demonstrated so clearly in the poetry of Rumi, the Bhakti path of love in Hinduism explained by Kabir, these poets are still so popular because they speak directly to this experience. The body responds:

The bhakti path winds in a delicate way.
On this path there is no asking and no not asking.
The ego simply disappears
the moment you touch him.
The joy of looking for him is so immense that you just dive in,
and coast around like a fish in the water.
If anyone needs a head, the love leaps up to offer his.
(http://www.poetseers.org/poets/bhakti-poets/)

3. I’m presuming you know the Satsuma is a Japanese blood plum. The sentence works much better without the word plum in it. This is the joy of writing for a gardener – it is the whole bloody aesthetic experience! You will also pick up that I talk of dragonflies, plums, tomatoes... and spring. And not chronologically. But I didn’t want to edit out the surroundings, my companions in place and time.


Bibliography


Murphy, Susan. *Minding the Earth, Mending the World: The Offer we can no Longer Refuse*. Sydney: Picador, 2012


Appendix 2

Autonomous edibles of temperate Australia

Foraged, hunted, trapped, gathered, picked and dug up supplementary foods

Autonomous foods walked for, eaten and compiled by Patrick Jones using the following references: Alexis Pitsopoulos (notes 2012), Adam Grubb & Annie Raser-Rowland (Hyland 2012), A B & J W Cribb (Collins 1974), Doris Pozzi (notes 2010), Tim Low (Angus & Robertson 1988), Judy Urquhart (David & Charles 1978), Alison Pouliot (notes 2011), Richard Mabey (Collins 1972), Dr Beth Gott (notes 2013), and more generally, the Internet.

Please note: Some plants and mushrooms are toxic and can even be fatal if consumed. Always take care to properly identify species and if you’re not sure don’t eat it. If you are pregnant, breastfeeding or are taking high blood pressure, thyroid gland or heart related medication then seek further information before consuming the following foods.

Amaranths (*Chenopodium*) all parts; cooked greens; seeds/grain/flour; vitamins: A, K, B6, C, riboflavin and folate; minerals: calcium, iron, magnesium, phosphorus, zinc, copper, and manganese; protein.

Bittercress (*Cardamine hirsuta*) flickweed, hairy bittercress, common bittercress, hoary wood cress; a brassica related to mustards; a bitter herb-like plant excellent in salads; grows in rosette form; common along roadsides and other disturbed areas; harvest in winter and spring.

Blackberry (*Rubus ursinus*) aerial parts; leaves for tea; flowers for salads; edible berries; berries rich in antioxidant vitamins A, C, high in fibre; similar properties and health benefits to raspberry leaf tea, which aids morning sickness, labour and pregnancy related cramps and muscle discomfort.

Blow fly grass (*Briza maxima*) also known as quaking grass, large quaking grass, shelly grass and shell grass; seeds and leaves are edible; seed heads are quite desirable before they dry; can be ground into a flour after hulling. Grass seeds of some species are dark in colour and contain a poisonous fungus that can be fatal if consumed in large quantities; leaves contain cellulose (fibre), which is not digestible but not harmful either.

Blewit (*Clitocybe nuda* also known as *Lepista nuda*) wood blewit or blue stalk mushroom; found in newly naturalising forests and gardens; a lilac coloured mushroom; poisonous if eaten raw; delicious mushroom cooked. Can look like poisonous Cortinarius spp; be absolutely sure with this species.

Boneseed (*Chrysanthemoides monilifera*) also known as Bitou bush, bietou, brother berry, Higgins’s curse, jungle flower, salt bush, South African star bush; a sprawling perennial evergreen; yellow daisy like flower with 5-8 florets; toothed leaves; fruit is edible and can be used to make jam; the fruit is unique and deviates from all other species of the daisy family – egg-shaped, ribbed, fleshy and sweet, at maturity turns brown, purple or dark charcoal.

