Discontinued Narratives of Migration and an Art Practice with Earth

E. A. Day

Doctorate of Creative Arts

September 2011

UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN SYDNEY
This paper is dedicated to my parents George and Margaret Day and to the land where we lived at Otago Bay, Tasmania. It is also for Beatrice, Claire and Violet.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Especially with thanks to the resources and support of the University of Western Sydney, Department of Writing and Society in the School of Communications. The funding from Writing and Society enabled me to attend the Glocal Imaginaries Conference in Manchester U.K in 2009 and also to return to in 2010 to exhibit at St Georges Hall, Liverpool.

With huge thanks to Dr Anna Gibbs and Dr Noeline Lucas, my two supervisors whose guidance has been crucial in bringing together this work. Anna Gibbs has allowed me to be the writer I suspected I might be, by trusting that I could do it and allowing me to step into ficto-criticism and develop the relationship that existed between the writing and the artwork. Research has opened up new worlds. Noeline Lucas has also given exceptional support in demonstrating how a sculptor became a writer. Her assistance with the structuring of this document has been immeasurably helpful, and her thoroughness in going over my texts as I was writing has also been invaluable and really fundamental in my getting it together.

I would also like to thank Casula Powerhouse who supported the Liverpool N.S.W. end of my exhibition, especially then Director, Nick Tsoutas who gave the project initial support back in 2007. Artist and curator, Paul Howard also worked with me to develop the initial proposal. Khaled Sabsabi and other staff at Casula whose work helped to make the large scale exhibition happen. Especially I want to thank Lillian Fong for her watering of my show day in and day out. Casula Powerhouse also have been supporting a further garden project in Liverpool, special thanks to Khaled Sabsabi for all the work he has done in supporting this work which will hopefully transpire when I have time to return to it. I also need to mention the Director of St Georges Hall in Liverpool UK, Alan Smith who from the start thought that Liverpool/Liverpool was a good idea for an exhibition. He allowed me to show in the Dickson Gallery at the same time as the Liverpool Biennial which brought many people in to see it. I also want to give thanks to Dr Ross Gibson at Sydney College of the Arts for letting me use their lawn by the library to grow the grass prints. Immeasurable thanks to Robert Lake who made that production seem plausible and great fun. Loma Bridge has been as ever a great person and friend with whom to discuss ideas, some of her thinking is in this work. I also want to thank Sarah Day, Ouyang Yu, Catherine Rey, Nasrin Matouchi for letting me use their words. I also want to thank my gallery Conny Dietzschold Gallery, Cologne/Sydney for the two exhibitions that I have had there during the course of the Doctorate. Dr Nola Farman must also be given special thanks for her assistance in the final editing of the document.

Last but far from least I also want to thank my partner, Dr Alan Cholodenko whose advice and support has sustained and animated the lengthy commitment to working on a thesis over four years. I also want to thank friends who have put up with my complaints and neglect over this period —especially towards the end.
### Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title Page</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication Page</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements Page</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of Authentication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Works</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of Illustrations Page</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Appendices</td>
<td>xiv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract Page</td>
<td>xv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 1</strong> Five Short Fictions</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Black (Mutation in Darkness)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liverpool/Liverpool</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Point on a Network</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whatever you do don’t mention it.</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fact or Fiction?</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 2</strong> The Stranger</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 3</strong> Robert Smithson</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 4</strong> Illustrations and Commentaries on the Visual Work.</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 5</strong> History of the Doctoral Proposals and Candidature</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 6</strong> Themes and Approximate Contexts</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 7</strong> Travels During the Doctorate</td>
<td>265</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

iv
Chapter 8  Conclusion  Page 276
Bibliography  Page 288
APPENDIX  Page 289
A list of works

MUTATIONS OF MIGRATION

There are five categories of production addressed in the following:

* Ephemeral installations, grass works
* Co-ordinated community projects developed before the Doctorate, and in conjunction with Casula Powerhouse (for after the completion of the Doctorate) (Boronia Project)
* Visual works such as the Map of Boronia Garden and Of the Earth series, are abstract, Minimal works produced to some degree, as a result of these projects
* DVDs made about and during the process of making those works
* Written works presented in Chapter One which make clear an autobiographical connection to themes and processes.

List of illustrated works.¹

Table of Images by Chapter

Chapter One

Figure 1: Black Painting, Rauschenberg, (1951) bitumen paint on newspaper. Page 10

Figure 2: Drawing of the Map of the Boronia Garden (one section) (2007) hessian, rice, latex, paper, knitting. Page 14

Figure 3: Randwick Historical Society Production Page 20

Figure 4: Cast grass object found on an electricity manhole cover in the grounds of the prison. 2000 Page 22

Figure 5: The Aboriginal Hospital at Malabar, from A Randwick Ramble. Page 23

Figure 6: View of the dungeon corridor at St Georges Hall with projection Page 27

¹ This list of works includes exhibitions commencing before the Doctorate program, as well as during. Some are in progress and will be completed after.
Figure 7: John Charles Frederick Sigismund Day from a National Portrait Gallery photographic collection. Page 28

Figure 8: Removing a grass cast. Page 29

Figure 9: Inside St Georges Hall, Liverpool U.K. Page 30

Figure 10: Drawing of the Map of the Boronia Garden (2000-2012) work on hessian Page. 31

Figure 11: St Georges Hall, Liverpool UK and inside the gigantic ballroom. ..... Page 31

Figure 12: Bruny Island Studio (in progress 2011). Page. 34

Figure 13: Bondi, Sydney 2004 Page 36

Figure 14: Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna 1999 Page 36

Figures 15 & 16: Sections of the garden work showing pathways which followed animal tracks, below is a circle which its makers described as their sacred site and adjacent to the beginnings of the pathway in a herb garden history. It also refers to Australia’s convict heritage which sits somewhere in our national psyche. Page 38

Figure 17: Assorted Spat out Ones blue and brown chewing gum on hessian 0.4 X 0.3 m 2005 Page 49

Figure 18: The Unravelling of Form 1995 Annandale Viaduct Page 52

Chapter Three Page 82

Figure 1: From left to right: Works by Robert Smithson include, mirrored and glass
sculptures *Untitled (1963) Mirror Statum* – similar to *Ziggurat, Red-Sandstone Nonsite*

**Figure 2**: *Displacement#2 Mirror Travels in the Yucatan*, Robert Smithson, original slide in the Guggenheim Museum, New York

**Figure 3**: *Displacement#7 Mirror Travels in the Yucatan*, Robert Smithson, original slide in the Guggenheim Museum, New York

**Chapter Four**

**Figure 1**: Boronia Garden showing Islander frangipani motif garden and turtle garden

**Figure 2**: (detail) *Drawing of the Map of the Boronia Garden* (2008)

**Figure 3**: *Drawing of the Map of the Boronia Garden* (2010)

**Figure 4-6**: Casting grass process images

**Figure 7**: Varying root systems (clover and kv rye)

**Figure 8a & 8b**: from *of the earth* series with émigré poem by Sarah Day and also *of the earth* (2009) with place names

**Figure 9**: small MESH works

**Figure 10**: Thistle made from crepe paper (2008)

**Figure 11**: experiment with concrete, wires and tubing

**Figure 12**: *Destiny of Objects* Casula Powerhouse, Sydney (1995). .................Page 169


**Figure 13**: Artspace, Sydney Hydroponics systems included in *View* series (1999).

**Figure 14**: Artspace, Sydney Hydroponics systems included in *View* series, (1999) with hydroponic system and lighting

**Figure 15**: Artspace, Sydney Hydroponics system included in *View* series (1999)

**Figure 16**: Vienna, Academy of Fine Arts, curated by Anita Fricek (1998) Page 171
Figure 17: Bondi, *Sculpture by the Sea.* (2001)  

Figure 18: detail of Sculpture by the Sea (2001)  

Figure 19: Werribee Park, Helen Lempriere Award (2006)  

Figure 20: Martin Place (installed on site of Dr Anne Graham’s work)(2004)  

Figure 21: *Change in the Weather*² (2006)  

Figure 22-24: *Liverpool/Liverpool: the skin of translation,* Casula Powerhouse, Sydney and St Georges Hall, Liverpool UK (2010). Curated by Paul Howard.  