Bower Spinach (*Tetragonia implexicoma*), similar to New Zealand Spinach (*Tetragonia tetragonioides*) by its 4 perianth segments (instead of 5), its yellow flowers and succulent fruit; mainly grows along southern coastline of Australia; used as a leaf vegetable by Indigenous Australians and early Europeans as a source of vitamin C to ward off scurvy; the berries were used as a red dye; they are edible but not highly desirable.
Boxthorns (*Lycium*) African boxthorns (*L. ferocissimum*) have orange or red edible berries, grow on the coast and on the plains in southern Australia; they would be better cooked and added to a honey dish or dried to extract the bitterness and bring out the natural sugars; they look similar to the native boxthorn (*L. australe*), which have smaller, flesher leaves and are found inland in southern Australia.

Broom (*Cytisus scoparius*), common broom or scotch broom, nitrogen-fixing legume perennial; add yellow flower buds to salads or as a nutty treat while walking.

Burdock (*Arctium*) or gobo in Japan, roots raw or cooked as vegetable; root vitamins: E, C, folic acid, riboflavin, pyridoxine, niacin; minerals: iron, manganese, magnesium; small amounts of zinc, calcium, selenium, and phosphorus. Burdock and dandelion root beer is apparently delicious.

Cherry plums (*Prunus*) small yellow or red fruit in December–February; eat fruit raw; cooked as jam or stewed fruit; the earliest of the stone fruits to ripen each season. Remove stone and dry in sun for winter treats.

Cherry Ballart (*Exocarpos cupressiformis*), native cherry, fruit in summer; eat raw; contains high amounts of vitamin C and is ideal for cool drinks and jam making, although small fruits require sharp eyes and much patience to harvest.

Chickweed (*Stellaria media*) also known as Stichweed; aerial parts, salad herb; pesto; cooked as greens, very high in vitamin C, protein and iron; good source of calcium, chromium, cobalt, molybdenum, magnesium, manganese, silicon and zinc; indicator of neutral pH soils; companion plant to fruit trees; harvest in winter and early spring.

Cleavers (*Galium*), stickyweed, bedstraw, aerial parts; young raw tips in salad, young plants steamed as veg; blended as soup; green smoothies; rich in chlorophyll, vitamin C and flavonoids that provide the body with antioxidants that strengthen the immune system; cancer fighting and an anti-inflammatory herb; harvest in winter and early spring.

Clover (*Trifolium*), a legume, thus nitrogen fixing species related to the pea; the leaves can be eaten in salads or cooked. Harvest in late spring, summer and early autumn.

Cranesbills, Cut-leaved Cranesbill (*Geranium dissectum*) purple flowered native of Europe; naturalised in Australia; roots are rich in tannin; used for the treatment of diarrhoea, gastro-enteritis, cholera and internal bleeding; externally, used for the treatment of cuts, haemorrhoids, vaginal discharges, thrush, inflammations of the mouth. It is best to harvest the roots as the plant comes into flower since they are then at their most active medicinally; leaves can be cooked as a vegetable; roots and leaves can be dried for future use; seeds roasted. Native geranium (*Geranium solanderi*), also known as Australian cranesbill or native carrot; found in SE Australia; very similar to Cut-leaved Cranesbill; small sprawling plants with pink or purple flowers; Indigenous Australians roasted the thick taproots although probably only the new pale ones as the older ones are very astringent; if boiling change water a few times to lessen astringency.

Dandelions (*Taraxacum*) all parts leaves in salads; roots cooked as veg, roots roasted for medicinal coffee, wine from flowers; single flower on single stem helps identify them from their look-alikes – hawksbeard, flatweed, etc; vitamins: A, B6, E, K, thiamin, antioxidants, beta-carotene, alpha-carotene; minerals: high in iron and calcium and contains magnesium, manganese, potassium, copper, choline and boron; root tea (not roasted) is brewed to help with weight loss, rejuvenation, detoxification – digestive, liver, kidney, skin and is now reported to fight a spectrum of cancer producing cells.
**Deadnettle** (*Lamium*), white (*L. album*) and purple (*L. purpureum*) flowering; a good tasting ground plant; stems, leaves and flowers are all high in iron; eaten raw as a salad garnish or cooked as vegetable; all parts of the plant is an astringent, styptic, diaphoretic, diuretic and purgative used in folk medicine; harvest late winter, early spring.

**Docks** (*Rumex*), curled or yellow dock, leaves, roots young leaves raw; leaves as cooked veg; not too much as high oxalic acid content – don’t eat too much! Dried roots are good as a medicinal tea – blood purifier, body cleanser; high iron content. Dried roots don’t contain oxalic acid; antidote to nettle stings, chew dock leaves and put of affected area.

**Elderberry** (*Sambucus*), elder fruit and flowers as wine and cordial; berries have organic pigments, amino acids, carotenoids, tannin, flavonoids, natural sugars, rutin, viburnic acid, vitaman A and B and a large amount of vitamin C; mild laxative.

**Fathen** (*Chenopodium album*), lambs quarters, lovely nutty tasting leaves, all parts cooked greens; seed/grain; cousin of spinach; drought hardy; contains oxalic acid so better cooked although a small amount raw in salad is ok; rich in calcium, antioxidants, riboflavin, protein and vitamin C.

**Fennel** (*Foeniculum*), wild fennel, aromatic perennial herb, all parts; leaves & peeled stalks raw; seeds as local spice; bulbs as cooked veg; don’t confuse aged seed heads with deadly hemlock seed heads (they often grow close to one another), otherwise completely different looking plants; high in vitamin C, potassium, manganese and fibre.

**Field mushroom** (*Agaricus campestris*), common field mushroom; grows in paddocks and fields where cows and horses have left their droppings; I mainly avoid this mushroom as it is easily confused with *Agaricus xanthodermus*, otherwise known as the yellow stainer, which seems to be more common than *A. campestris*; More people are poisoned by *A. xanthodermus* in Australia than any other mushroom and although not deadly can make you feel pretty sickly for a few days. Peel the cap of one of these often large white mushrooms with pink aging brown gills and wait a while, if it stains yellow don’t eat it.

**Flatweeds** (*Hypochoeris*), cat’s ear, leaves, roots cooked as vegetable (change water to mitigate bitterness); nutritional and medicinal properties close to dandelion although supposedly less potent; good for the liver.

**Freshwater mussels** (*Bivalvia*), molluscs, are water purifiers. There are approximately 50 different species of freshwater mussels in Australia and some are good as water purifiers in dams and some can even live in brackish water.

**Fumitory** (*Fumaria*) aerial parts steep to make face/skin/eye wash.

**Gorse** (*Ulex europaeus*) also known as golden gorse, furze, whin, prickly broom and ruffet; leaf-buds can be infused for tea; the flowers make a bright garnish in salads and are reported to make a beautiful yellow dye.

**Hawksbeards** (*Crepis*), false dandelion, leaves, roots cooked as vegetable (bitter, change water a few times when cooking, serve with drizzled olive oil, salt and lemon); new shoots as veg; looks a little like dandelion although has multiple side stems (hairy) with flowers; used in Greek horta dishes with dandelion and flatweed.

**Hawthorn** (*Crataegus*) haw, may bush, fruit soaked to remove seeds & pulp, strain and sun dry as fruit leathers; tonic for the heart, high cholesterol, chest pain, hardening of the arteries and heart failure; used to improve digestion; vitamin C and antioxidants.
**Hedgehog fungus** (*Hydnum repandum*), wood hedgehog; a mild tasting fungus noted for its spore bearing teeth rather than gills; a relative of the much sort after Chanterelles (*Cantharellus*); found in pine forest or deciduous woodland; buff to pink to orange caps with pale whitish teeth or spines.