Figures 29-31: *Of the Earth Series,* (2007 and 2008), shown in *A Lucky Country,* curated by Daniel Cunningham, Ron and George Adams and Michael Rolfe, Hazelhurst.  

Figure 29: Wooden blocks forming plaster casts (2010)  

Figure 30: Detail of the chaotic root systems of grass roots, sample peeled back from the plaster. Detail from *Liverpool/Liverpool* (2010)  

Figure 31: Peeling the grass roots back from the plaster mold, hothouse Otago Bay. Detail from the production of *Of the Earth.*  

Figure 32: *Wigan* (2008)  

Figure 33: *Amman, Sao Paulo* (2008)  


Early plantings of the garden whose various cultural segments were drawn together by pathways that followed the former animal pathways amongst a stand of native trees. Women worked in groups mainly on designs. I co-ordinated this project hoping that the women would gain sufficient interest in the work to make it their own. Five years on since my involvement the gardens still survive. This project continues.

---

² An exhibition about global warming curated by Dr Norie Neumark, Dr Maria Miranda and Jacqueline Bosscher, was held in June 2007 at the UTS Gallery. Again comprised of grass grown on site and soil “drawn” upon using an SUV tyre tread. This exhibition makes explicit an ecological and politicized aspect of the work.
**Figure 37:** Small stones collected to make the pathways of the herb garden that was a design based on medieval concentric circles over a cross. Page 183

**Figure 38:** ‘Sacred site’ made by a group of Aboriginal women. Page 184

**Figure 39:** goanna design. Page 184

**Figure 40:** Beginnings of the Islander garden based on a frangipani motif. Page 184

**Figure 41:** Poster produced for screening of film. Page 185

**Figure 42:** Google earth view of *Boronia.* Page 185

**Figure 43/45:** Details of *Liverpool/Liverpool: the skin of translation* (production 2010). Page 186-87

**Figure 43:** Production at Kirkebride (Sydney College of the Arts), formerly a mental institution. Page 186

**Figure 44:** Working on the plaster casts (Robert Lake) who assisted with the production of this large work. This image shows the plaster cast beds, which have started to be covered with soil. The rows on the far side have been planted with grass seeds (2010). Page 186

**Figure 45:** *Liverpool/Liverpool* in progress. Plaster casts with sprouting and sprouted grasses. Page 187

**Figures 46-49:** St Georges Hall, Liverpool, Lancashire England (September 2010). Page 187

**Figure 46:** Exterior of this large public building that encompassed a law court below the ballroom. The lower levels were a prison. Page 187

**Figure 47:** The ballroom at St Georges Hall where the exhibition was held. Page 188

**Figure 48:** The Law Court where Judge Day presided. Page 188

**Figure 49:** Corridor (Dickson Gallery) with projection of *Boronia* and *The Law is not Always Just* (2010). Page 189

**Figure 50:** *The Law is not Always Just,* still shot from the DVD. Projected at St. Georges (2010). Page 189

**Figure 51:** *The Law is not Always Just,* Conny Dietzschold Gallery 2011. Page 190

**Figure 52:** *Drawing of the Map of Boronia Garden,* framed works on hessian, part of an ongoing work. Page 190
Figure 53: *Boronia* film still and $2.00 shop flowers.

Figure 54: *Artspace 24/25*, overview of gallery during the one hour long exhibition.

Figure 55/57: Suburban transplants and migrations

Figure 55: *The Mesh works* (2007—)

Figure 56: *Mesh*, with embroidery from Equador.

Figure 57: *Mesh*, dyptych and flowers (200—)

Figure 58: *The Fragility of Goodness I* (knitted works) (2000—)

Figure 59: *The Fragility of Goodness II*

Figure 60: *Matthew and Others: Everything is Connected to Everything Else.* (2004)

Figure 61: *Cosmos* series, at the Conny Dietzschold Gallery. (1999—)

Figure 62: *Cosmos*, chewing gum painting on hessian.

Figure 63: *Power Is A Fluid Vertical White Line*, Cast Gallery, Hobart (1987)

Figure 64: Untitled work from *Disintoxification*, curated by Christopher Dean

Figure 65: Still from *From A to B* (2002)

Figure 66: *Assorted Spat Out Ones* (1999)

Chapter Five

Figure 1: *The Origin of Ideas project* (2001)

Chapter Seven:

Figure 1: Two views of Liverpool Docks UK.

Figure 2: Images of my ancestral graveyards, UpHolland Lancashire UK

Figure 3: Wigan Church
**Figure 4:** Inside the courtroom at St Georges

**DVD works which relate to these temporal grass works.**

These works are edited on iMovie and have a homemade, ‘I was present’ documentary, handheld quality. All DVDs are included in this document.

- *From A to B, an Allegory of Process*, DVD work shown at UTS in *Change in the Weather* (2008). (7 minutes) This short film is about the movement of a heavy cylinder from one place to another. It features my father, whose processes of invention and innovation derive in part from his being a migrant on the land and who has constantly used his creativity in the evolution of a demanding ‘journey’ as a migrant, who arguably, must possess decisive independence and confidence to leave one place in search of something better elsewhere.

* Memory of a forgotten self, on the other side of the world.* (2008). (3 minutes), My father took these pieces of old Super 8 footage before we left the UK in 1963. A few years ago the decaying footage was transferred onto VHS by my sister. Here sections are edited and transferred onto DVD. Each translation leaves a grainy trace on the surface of the old film showing a childhood on the other side of the world.

* Desire for Ancient History, (2006). (10 minutes) Made after the Notes on the Castle exhibition and using images of ancient castles on ancient sites, incorporated into that installed work. The medieval castles become Australian prisons, and then become cardboard archive boxes built into walls, flying buttresses and other architectural features of the castle. Heidegger has described the subjugation of the earth and its ‘stockpiling’ as a ‘standing reserve’ and the loss of the earth’s “thingness” (its elemental quality.) In association with this viewpoint, I can speculate on what the earth might have meant for Aboriginal people prior to settlement, before these systems of power and measurement which prisons and the panopticon of information now cover this country.4

* Artspace 24/25 (5 minutes) Movie and images based on the Boronia Project 2009. An interview with Sally Hookey, who was one of the Aboriginal women working on the project. This film also shows images of the garden soon after it was first established in 2005.

---


* * The Law is not Always Just, (3 minutes) documents the grass being peeled back from these words cast in plaster. The DVD was made to be sent to Liverpool in response to the St Georges Hall site. The image shows this building as the monolith of the Empire with statues of Britannia. I showed this DVD in a dungeon corridor, which was very similar in style architecturally to dungeons at Port Arthur, Tasmania that featured in Notes on the Castle. That I discovered the connection to Judge Day was serendipitous.
LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1  Exhibition invitations: ................................................................. Page 297


Liverpool/Liverpool: the skin of translation, Casula Powerhouse (2010).

Liverpool/Liverpool: the skin of translation St Georges Hall (2010).

Trouble with the Weather UTS Gallery (2007)

A Lucky Country, Hazelhurst Regional Gallery (2007)


Conny Dietzschold Gallery (2008)

Conny Dietzschold Gallery (2008)

APPENDIX 2  Migratory Worlds, Migratory Worlds Crossings, Journal of Migration, University of Lancaster, UK (2011)................................................................. Page 304

APPENDIX 3  Liverpool Liverpool: The Skin of Translation by Ann Finegan. (2010)...... Page 319

Liverpool/Liverpool: The Skin of Translation, an exhibition proposal developed with the curatorial assistance of Paul Howard..........