**Horehound** (*Marrubium vulgare*) white horehound or common horehound; a perennial plant; small white flowers; leaves resemble common mint only with a downy coating; used as a cold remedy by the ancient Egyptians; it is best known as a respiratory stimulant, expectorant and cough suppressant; also used medicinally to treat low appetite, heartburn and as a non-opioid pain reliever.

**Ink cap** (*Coprinus comatus*), shaggy ink cap, lawyer’s wig; columnar mushroom found on roadsides and in gardens and disturbed areas; a delicious mushroom that should not be consumed with alcoholic beverages as it can suppress the processing of alcohol creating a toxic Antabuse Effect; a mushroom that doesn’t last long and must be picked young before the caps deliquesce.

**Kangaroo Apple** (*Solanum laciniatum*), bush tucker; a nightshade (thus related to the potato, tomato, tobacco, egg plant); an edible berry but only desirable when it is very ripe, almost bletted; stewed with honey helps make this fruit more palatable; mash, remove pips and skin and sun dry as fruit leather.

**Knotweed** (*Polygonum*) knotgrass, aerial parts young stems, leaves & tips raw or cooked; similarities to rhubarb; a good source of vitamin A, C and antioxidant flavonoid rutin, minerals: potassium, phosphorus, zinc, and manganese.

**Lemon balm** (*Melissa officinalis*), a common perennial herb in the mint family; an anti-viral tea good for relieving colds, flu, fevers, mumps, cold sores and other viruses; it is good for promoting sleep and reducing stress; an excellent medicinal ground cover in a food forest.

**Marigold** (*Calendula*) culinary and medicinal herb; an anti-inflammatory; flowers in salad; leaves are edible but not usually palatable; a companion plant in any food forest.

**Mat-rush** (*Lomandra*) basket grass, lower white shoots as raw starch; seeds/ grain/ flower; a good source of vitamin C, iron and fibre.

**Mallow** (*Malva*) all parts young leaves & tips raw; whole plant inc. flowers and fruits (cheeses) cooked as veg; eat tender leaves in spring; high in calcium, iron and vitamin C.

**Milkmaids** (*Burchardia umbellata*), bush tucker, a perennial herb native to woodland forests of southern Australia; it typically flowers between September and December; it has narrow leaves and white or pale pink flowers; the tuberous roots are edible cooked as a potato; like yam daisies (*Microseris lanceolata*) they are crisp and starchy eaten raw.

**Milk Thistle** (*Silybum*) see Thistles (family Asteraceae)

**Nasturtium** (*Tropaeolum majus*) garden nasturtium, Indian cress or monks cress; seeds, leaves and flowers in salads or cooked; high in vitamin C; should be avoided by pregnant women.

**Nettle** (*Urtica*), stinging nettle, nettles are amongst the very best blood purifiers, they assist airborne allergies and congestion; use tender tips to make pesto after steeping leaves for a minute in boiling water, drink cooled nettle water for anti-allergy tonic; rich in vitamins A, C, iron, potassium, manganese, and calcium. Be careful when harvesting as nettles sting. If stung chew up dock leaf and put masticated leaf directly on the affected area.

**Nightshades: Black nightshades** (*Solanum nigrum*) are safe to eat, aerial parts cooked as vegetable; ripe black berries raw or cooked; related to tomato, eggplant and potato. A potentially poisonous nightshade that has recently come to Australia is Tropical Soda Apple or Horse Nettle (*Solanum carolinense*). A crazy looking thorny plant is a nightshade from the USA. They start out with a mottle green fruit before
turning yellow. Edibility is doubtful. Deadly Nightshade (*Atropa belladonna*) is not common outside cultivated gardens in Australia; it’s an hallucinate and potently fatal in high enough doses.

**Oaks** (*Quercus*), acorns of most species make a good nutty meal or grain for baking; experiment with removing astringency either by placing de-shelled and crushed acorns in cheesecloth bag and leaving in a stream for several weeks or speed up the process and steep bag in boiled water, remove from water and rinse until the acorn meal is neutral to taste, dry in sunshine or in a low oven, grind and sift; stores well if fully dry; oak leaves are a great alkalising medium in a worm farm or compost; acorns contain magnesium, manganese, copper and potassium.