APPENDIX 4  The ‘root-brain’ hypothesis of Charles and Francis Darwin: Revival after more than 125 yearsVolume 4, Issue 12 December 2009 František Baluška, Stefano Mancuso, Dieter Volkmann and Peter Barlow Pages 1121 - 1127 DOI: 10.4161/psb.4.12.10574....................................................... Page 324

APPENDIX 5  Encyclopaedia Britannica note on Mutation..............................................


APPENDIX 7.  Andrew Frost review.......................................................................... Page 328


APPENDIX 9  Letter to Kon Gouriotis, Australia Council of the Arts Page 330

APPENDIX 10  View from the 63rd Floor (2000) by Elizabeth Day.........................Page 331

APPENDIX 11  Participating Author’s Contract....................................................... Page 332

APPENDIX 12  Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery presentation for ‘Hearing Voices’ (2009)........................................................................................................ Page 335
ABSTRACT:

Key Words: migration, mutation, ficto-criticism, hybridity, uprooting, transmutation, particles, estrangement, the stranger, the exile, tranporting, transplanting, metamorphing, translating, Robert Smithson, ...

Based in a theory of art integrally related to earth, my art practice is a form of transplantation/transplanting. It finds its roots in Minimal Art, or better, in the transplanting of Minimal Art into the installation art form known as earthworks pioneered by the American artist Robert Smithson. Smithson’s practice “uprooted” Minimalism. One might say that he deterritorialised it, taking it out of the art gallery into the outside world.¹ In that gesture, Smithson responded to Marcel Duchamp’s famous importation of non-art into the gallery, ostensibly turning non-art into art by the very act of that transplantation. Rather than maintaining the gallery as the locus or on the other hand simply seeking to negate it, Smithson arguably inverts, transplants and re-radicalises Duchamp’s gallery, making the earth itself the new gallery of art².

In doing so, I would argue, he makes of the field of art - and of his inquiries into and as art - the earth itself. He makes, that is, earth into the field, making himself into what I propose to call a “field artist”. My use of the garden (which I see as a practice arriving via the feminine) is re-animated via a link to Smithson’s Site/Nonsite concept. The garden also asserts what for me was lost through migration, for a generation the language of the maternal line. The gesture of the Asphalt Rundown by Smithson (after Pollock’s ‘drips’) brought the question of mining to play in the galleries of Manhattan. Likewise with the inclusion of my Boronia project, I want to include another field of neglect.

Transplanting represents a process for me, and this is a crucial point. When I use the term transplanting, I mean to subsume within it such processes as change, mutation, metamorphoses, morphing, and so forth. In other words, my art practice, as well as that of Smithson, is a practice of process, the process of transplanting. Smithson was not literally a migrant, but he was a traveller.³ In making the earth the new space/place of art, Smithson acknowledges both the earth and art, as well as the artist, as creative media. His enterprise opens up several possible models of the relationship of art and the artist to the earth as he reconceptualises the earth as earth, as ground, as field. In line with Heidegger’s thought, I propose that art can be considered as ecology and the artist as an ecologist, as the transplantation/transplanter of the creativity of earth into the creativity of art.⁴ Here art becomes commensurate with, and faithful to, what earth is. One might appeal at this point to the idea of good husbandry, cultivated by Shakespeare in the figure of the right role of the king: that things should be as they are. Creative endeavour across arts and sciences —becomings, must be fostered. I recognise that art is a form of planting, of boundless productivity, the drawing forth of good produce from the ground. A more complex model of

---

¹ Parr, Adrian, ed., The Deleuze Dictionary ‘Deterritorialised ‘...Perhaps deterritorialisation can best be understood as a movement producing change. In so far as it operates as a line of flight, deterritorialisation indicates the creative potential of an assemblage. So, to deterritorialise is to free up the fixed relations that contain a body while exposing it to new organisations’ p. 67.


transplanting would see creativity, including of earth, inextricably caught up with not only what takes root but what uproots, deracimates, disperses, disseminates the seed. There is an ecology here too, but not a simple one.
Introduction

As discussed in the preceding Abstract, my work is based in a theory of art integrally related to earth and my art practice is a form of transplantation/transplanting. It finds its roots in Minimal Art, or better, in the transplanting of Minimal Art into the installation art form known as earthworks pioneered by the American artist Robert Smithson.

Smithson’s practice ‘uprooted’ Minimalism: one might say that after Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari he deterritorialised it, taking it out of the art gallery into the outside world.¹ In that gesture, Smithson responded to Marcel Duchamp’s famous importation of non-art into the gallery, ostensibly turning non-art into art by the very act of that transplantation. Rather than maintaining the gallery as the locus or on the other hand simply seeking to negate it, Smithson arguably inverts, transplants and re-radicalises Duchamp’s gallery, making the earth itself the new gallery of art.²

This is a practice-based research project in which the direction and content of the short dissertation is determined by the nature of the critical, studio-based, component of the

¹ Parr, Adrian, ed. 'Deleuze: A Dictionary of Terms', Edinburgh University Press, 2005. As Adrian Parr notes in ‘Deterritorialised’ Perhaps deterritorialisation can best be understood as a movement producing change. In so far as it operates as a line of flight, deterritorialisation indicates the creative potential of an assemblage. So, to deterritorialise is to free up the fixed relations that contain a body while exposing it to new organisations’ p. 67.

research. This dissertation seeks to examine, contextualize, and theorize aspects of the creative visual research presented here in documented form. These afore-mentioned themes are developed sequentially throughout this paper in relation to its theme - *migration and mutation*. The material is presented from different perspectives. There are sometimes echoes even repetitions of ideas and images. The images in some cases require multiple considerations so are included in the ficto-critical sections of Chapter One as well as in the discussion of later sections especially Chapter Four and later in the Appendix within published articles.

In Chapter One, the emphasis in the ficto-critical writing is on autobiography and the performative aspect of my creative process, which incorporates the earth and often unusual forms of gardening as well as administrative projects. Irreconcilable media and forms (a studio on an international network, a garden in a prison) might be regarded as what Jacques Rancière describes as ‘disruptions.’ Belonging and territories are also key here, plus the notion of uprootedness, are all part of the greater theme of migration that is the crux of this paper. My writing has extended in unanticipated directions, unlocking new connections that the visual and installation work addresses more obliquely. These pieces are adopting —‘a kind of hysterical writing – a writing moving not simply from position to position, but between positions as well; a writing refusing, incapable of an ordered account...’ It is also the nature of traumatic writing to have to struggle to say something, and that gaps and silences are a feature of it. Here my work enacts or performs what it speaks about —the difficult work of integration of trauma into story.

The second chapter introduces some of the key concepts of this paper, which are also a disorderly array of migrations of migration, mutation, hybrid, uprooting, transmutation, particles, estrangement and the stranger or the exile. This chapter examines the work of some key theorists in interdisciplinary domain of Migration Studies that includes both the arts and the sciences. In this section there was research into Migration studies’ examination of the phenomenon of mobilities and the movements of individuals and

---


populations. The writing of Julia Kristeva, especially in *Strangers to Ourselves*, is emphasised, since it has contextualised for me the condition of the exile within a long history of migration and movement. Kristeva, writing in the sixties, has written both about and out of the condition of women at that time. She is the model of her own and the world’s re-writing is ultimately to demolish the notion of the stranger who exists within ourselves. Anna Smithson’s book *Kristeva: Exile and Estrangement* provided the literary image of the figure of *The Female Traveller* who is at home with the uncanny, the *unheimlich* or unhomely. The writings of Chapter One begin to uncover secrets and subliminal texts of my own migration and are also the subject of the visual output of this text.

Chapter Four and finally the more explicitly exegetical component of the dissertation examines, analyses, summarises and reviews the visual arts and writing projects which form the core of the Doctoral research and which were developed around the theme of migration and the stranger.

**Why the choice of Robert Smithson as a focus for this work?**

Robert Smithson’s work is examined in Chapter Three in the light of some of the key concepts that emerge in his work and their relationship to migration and the stranger, the earth, the fundamental inclusion of space embodied in his work the interdisciplinary transitioning between forms. I will take up the discussion of my own practice in Chapter Four as it relates to some of the main visual productions pertaining to this paper, the grass carpets, the *View from the Sixty Third Floor* series, especially *Liverpool/Liverpool; the skin of translation*, (1999-2010), the *Boronia Garden* (2005) and *Of The Earth Series* (2000-2010).