**Old Man Weed** (*Centipeda cunninghamii*) also known as sneezeweed; traditional bush medicine used for many ailments including skin irritations and chest infections; preparation was with animal fats as a cold, chest and cough liniment or by infusion, smoked and steamed.

**Oyster mushrooms** (*Pleurotus ostreatus*), a popular edible mushroom; a parasitic bracket fungi that grows on living trees but eventually kills its host and keeps living there; they have been used as mycoremediation of petrochemical pollutants; if there is a stipe, it is normally nominal or barely existent and the whitish gills are decurrent along it; shell-like cap is greyish-blue when young and darkens, even blackens with age; better eaten young.

**Parasol mushrooms**. **Shaggy parasol** (*Chlorophyllum brunneum*), a shade loving mushroom with a brown cap that breaks up into coarse concentric scales; thick white flesh, discolouring yellow-orange, darkening to reddish-brown; white gills age brown; Stipe is bulbous at base, smooth and white, again ageing brown; white spores; found in lawns, gardens and under *Eucalyptus*; a delicious mushroom; cook before eating; warning: when young can be confused with toxic *Amanita* species; don't pick until veil has properly exposed the brown and white concentric patterned cap.

**Paterson's Curse** (*Echium plantagineum*), also commonly known as Riverina bluebell, Lady Campbell weed, Salvation Jane, blueweed and purple peril; a low growing annual herb that grows in rosette form; purple flowers from spring to early summer; toxic to grazing livestock, especially horses and pigs due to a high concentration of pyrrolizidine alkaloids; toxins are cumulative in the liver; an oil made from the seed is a unique source of plant-based omega-3, -6 and -9 fatty acids; the seed oil is also purported to have skin rejuvenating benefits.

**Petty spurge** (*Euphorbia peplus*), radium weed, cancer weed, medicinal sap or milk placed on warts and sunspots, although beware they can burn the skin mildly.

**Pigface** (*Carpobrotus glaucescens*) succulent bush tucker, raw flowers – delicious, sweet and salty, taste like salty fig; eat fresh or dry red fruits; leaves cooked or raw (although very salty); high in protein. Great with saltwater fish cooked together.

**Plantain** (*Plantago*) ribwort, ribgrass, wound herb, young leaves in salads, soups; chew leaves and apply to cuts, burns and wounds; seeds are mucilaginous and help thicken soups and regulate the bowel; edible tuber.

**Possum** (*Phalangeridae*), common brushtail possum; the largest of Australian possums this lovely animal has bred up incredibly well with anthropogenic settlement, its numbers swelling in urban areas; although it is illegal to eat this protected animal it makes ecological sense to eat a few a year from our gardens than rely on a polluting and enslaving meat industry; they also sometimes over-compete for fruit in gardens making them fair game in an ecological sense; extremely useful fur for textiles, as Kulin nation peoples can attest.

**Poppy** (*Papaver*), all aerial parts – leaves, flower buds in salad; ground seeds as flour.
Prickly pear (Opuntia robusta) otherwise known as silver dollar, sweet purple cactus, wheel cactus and wheel pear; can grow to over 2m in height; fruit and pads are edible; fruit raw or cooked, boiled into jelly, or even fermented to make alcohol; full of tiny black seeds Native Americans would dry seeds and grind into flour; pads, called nopales, are also eaten raw or cooked; recent findings indicate regular ingestion of prickly pear has a significant cardiovascular benefit.

Purslane (Portulaca) pigweed, munyeroo, aerial parts raw as salad; seeds as grain/flour; rich in Omega 3 fatty acids and vitamin C.

Rabbit (Leporidae), bunny, wild rabbit; If a rabbit is easy to catch it is probably unwell or domesticated, don’t eat the former. Soak rabbit in salty water over night to remove some of the bitterness, and then poach rabbit in boiling water for an hour and a half, remove flesh and add to a salad or vegetable dish; extremely useful fur for textiles.