---


In thinking about migration in relation to Smithson and the issues addressed in *Mirror Travels*, I am also set up the ground for the consideration of this View series of my own which began in 1998, and continued throughout this Doctoral program. Not entirely unlike the *Mirror Travels*, the work is a series connected closely to the earth, though there no actual mirrors were involved specifically. The most recent of the View from the Sixty Third Floor works involving the grass casts, occurred in late 2010 with the *Liverpool/Liverpool: the skin of translation*. In Chapter Four as well as writing a descriptive and process oriented account of the work I have made during this Doctorate, I have explained where I see my own practice diverging from Smithson’s massively acclaimed one.

The connection that I make to Smithson’s Site/Nonsite via the reference to the Boronia Garden externalises the deep fracture in my life is via the institutional damage done to my grandmother’s psyche and a subsequent need to recover a language for what was erased — for forty years this woman’s life was denied and silenced. Power and its afflictions are also viewed from the discontinuous narrative that involved my English ancestor, the infamous Judge John Charles Day (There is an entry in Wikaepadia).

As I have discovered through travel there are contradictions in the family history around the subject of institutions and power. Some were themselves incarcerated and Day on the other hand was responsible for locking people up — in St Georges Hall where my exhibition took place. I go to meet the judge! These unspoken family narratives might have played out in my necessity for finding out more and wanting to find creative solutions for the social and personal circumstances that produce institutions —by developing creative projects within one.

Whatever the powerful emotions were that lead Smithson to produce *Mirror Travels*, they found beautiful release in his installed/photographic series and his incredibly sophisticated and sensitive analytical response to history and to the environment.

I mentioned earlier that Chapter One includes a section titled *The Black* as well as the
Liverpool/Liverpool text. This draws on the image of Frederick Law Olmsted’s Central Park, with its historical and social stratifications, its unravelling, its exposure and inclusion of institutions. In this short piece of writing about myself as a migrant, in which I step from one country’s history to another, bringing as migrants do, our own narratives, connections, tragedies and particular national dynamics, I pursue the idea that there are some parallels between the image of the prison in Australia as what Smithson would call an entropic site. The Boronia Garden was made with a group of women inmates from very diverse cultural backgrounds, within the grounds of a women’s correctional centre (2006). I have since found an image of the garden on Google earth, and put it on the cover of a cloth book of The Black, a process which echoes Smithson’s Site/Nonsite) By this I mean that it brings a site based form into interpretation through the form of an artists book). That is, through the various technologies, including satellite photography of the otherwise now inaccessible garden, I can speak of the processes by which this garden came about. A series of images called Drawing of the Map of the Boronia Garden accompany the cloth book, to describe a relationship to the Boronia site. Significantly for me these two works are made with stitching. I write further on this, as well as on my own interpretation of the Site/Nonsite form, and perception of the ‘dialectic’ of the Australian prison.

Smithson’s Earthworks are in many ways the opposite of the English garden. They are not easily accessible, they do not exist for the sake of pleasure and escape, they are explicitly entropic rather than creating the illusion of timelessness; they make manifest the work that has gone into their creation and they involve a theoretical critique of humanism, such as was the case with Olmsted’s design for Central Park. More discussion of my own relationship to gardening processes —including the sculptural use of the British lawn will appear in Chapter Four. Also in that chapter, I have written about the hydroponic systems of my migrant parents. These are an emblem of mutation from one place to another and also the relationship of nature to culture and nature to the

---

machine. The self-sufficient organism of the hydroponic system plugs into the water and electricity supplies of its location and begins to exist. Market gardening has been one of the poorly paid migrant occupations and as such it tags a process of migration. Many national groups have entered this country via this occupation. Gardening continues to be a process by which I am defining something tenuous—the condition of life in an age when 95% of scientists are warning us of the dangers of global warming—and also my own ongoing situation as a migrant. I am still finding out what it means to be one.

In relation to my discussion of migration and its processes, in the Yucatan work, underlying wounds, pain and loss and the need to confront the past are behind the guise of entropy as Suzaan Boettger claims is happening, especially with the eighth and ninth Displacements.8 This extremely considered and disciplined work exudes trauma, wherein a zeitgeist can barely be distinguished from a particular subjective state of grief and loss. Performance art in the 60s and 70s as Frank Stella noted ‘kept painting real’9 in its parallel demand for the lived presence of the artist. Not a self-proclaimed performance artist, the kind of action or posture adopted by Smithson was one wherein his presence or persona was not relevant. Yucatan tells its story through the site interventions and their documentation and of course through the parallel text which was published in Artforum (1973).

I look to my role, which has sometimes been the innocuous one of project co-ordinator, as an extension of the drawing projects I did during the eighties and nineties in which I made drawings that became the understanding of myself as an active subject ... finding ways to go beyond a sense of dispersion, absorption, scattering by the world as opposed to acting on it in some way. Power is a Fluid Vertical White Line is one of the best examples, and Chapter Two makes sense of the connection I make to the Black Paintings of Robert Rauschenberg. In the midst of artists of the 80s who were performing more distanced and ‘cool’ styles of art, mine was very ‘uncool’ in the sense that it was heated

8 Roberts Jennifer L. quote from Frank Stella in Mirror Travels: Robert Smithson and History, p. 13

and wanted to enable some possible transcendence of that damage of which I speak. It also applies to an attempt to reconcile myself as a female subject but also as a migrant with what it means to be part of Australia. It seemed necessary for me to investigate Australian history by being part of the institution of the prison, which was a crucial element in Australia’s history.\textsuperscript{10} I also look to some ways to connect the spaces of memory, which I have referred to after Nikos Papastergiadis as ‘discontinued narratives of migration.’\textsuperscript{11} Artists go down to the murky depths and have to rise again to the surface with knowledge and traces of where they have been.

Chapter Two is a selection of some ideas from Migration Studies, a study that addresses the massive increase in global transit and the acceleration of the mobility of populations. In the regenerated site, the industrialised urban environment, with its layers of history (such as one finds in Liverpool UK) once dead, entropic, spiralling downwards into disuse, there has now been a return to life, a re-animation.

My research into my own discontinued narratives of migration has also been a process of translation into imagery. Some of us seem to become resolved or achieve resolution in the production of imagery. Smithson’s \textit{Mirror Travels in the Yucatan} is an aesthetic synthesis of a number of threads I attempt to draw together here. We learn through some insight into Smithson’s early career of his passion for painting, the sensitivities of which follow through in these photographic images that comprise a kind of performative travelogue. They also have a relationship to pain. Migration carries with it a level of

\textsuperscript{10} The Australian prison is compared to Robert Smithson’s entropic mine. These as ‘sites’ can be used to portray an image of destruction and potential. The \textit{Boronia Project} to which I refer occurred in a women’s correctional centre in Sydney prior to my Doctoral program in 2005. I frequently refer to the image of a prison as a site of meeting of migrant (colonial) and Aboriginal history. My own interaction with institutions is written about in the accounts in Chapter One.

\textsuperscript{11} This phrase comes from Nikos Papastergiadis’ book \textit{The Turbulence of Migration}, Polity Press, Oxford, Cambridge, Massachussets, 2002. The early twentieth century sociologist Georg Simmel wrote about early modernist transitions from rural to city living. It was a useful phrase to think about my own ‘discontinued narratives’ —which have had such a lingering effect. I wanted to refer more generally to stories, narratives and experiences, which are brought into this country from other places. I wish to acknowledge a debt.
trauma that the process of writing (or art making) has the capacity to embody, and to past and present as they address the complexities described above.

Chapter One

THE BLACK (MUTATION IN DARKNESS)

The verb - *to scrutinise* comes from the Latin root *scruta*: this means to look hard to the extent of digging through old rags and garbage—Helen Molesworth¹ This work is about scrutinising, scrutinising my installation art practice and its roots – in the earth, in previous art practices, especially those of Robert Rauschenberg, Robert Smithson and Eva Hesse, and in my family, its history of migrating…and of ghosts.

¹ Molesworth, Helen, *Before Bed* October: The Second Decade, 1986, p.79
Let me begin with painting.

The **Black Paintings** of Robert Rauschenberg produced between 1951-52 involved the use of thick black viscous paint over newspapers. Helen Molesworth described them as ‘Same day different shit.’ Dailiness, repetition, regularity—such is the implication of these collaged works, which were usually framed in doorways. ‘More than simple scaling devices’: in Molesworth’s book, Walter Hopps is quoted as suggesting that they evidence human presence and establish a literal conjunction of abstract art and the physical factum of everyday life.

She goes on to question, is this the physical factum of everyday life only newspapers in doorways? Or do they stand in for dailiness and “human presence” in another form? I am making here a connection between Rauschenberg’s **Black Paintings** and a related but different use of materials and the bodily references I make in Drawing of the Boronia Garden. That is, the decaying once edible rice, amidst the torn back paper crusted with latex, I would also have go away. (As Rauchenberg might want to wipe out the bad news). Running through this surface, as if to dissolve its horror, is a more fragile, pristine stripe.

I want with this brief introductory text to make a link to Chapter Three on Smithson’s work, establishing spatial understandings that are indebted mainly to Smithson. Rauschenberg’s paintings occupy space and have what was described by Micheal Fried, as *presence*. Basically presence meant that an art work emanated its meaning rather than being in any way descriptive of that meaning.

---

2 Molesworth p. 80

3 I have derived an understanding of Michael Fried’s concept of *presence* by reading his famous text *Art and Objecthood*, Artforum 1967 also I am referring to a text by Davida Panagia on Fried’s concept (2008-09). ‘Art is theatrical when it aspires to address the beholder so that the work of art exists for the viewer. Addressing itself to an audience makes it so that the presence of the viewer, and not the presence of the art object, is of primary importance. The distinction between the presence of the viewer (which is a spatio-temporal claim that states that the viewer has to be present in order for there to be art) and the presence of the art object (which is an ontological claim that refers to the sense of presence that one experiences when one engages a work of art, regardless of setting, context, or stage) is the principle behind Fried’s attack on the theatricality of literalism and his famously obscure concluding sentence, in ‘Art and Objecthood,’ that ‘we are all literalists most or all of our lives. Presentness is grace.’ In other words, everything hinges on whether the work of art feels staged or not and whether that staging is necessary in order to establish the presence of the work in question. Elsewhere I have argued that Fried’s aesthetic
At the same time I am trying to establish a rendez-vous, between the language of migration/mutation – of uprooting, transplanting, trans-mutations, cultivations and hybridisation especially relevant for the thinking of my work and practice – and institutional architecture as an early manifestation of migration to Australia. In the following account there is an attempt to present – as Rauschensberg was doing in the framing of the Black Paintings – a bodily presence in relation to architectural forms. The twentieth century has seen sculpture step off the pedestal. Rauschenberg’s Black works were paintings but having stepped out of the frame and as such are bordering on performance. Smithson’s involvement with materials, spaces, media, in his “sculptures” was a part of this stepping and significantly contributed to thought about space in an extended field of production that is now commonplace in many contemporary practices.

---

In my short piece of writing, with the working title, ‘Mutation in Darkness’, I reference what I’ll call the content of a drawing, ‘Drawing of the Map of the Boronia Garden’. This work is still incomplete and one segment is inserted here. This work came out of, has a spatial relationship to, and to an extent will begin to be descriptive of the cross-cultural garden project that I organised and co-ordinated in a women’s correctional centre in Sydney.4

The Boronia Project

There are twelve hessian rectangles. These are encrusted, collaged with a variety of materials that together make a composite map of the garden I designed with a cross-cultural group of female prisoners. The garden from the aerial vantage point (that can be viewed in real time on Google Earth) is mapped on the image. This map is made out of a knitted fabric of white wool.

The garden now has a life of its own with the migrant and indigenous women who made it; and the ‘drawing’ is both my own reflection on this project that lasted 18 months as well as a way that I can consider the ‘interior’ and ‘exterior’ of these spaces. The work relies on a knowledge of Abstraction: more specifically Minimalism and its descendants, that have lent themselves to an immensely versatile kaleidoscope of applications and processes of inquiry.5

The ‘drawing’ involved collage, a kind of ‘shit’ by Molesworth’s analysis, with its bitumen paint, balloons, string, edible substances, rags, washers, a build up of crud. There’s that ‘stuff’ and the knitting — clean, white and fragile. The dark quality of this surface, rough, grubby, abject, unattractive, dripping and germy has for me for about

---

4 The Boronia Project is a community-based work in a correctional centre, (2005). Though this work has informed my art practice it is distinct from the work that I exhibit which is part of a more conceptual tradition. This piece of writing to a degree addresses this dichotomy through a consideration of the image of the prison —which I use largely metaphorically.

fifteen years, been a compelling characteristic —. If there is a comparison to Rauschenberg’s ‘shit works’ it’s in the use of what could be described as grungy materials, which austerely replicate a condition of dirt or abjection. There may be a level of repression indicated or expressed in his work which is, for me, relevant as I explore the space of the institution and some fears that I think relate to my grandmother’s 40 years of incarceration, in my thesis *Discontinued Narratives of Migration*. I am writing as a migrant, a 60s Brit who came from the North of England to Tasmania.

Norman O. Brown,⁶ says Molesworth, has written that Rauschenberg’s work is a search in the inside world for the lost body of childhood. Culture, he says, functions dualistically: as a denial of the body, and as a projection of that repressed body onto things. Despite this, for him the child knows consciously and the adult unconsciously that we are nothing but body, that ‘body knowledge’ and all values are bodily values. I am trying to unpack the past.

Rauschenberg’s radical inclusion of ‘things’ collaged in his Red Paintings allows the body to be reconstituted at its limit, ‘in the space of fantastic disorganisation’. Molesworth quotes Roland Barthes’ statement, ‘Collages are not decorative, they do not juxtapose, they conglomerate...they take the colle, the glue at the origin of their name; what they produce is the glutinous alimentary paste, luxuriant and nauseating’⁷.

Eva Hesse also wrote and produced art extensively about what she called the ‘ick’ factor⁸. She discovered as a young migrant in New York the distressing facts about her Jewish family’s history in German camps during World War 2. This distress might be seen to manifest in her work as a visceral gripping angst in the string tangles and other latex or fibre-glass coated surfaces. ‘The grandchildren have to remember what the parents tried to forget’ is a Jewish proverb. The Jews who escaped to Australia after the Holocaust had to establish lives again and didn’t want to think about the horror they had left behind; but the grandchildren can look back and feel the anger.

---

⁶ Molesworth, Helen, *October the Second Decade*, p. 83.
I look at what my mother left behind. Her own institutionalised mother is not something she wanted to bring with her but it’s not something she can ever forget. There is an inevitable flow across continents, even though the streamers on the ships coming to Australia ripped and snapped. Broken or discontinued narratives\(^9\) are obviously not isolated to first generation migrants. With the carpet works I have tried to define displacement and nomadism as a contemporary condition. It is the state of the stranger of being ‘at sea’. The *Drawings of the Boronia Garden* is alluded to here.

**Mutation of Migration: The Black Zone**

I’m wading through a huge black pit that is full of debris. I thought it was a pit but maybe its an open cut mine or quarry in the ground, with lifts and pulleys out of decaying wood. There’re piles of rags and other rotting matter. You could be lowered down into it on a rickety platform, like the one in the north of Tasmania which in recent times collapsed - a Gothic or Dickensian image. Or maybe a ‘dark satanic’ Blakean industrial revolution site of danger, inequalities, bad power relations of bosses and workers, poverty, children working in harsh conditions, union uprisings, dark tunnels leading to a coalface where many perished.