Ragwort (Senico jacobaea) also known as ragweed, stinking nanny/ninny/willy, tansy ragwort, St. James-wort, staggertorw, cankerwrt, stamterwrt, mare’s fart and cushag; a biennial but sometimes perennial herb not related to tansy (Tanacetum vulgare); ragwort was traditionally used for inflammations of the eye, for sore and cancerous ulcers, rheumatism, sciatica, gout and painful joints; applications were external only; the plant is toxic to animals; leaves emit a foul odour hence some of the common names.

Redfin (Perca fluviatilis), English or European perch; an excellent tasting river or lake fish, unlike trout never tastes muddy; many bones, go slowly; easy to hook with lure or worm; known as an environmental pest, there is no catch limit; a menace to local fish populations, this predatory fish is a truly sustainable food source.

Russula (Russula cyanoxantha), known as the charcoal burner; from a large family where some Russulas are poisonous; generally the family is distinguished by white crisp gills, white smooth stalks and caps that are reddish-mauve; the edible R. cyanoxantha is distinguished by its pale violet-charcoally cap which when peeled shows a reddish flesh and is also distinguished from others in the genus by the fact that its gills do not split, but are rather flexible and soft; the gills feel greasy to touch.

Saffron milk cap (Lactarius deliciosus), pine mushroom; found in pine forests, a motley orange cap that exudes an orange milky latex sap when cut, which turns coppery green; contains a hollow stipe with reticulated markings; a highly desirable forest food around from mid Autumn to mid winter.

Salsify (Tragopogon), also known as goatsbeard and vegetable oyster: a popular vegetable in the 16th century, related to the dandelion, often compared with asparagus, artichokes and oysters; contains vitamins B2 riboflavin and B6, folate and the minerals magnesium, iron, potassium and calcium; leaves raw or cooked as vegetable; seeds sprouted or dry roasted; roots are a complex starch – an excellent food, young roots grated over a salad; like Jerusalem artichoke the root contains inulin, making it good for diabetics; collect seeds to cultivate; the startling purple flower (similar to a small version of a globe artichoke) enables this plant to be easily identified but by the time the flower appears leaves and root are often too tough to use.

Salt-bushes: Seaberry salt-bush (Rhagodia candolleana) is a rigorous plant good for stabilising eroded sites. Birds seed this species as they like to feed on the red staining berries. Confined to the Southern coastline of Australia. The cooked leaves of young plants are delicious, the fruit is very bitter but edible, very dark red when ripe; would make a great dye.

Ruby Saltbush (Enchylaena tomentosa), also known as Barrier Saltbush, is a small shrubby plant common throughout Australia that loves saline soils and is said to assist with salinity problems. It grows prostrate or erect, up to a metre high. It has slender leaves up to two centimetres long, and fruits that may be red, green or yellow. Stems and leaves are covered in woolly hairs. The fruits are edible and can be made into a tea, or dried for storage and then soaked as needed. The leaves can be cooked as a vegetable.
**Shepherd's purse** (*Capsella bursa-pastoris*) purse-like pods; all parts; leaves raw or cooked; root cooked as veg; seeds as grain, mustard, sprouted; leaves rich in vitamin C and A; like cabbage though hotter in spice; flowers through the year.

**Slippery Jacks** (*Sulillus luteus*), boletes, known in France as ceps, found in leafy woodlands and pine forests; slippery because of its slimy pileus or cap; a fleshy pore fungi (has no gills); peel cap in preparation for cooking.

**Sorrels** (*Rumex*) esp. sheep sorrel, leaves like a sheep's head; raw leaves added to salads, green smoothies; cooked veg or in soup; indicator of acid soil; relative of buckwheat; rich source of oxalic acid, sodium, potassium, iron, manganese, phosphorous, beta-carotene, and vitamin C, the combination of these vitamins and minerals promote the glandular health of the entire body. Only take in small quantities because of the oxalic acid.

**Soursob** (*Oxalis pes-caprae*) also known as Bermuda-buttercup, African wood-sorrel, Bermuda sorrel, buttercup oxalis, Cape sorrel, English weed and sourgrass; annual and perennial ground covering plant; leaves similar to clover; used to alleviate thirst; small tubers can be eaten raw or cooked; flowers in salad; all parts contain oxalic acid which gives the leaves and flowers a sour taste; a similar oxalic content is found in spinach, broccoli, brussel sprouts, grapefruit, chives, and rhubarb; people with weak kidneys should avoid oxalic foods.

**Sowthistle** (*Sonchus*) hare thistle, hare lettuce, all aerial parts; young leaves and flowers in salad; cooked greens; good source of vitamins A and C; relative of lettuce.

**Spearmint** (*Mentha spicata*), a robust herbaceous rhizomatous perennial plant that likes wet soil; makes a refreshing tea that aids headaches, tension, nausea and stomach aches, it is also good for treating acne.

**St John's wort** (*Hypericum perforatum*) also known as Tipton's weed, rosin rose, goatweed, chase-devil, or Klamath weed; a multi-stemmed perennial herb; the name comes from its traditional flowering and harvesting time on St John's day; bright yellow flowers; traditionally used for the treatment of depression and anxiety.

**Storksbill geranium** (*Erodium cicutarium*) also known as crowsfoot, redstem filaree, common storksbill, pinweed; all parts edible; leaves and roots cooked as vegetable; infusion of the root for stomach ache; bright pink flowers are a source of nectar; leaves are fern-like; harvest in spring.

**Sulphur-crested cockatoos** (*Cacatua galerita*), cockies; a beautiful and raucous bird that inhabit eastern and north Australia and New Guinea; have bred up in large numbers due to anthropogenic development, mainly grain and fruit crops; sadly shot, gassed and poisoned en masse in Australia for agriculture’s fruits, pulses, grains and nuts; a robust and protected native species that constitutes an abundant white meat of considerable note; stuffed with lemons and herbs and roasted with vegetables these birds are akin to chicken; their diet is excellent and therefore they taste as such; ignore folklore that says they’re tough and tasteless; a few poached for the pot each year deters them from ravaging our edible gardens; never kill an animal you’re not going to eat.

**Thistles** (family Asteraceae) *Arctium*, *Carlina*, *Carduus*, *Centaurea*, all parts, roots, stems, leaf stalks as cooked veg; *Cynara*, *Onopordon*, *Silybum* seeds raw, roasted or sprouted; larger flower buds as artichokes; spear thistle (*Cirsium vulgare*) roots eaten raw with balsamic or red wine vinegar; otherwise make an excellent roast vegetable as good as carrot; for best eating harvest roots before flowering; milk thistle seeds contain a liver-protective.

**Vanilla lily** (*Arthropodium sp.*) traditional bush tucker; pale vanilla lily (*Arthropodium milleflorum*) is a herbaceous perennial plant with a strong vanilla fragrance; 25mm long tubers were eaten by Aborigines; two or more pendulous white, pale blue or pink flowers at each node; small vanilla lilly
(Arthropodium minus) is a similar but smaller species with only one flower per node; these lilies were a great source of food for Aboriginal people because they contain fructans which undergo digestion in the colon by bacteria thus little rise in blood sugars.

**Vetch** (*Vicia*) tips and flowers in salads; indicator of neutral pH in soil; early cultivated legume, relative of lentils and chickpeas.

**Violet** (*Viola sp.*) sweet violets, violas and pansies; flowers and leaves are edible; both excellent for salads; use violet flowers to make vinegars, butters, spreads, and jellies; the Cherokee used violet leaves to make a poultice to relieve headaches and also used as a tonic to relieve dysentery, colds, coughs and skin irritations.