There are old oily ropes and black dust, like the slag heaps I lived near in the North of England, where the mills and mines of the nineteenth century still stood. In my memories’ images, the sky is grey and there’s rain on dark hills of shale, debris of the diggings, though the landscape is quite flat. It is grim and cold, so I think it must be Lancastrian. Scaffolds come to mind and old forbidding churches, such as the Mancunian artist T.S. Lowry painted. They are Presbyterian and punishing, like those repressive looking rows of council houses in UpHolland near Wigan, and the stories my father told us about his education; when you were beaten for not spelling or adding up well.

\(^9\) Papastergiadis, Nikos, *The Turbulence of Migration*, Polity Press Oxford, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2002. Chapter 2. I have searched for the phrase ‘discontinued narratives of migration’ and have been unable to recover where it came from, though in this chapter Papastergiadis does write about narratives of migration, it may have cropped up in one of the several books that I read by Papastergiadis.
The pit is a dark area beyond the dotted lines of what is viewed as good and acceptable behaviour. It is possibly the fluctuating borders of a mental hospital, but it is also a silence, a wound and a deep memory, a story we were supposed to leave behind, but something I drew on a paper surface. I have gone looking in there, into the page behind the drawing. My grandmother, Alice and her son, Frank are dark and beautiful secrets,

Figure 2: Drawing of the Map of the Boronia Garden (one section) (2007) hessian, rice, latex, paper, knitting.

like the obscure valleys and mountain tracks barely ever visited in Tasmania. The Walls of Jerusalem rise from a plateau on the Central Highlands. If you manage the steep climb, you can almost see the perimeters of the whole island.

The sadness of what was happening when we set off from Lancashire across the world only hit me when we sailed out of Tilbury Docks in 1963 and I saw my Aunt’s white handkerchief waving from probably a mile away. She vanished for a long time.
Many vanished less dramatically. We said good byes in those last weeks and that was that.

Alice and Frank were two relatives whom I later discovered we had abandoned in their ‘illnesses’. My parents were looking for what? Better weather? The offer of a new life on the other side of the world, five weeks on board an ocean liner, deck chairs in the sun? It looked good. It certainly was an adventure. Would I have had the same sense of tragedy had we stayed? Loss would have happened but might have been more reachable, less intangible. I am imagining the history of two places, England and Australia, here and there, as excavation sites.

Robert Smithson, the earth artist, in his essay ‘A Sedimentation of the Mind’ Earth Projects wrote about processes of art production that might involve the extended spaces of landscape and architecture outside the gallery, room or studio. The use of actual earth, rock, matter from sites in deserts, outer suburbs and non-artworld situations was often implicated. Smithson’s work gives recognition to layers, evolving processes of all kinds, including geological and pre-historic formations. It is partly the acknowledgement of eons of time, as well as recent layers, that affected selection of his work as one of my Case Studies. I am thinking of my own recent history in Australia and this country’s ancient past.

Another feature of Smithson’s practice was the formalisation by means of Minimalism of inclusiveness through, for instance, the Site and Non-Site works. (Elaborated in Chapter Three.) These involved the inclusion and framing, of spaces beyond a gallery into the context of a gallery by a variety of means. As a contemporary installation artist who can take it for granted that the extended space of my practice is beyond the studio, I am trying as I write this to find a way of thinking about migration spatially. Robert Smithson wrote about the construction of Central Park12 in New York


11 Spiral Jetty for instance was a starting point for writings, films and photographic works.

by Olmsted as an unravelling and expansively inclusive process. Some of Smithson’s ideas seem applicable to my thinking of the discontinuous trajectory made by a migrant. I think of time, broken like a lift shaft in a building being demolished. Smithson saw language as geological or archaeological debris, floors or strata. There isn’t a smooth transition possible from one place, one floor in the building to the next. The graft is going to be nobbled and lumpen where there’s been overcompensation of growth to try to smooth away the discrepancy. Laying open the processes which are never going to be anything but awkward, ambiguous and un-unified is an honest relief to the pretence that I think Smithson understands a garden to present. A garden gives us a sense that all is well. The Central Park image reveals a city and an art world laid bare at the roots. All might not be well and the process will continue to unravel and be incomplete, but it is exposed and never finalised, never complete.

I will continue to use the example of a building in the course of demolition, with its processes of construction exposed. (I might come up with something better.) I am metaphorically suggesting that, given the set of conditions that I arrived in Australia with here, I found a place on the broken lift shaft where one could walk out into a similar place when the double doors opened on each side. There were many secrets that had to be discovered in either place.

Memories and secrets left behind re-surface slowly. Mostly we didn’t know that we were immersed in them. We were twelve thousand miles from where those memories happened. It is easy to be oblivious of the past, especially at such a distance; but I always wondered why I was only vaguely present. People told me my eyes were deep, and that I looked worried and faraway. It was as if I knew already. I lay around the house a lot and started going into the surrounding bush where I screamed loudly and then would sit on a log and smoke cigarettes. It was boring feeling very badly about something.

Teenage years passed at high school, year in year out. I tried to assimilate and was probably reasonably successful, though when I flew into Gatwick Airport at the age of 27, I suddenly realised a livelier humour had descended. Some weight was gone. Was it

13 Ibid. p. 157
the adopted Tasmanian history 18 years in the place where time stood still? Like the planet Pluto on the furthest reaches of our Solar System, not known until fairly recently, Tasmanian animals manifest some intense primordial force. They have the sharpest teeth, the most poisonous venom; they are the most of everything. I read that the Tasmanian tiger, unlike the dingo was, untameable. This led to its early extinction. The worst of the worst convicts were sent to Tasmania, to the most remote Macquarie Harbour and Eaglehawk Neck. Near that place are the Salt Mines, underground graves that taught the eyes to see in prolonged darkness to enable underground digging in mines; eyes that would be blinded should they be exposed to sunlight.

I was 22 when I found my mother crying and discovered the shocking news that my grandmother had died in the UK. It was shocking because I didn’t know my mother’s mother, Alice Hodge, was recently alive or dead. I had presumed dead, though her absence wasn’t exactly spelled out as such. Our grandfather’s wife was not our grandmother, but the reason for that had been unclear. We were accepting of the story.

Now the real grandmother, Alice, was dead. She had lived in the hospital in Warrington, Lancashire. She had been forbidden her children, forbidden her sisters who wanted to help and forbidden her grandchildren. Herbert her husband wanted finality. Seal off the contaminant and don’t let it spread. The children obeyed, instructed as they were on how deep their shame was. Forty years she was given for post-partum depression. There must have been no way out for her after a while — although the acceptance of her willing sisters might have been all that was required to overcome her complete loss of fight after five children were born in a sequence. Even this avenue of escape was denied her.

Sitting with a group of prisoners teaching a drawing class, I breathe in and wonder what stories they have to tell. We are in a small 70s ‘demountable’ fibro building within what are known as the wings: four-story drab blocks of cells, which are surrounded by a 19th century Australian sandstone. There is razor wire along the walls beyond, and a green steel gate clangs every once in a while as I speak and listen. An old frangipani is being cut down because someone has used it to look over the wall. The cellblocks are not red brick, as Warrington appeared to be in the black and white photos
my aunt had taken. I can come and go as I please. The women whose worlds I am addressing fell through the safety nets and crashed into the floor. Bedraggled and damaged, they are trying to piece together their lives, some of them anyway.

I’m choosing to be in this place and am choosing to find a way out. I have chosen the dark earthbound space of the prison, where there are many who ‘couldn’t cope’; in order to escape it, refuse it, find a flowing channel through – out of its restrictions, its locked gates, its bureaucratic strictures. I’ve deliberately gone into this place of extremes, refusing to ignore it. I want to come through into the air, breathe through with lightness all of its horrors which are right at the bottom amongst the rags and debris. I want to scrutinize it all. That redbrick memory I’ll never know well. The secrets of my childhood were on the other side of a membrane, a paper-thin wall that sometimes let these places lock me in, hold me in place. I listened while I drew. Whatever that stain was about, I want none of it. I’ll be gone soon, but there’s work to be done while I’m here.