**Watercress** (*Nasturtium officinale*) fast-growing aquatic and semi-aquatic perennial; one of the oldest known leaf vegetables consumed by humans; a member of the Brassica family related to garden cress, mustard and radish; a peppery flavour; harvest above water only as a small microscopic snail that is seriously toxic to humans lives on leaves under the water line.

**Wild apples** (*Malus*), often grow disease free autonomously; great food source for preserving; as juice pasteurised and bottled, as stewed fruit bottled, as cider fermented, as apple cider vinegar (secondary fermentation process), or sun dried as fruit for the winter months.

**Wild lettuce** (*Lactuca*), prickly lettuce, opium lettuce, young leaves for salad; cooked greens; mildly psychoactive taken in large quantities; bitter latex milk containing (lactucin, luctucone, lactupicrin), a trace of an alkaloid, triterpenes, iron, vitamins A, B1, B2, and C.

**Wild garlics** (*Allium triquetrum*) three-cornered garlic, three-cornered leek, angled onion, (*Allium vineale*), crow garlic, field garlic; all parts – use as garlic/onions/chives etc; great for pesto; contains sulphur compounds and can reduce blood cholesterol levels if taken regularly; act as a tonic to the digestive and circulatory system; insect repellent (esp moths).

**Wild mustard** (*Brassica*), rape, mustard greens, wild cabbage, all parts; seeds as grain, spice, sprouted, mustard; high amounts of vitamin C and soluble fibre and contain multiple nutrients with potent anticancer properties: 3,3’-diindolylmethane, sulforaphane and selenium.

**Wild radish** (*Raphanus raphanistrum*) jointed charlock, young leaves in salad; older leaves cooked veg; good for a curry saag; flowers in salads.

**Wild rocket** (*Diplotaxis tenuifolia*) all parts; peppery flavour, tender leaves in salad; rich in vitamins A, B, C and E, calcium, iron, magnesium, potassium, and essential amino acids; flowers in salads.

**Wild roses** (family Rosaceae), sweet briar, dog rose, briar rose; to use rosehip fruits remove seeds, boil and strain seeds to make a sauce/gravy; mash raw with a little water and strain seeds and pulp to make fruit leathers; hips are used for tisanes, jam, jelly, syrup, soup, beverages, pies, bread, wine, and marmalade; hips make a sugarless way to increase vitamin C intake. Dry hips and steep for tea. They contain vitamins A, B complex, C, D, E and K. Rosehips are purportedly good for applying to dog bites.

**Wild turnip** (*Brassica*) leaves cooked as veg; high in vitamin C and soluble fibre and contain multiple nutrients with potent anticancer properties: 3,3’-diindolylmethane, sulforaphane and selenium; flowers in salads.

**Willows** (*Salix*), sallows and osiers; willow bark tea is good for its specific effects on fever, pain and inflammation; the active component of willow extract is salicylic acid that works as an analgesic and as an acne treatment.

**Wood sorrel** (*Oxalis*), shamrock, soursob, leaves raw or cooked; add flowers to salads; rich source of vitamin C and contains vitamin A; not too much raw leaves or flowers as they contain oxalic acid.
Yabbies (*Cherax destructor*), common Australian yabby; a freshwater crustacean found in dams and creeks; a delicious summer meat; boil yabbies, peel shell and eat as is when shell goes orange-red, toss through a salad or add meat to a quiche.

Yam daisies (*Microseris lanceolata*), murnong, bush tucker; once a prolific tuber of the perennial grasslands of Victoria; an important staple ecologically farmed by Aboriginal people for many thousands of years; numbers are now low and relegated to woodland forests where they grow poorly in poor soils; only use this food in desperate times, otherwise help to disperse seeds and grow again this important resource.

Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*), common yarrow; supposedly good for treating wounds; quite a bitter leaf vegetable; cooked or raw in salads; finely chopped the leaves can be used as a replacement for chervil; the leaves were once dried and powered to make a snuff called Old Man’s Pepper.