Coming through the gates that approximate a medieval castle, I have wondered whether they will get onto me\textsuperscript{14}. The armour of my non-descript clothing might reveal a gap. Someone will see through it. I would be found out, and they would say get out of here. You don’t belong here. I know that it is true. I don’t and won’t soon, but I have to be here for a while to find out. I need to get on top of this. I need to get out of here with flying colours, with aplomb, so that history doesn’t repeat. I am making a map, which cuts through and under the walls and can also be seen from a plane. It’s a sign that something has changed. Even if I’m the only one who knows about it, that’s all that matters.

The aerial view of a work was a significant relationship to Smithson’s interdisciplinary practice. In 1969, Smithson was asked to submit proposals for the Dallas-Fort Worth Regional Airport\textsuperscript{15}. This was a large site–specific sculptural project. ‘Art today…’, says Smithson, in his account of this project that never came to completion, ‘…is no longer an architectural afterthought, or an object to attach to a

\textsuperscript{14} A phrase used frequently by inmates meaning getting caught out.

\textsuperscript{15} Robert Smithson, \textit{Writings}, p. 354
building after it is finished, but rather a total engagement with the building from the ground up. How art should be installed around an airport makes one conscious of this new landscape’. ‘Aerial art…’ he continues, can therefore give limits not only to “space” but also the hidden dimensions of ‘time’, – an artificial time that can suggest galactic distance here on earth. Its focus is “non-visual” space and time, which begins to shape an aesthetic based on the airport as an idea and not simply as a site of transportation. This airport, said Smithson, is but a dot in the vast infinity of universes, an imperceptible point in a cosmic immensity, a speck in the impenetrable nowhere. Aerial art reflects to a degree, this vastness.

There are Aboriginal women here amongst us and their numbers are too many. I think being the white person here is wrong, and so is this way of teaching to these Aboriginal students. I do not have their knowledge. They create paintings, tracing animals out of books that are dotted with the tip of a match-stick in the building like a castle, a building that is a memory of my ancient past, not theirs. Why so many of these people?

I have found myself in another place of turbulence. Here again things do not add up. There is confusion about the layers of sedimentation. None of us should be here at all, but why do these people, who once were so connected to place, not know anything about where they are and what they are doing here? There is an historical problem that needs to be addressed. I worked with the Aboriginal culture teacher, Betty Champion, to find out more about the site of Long Bay. Betty and I visited the women at La Perouse, who told us about the history of the tribes who used to live in that area. They told us there were Western sicknesses, such as smallpox and influenza that were brought by the French and the English who had arrived at that outpost south of Sydney. According to the elders, their early forebears said one of the remedies was to go to a high windy place (such as the site at Long Bay) so that the ‘badness’ would blow away. There is a cave nearby once called the Aboriginal Hospital, where many afflicted and dying rested.

---

16 Ibid., p. 100
17 Ibid., p. 116
A small, dedicated group, the Randwick Historical Society collated the vulnerable knowledge. The elders also gave us a list of the medicinal plants that grow locally. These plants were incorporated in the design that was proposed for a piece of land fronting on Anzac parade. It was to be a garden that recalled the medical history of the site. The inmates, many of who were local descendants, had contributed to this design. The aim of this project had been to make a garden based on the collected local histories and to connect both white and non-white students with their history. Along that stretch of coast we found, for instance, the location where the lepers’ colony was once situated and is now Prince of Wales Hospital. It seems that early in the history of NSW the area became a place where a range of human rejects were encouraged to remain or to where they were removed. In the end for various administrative reasons, this project moved to Boronia – and changed its course again.

Such information was gathered and was used by the group who were designing the garden. My role was to co-ordinate and to administrate the plans. Before this garden could be realised, the plans of the bureaucracy changed and a vast new complex of mental health facilities now stands on that ground.

It was always difficult to comprehend what one could only imagine as a distraught life, locked in a box, enclosed and sealed by a family’s desire to smooth over the discrepancy and get on with good living. You can dwell too much on the past. Leave it be. Yet she was so close to us all but forgotten.
I take another deep breath and wonder about my own years of pensive silence. Words were always difficult to find. Whatever happened that I absorbed her silence? Did I catch something? Was it in my genes? Something deep was undeniably etched, that channel at the bottom of the ocean which stretched across the earth.

The knowledge meant walls now weren’t necessarily walls; the floor wasn’t necessarily the floor. The only things that made any sense were the rocks and half submerged driftwood trees quietly emersed in sand on the small beach near our house. They were immobile and the water lapped around them gently. These quiet damp objects weren’t going anywhere. I had once stared at the beams the original builder left in the shapes of trees in our 400-year-old house, a house that held together the rocks that someone found on the hillside all those years ago. The walls were thick and the beam solid. There was no chance of it moving. The shape of tree roots became the shape of the alphabet in my ancient Celtic forebears’ time. It wasn’t surprising to read Robert Graves’ account that the earth gave meaning and words to the world. Those spirals and tendrils formed the basis of the ancient letters and were derived from the roots of plants\(^\text{18}\).

As I walked around the prison grounds when we were developing the designs for the garden, designs that I always imagined needed to be seen from above, I found this imprinted word that had slipped away from a cast metal manhole cover. The bird’s eye view was the imagined vantage point. The word is made of fine roots of grass moulded in the metal grooves. The full word said ELECTRICITY. Words and images cast in grass roots became a way of ‘speaking’ as a migrant, as a visitor to this history. In a sense it is true that the only art that really belongs in Australia is Aboriginal, deeply meshed with the land it manifests. As a migrant artist one’s connection to this country is unknown.

I worked with Betty Champion, on the garden. She helped draw forth the plans from a group of local men who were from that South Coast. The aerial view would enable the walls that had been built in 1897 to be traversed by giant rockeries designed by the inmates, local people of the area. There were giant snakes, turtles and fish-shaped gardens drawn by the students who were now locked up.

\(^{18}\) Graves, Robert, *The White Goddess*, Faber and Faber, 1963, p. 44.
Had I already become aware of something amiss? Perhaps I did know as a child and young person that something had happened. They went away for the weekend and downstairs I found a pail of black paint. I removed objects from my childhood. Dolls, books, trinkets, the lot and created a comforting gloom. Was that the same dark space, a photomontage of northern childhood, Tasmanian Gothic and Alice’s silence? It might have been my decision to be an installation artist? It was a strange and powerful act. I was revealing something or refusing their presentation that the way things were was acceptable. It may have been a signal, some knowledge that all the secrets needed to be publicly realised. Tell me, I already know.

Figure 4: Cast grass object found on an electricity manhole cover in the grounds of the prison. 2000

The dark paint had grown in my mind as a really good idea does. The new knowledge was a dark cavern impossible to know. I brought my Lancastrian subterranean memory with me of that unacknowledged dark tunnel and stepped out of it into a matching Australian one.

It’s a profound sorrow that doesn’t go away.

The nineteenth century archaeological diggings were on a similar level.
I began working in a prison; and it was, rather than a place of anxiety, one of relief. I wasn’t out of place. My mother says I had no idea when I said ‘Why didn’t you tell me?!’ I’m sure it is true.

I had no idea.

I was seeing at last the dark secret places that had been under strict taboo. Hardly comfortable, they were places where life went on.

Resourceful inmates made re-routed life somewhat habitable. Friendships occurred, people got university degrees, birthdays were celebrated, and meals were shared. Some were able to pick through the tasteless food, retrieve a few ingredients and re-configure them into something worth eating.

It would not have been a good place to live, far from it, but I could now imagine it. I was an educator looking in. Life was savagely reduced, but it was possible if the worst came to the worst, when the unspeakable happened.
There was a small dawning of understanding about the life my grandmother might have lived. The nineteenth century castle of sandstone and red brick where I worked, with its crenulations, flying buttresses, narrow windows, was something like the place into which Alice and Frank had vanished. Walking into the dingy over-painted and constrained spaces I could begin to know.

The women I am teaching have all touched some extremity....pain, violence, addiction. They harm themselves given half a chance. When I saw exhibited photographs, re-presentations from the 1950s archives of women who were similar, clearly distressed, wanting to avoid the camera with their pudding bowl haircuts and complete loss of dignity, I thought that it was wrong to show them like that. They wouldn’t have wanted it. These women are ravaged but keen to maintain appearances. It is true these pictures were contributing to the texture of the darkness, but those pictures should not have been taken against the will of the sitters. Even in death further exposure of their indignity in exhibiting them made it worse. Had the visual exposure of these earlier troubled lot helped these women I now know?

How does one speak of the silences without committing further abuse? Not speaking perpetuates the taboo. My answer has to be in the performing of this work, allowing some new understanding to happen at the end of the road. Small, recycled plastic Kodak containers of paint and some brushes might help. So might a chance to review the space of a prison as not a medieval castle but as a part of the landscape. The previously proposed garden was moved to the Boronia Women’s Centre. I worked with several cultural groups, but the Aboriginal women took over the project; and I hear they continue to maintain that garden site in the gaol.

I was able to recognise what they say about the stolen generation. I still can’t know what Alice’s life was like. Was she happy in some way? What did she do all day? Did she talk about me? You grow up next to a vacant space. Shame is felt even if it isn’t mentioned. We knew we had to back right away from that story.

The carpet works are both on the ground and simultaneously floating. They describe a contemporary subjective condition. One that is never and always at home, in
process, in transit, but absent from Australia but here. Here and there. Inside and outside. Both.
Liverpool/Liverpool (After The Black)

Was it the weight of the past in the corridor space beneath the courtroom that made me sick? Did I catch something on the plane maybe? I have to go back to the hotel room. At the base of the steps is the room where the accused sat waiting to ascend the spiral wooden steps and face their charges. If found guilty they would ‘go down” for it, to another adjacent holding room. The cruelty of the Judge Day is described on the museum placards in the ante-rooms behind the courtroom —he made even the notorious Rip Gang quake with the number of floggings both before a sentence and then again at the end. The relatives I am with, whom I haven’t seen since we left to live in Tasmania in 1963, are also feeling a sense of disgust about the violence of someone with our cheekbones. The Flogging Judge was my grandfather’s grandfather. He was offered a ‘Commission’ in Queensland in 1842. He refused it. He was doing very well in Liverpool. It was my first knowledge that my generations had even toyed with the idea of Australia.

This place is real, not just a lift-shaft of my imagination in the ruined building. The weight of the past always forces itself on me in the form of these intense emotions. At one point I don’t know if I’ll get through this malaise. I am really sinking. It isn’t like me, I feel seriously ill and go back to the hotel room as soon as I can, exhausted. Everything stacked up to bring me here and make this connection. The walls are still impregnated with urine and pain, in some cases there might have been hope — anything would have looked better than this. This was where many of the accused as well as the convicted were housed whilst they awaited transportation to Plymouth and then onto Australia. It is very strange to be here. I stand in and place my work on the walls of the dungeon cellar at St Georges Hall.

It surprises me that the design of the doors, the shape of the curved ceiling overhead and general proportions are so similar to the ones we saw travelling in Tasmania. It might have been created by the same person’s imagination. I am in the place where the earliest decisions were made to remove basically the poor to Australia. Judge Day was the rich who my relatives suspect to have become wealthy in part by the slave trade. He was
famous for the severity of his punishments. You would wonder whether he suffered some mental illness, but his son’s writing describes someone who loved art and nature and took sufficient interest in those he condemned to go walking in the derelict streets of Liverpool to see how those who became criminals lived. It must have been quite risky as he was a well-known figure. It could have appeared that he cared about those he punished.

Figure 6: View of the dungeon corridor at St Georges Hall with projection

Knowing that his illegitimate grandson’s face was the one I had looked at on the living room wall as a child, brought me close to him and curious about his influence. The face in the photograph in the Judge’s chamber did have my father’s cheekbones, chin and ear lobes. It was easy to think that his daughter had sought the company of a more approachable, person in the judge’s coachman – and the fury of her father on discovering the pregnancy.

Life is too mysterious. Thanks to a letter of introduction from a curator, I didn’t just find anywhere to exhibit. I found St Georges. I came to meet the Judge. A statue of mighty Britannia with a cluster of servants stands in front of this monumental building. There is a gigantic bronze Queen Victoria riding high on horseback beside her Prince to the left of the sweeping stepped entrance. Did she never think about the damage she was doing? I try to imagine the supreme belief she must have had in her own righteousness when the sun never set on the Empire.

Later I walked into St Georges off the street near Lime St Station up to where some stairs go onto the second level where the Law Court is situated below the massive
ballroom. The court physically, spatially and symbolically divides the opulent ballroom from the dungeon corridor where my exhibition comprising three projected films is on display. The work that I made is a message to the Hanging Judge Day. It says; *the law is not always just.* I peel back this text cast in grass roots from a plaster cast.

Grass is an approximation to the colonial surface. The British took it everywhere when they came to Australia determined to restore where possible those ‘green and pleasant lands’ they must have missed so badly. When I was working as an art teacher in a colonial prison in Australia I had found the segment below on a disused electricity manhole cover. A mower had turned it over and it sat there on the cut grass it seemed, at that moment of excitement, waiting to be found. To say what it had to say. The tendrils of grass roots had, sensing the limitations of the hard metal, set themselves into the form of the cast metal which had once spelled ELECTRICITY. Now it said ELECT. ELECT what? I picked up the word and put it on my wall to think about.

This is when the cast came about. I made a long stretch of plaster embedded with large slightly unruly letters cut out of cardboard and pressed into the wet fluid plaster until it heated and set hard enough for the planting to replicate ELECT’s description of the
The courtroom, which was where the fate of the poor was finally decided, is a bright wooden chamber beneath a stained glass hemisphere depicting St George slaying the dragon in red and blue and emerald green. For the first time in my life I feel identified with power. We always thought of ourselves as working class. My grandfather was a truck driver. We moved to Australia and became market gardeners. I wonder if this experience will improve my self-esteem. I might become successful. It might have done more for me if he hadn’t been so extreme, so cruel. I am ashamed. I am torn between pride and shame. I was never presumptuous enough to succeed. I sat in the Hanging Judge’s throne wanting to understand how such a person thought and felt towards those he judged. He was so feared. Known for a particular gesture of the eyebrow when he was about to deliver a verdict. He would appear to be sleeping until a lid was raised and his decree delivered. To my left are the pews where the jury sat. To the right viewers and witnesses of the public could watch in rows. Almost in front of me at the top of a spiral staircase is the dock where the accused was brought to sit.

Liverpool is a passionate and historically fraught city where the slaves were brought from Africa en route to the cotton fields in the Southern states of the United States. Some stayed. Many Lancastrians prospered as the cotton came back from the southern states to Manchester where the thread was spun and woven. Feverish industry and much grief gave us bed linen, towels, fancy tablecloths and a fine array of garments.

Writing *The Black* several months earlier and then coming here I recognise what I can only describe as a cellular knowledge. It was something waiting to be known. The
dreadful and more recent incarceration of my grandmother was also present in this place. Another learned gentleman sent her ‘down’. Judgements of the powerful and their counterpart shame come together in this work. Thinking of the gluggish quality of Rauschenberg’s bitumen paint, I want it all off me. I tried to find compassion in gardening with the judged twelve thousand miles away and 200 years on.

The *Drawing of the Map of the Boronia Garden* comes back to me, still incomplete as I write. This imagery revolves around my steadying a barrage of confusion. I will continue this work for some time to come. The white knitted lines in the landscape of sludge-like materials are like my mother who is loved for her gentleness who has always tried to quieten me. ‘t was a long time ago,’ she said. Yet the past did not go away in my case.

She gags me with her reticence and I fear I will not be able to share this story. I could become sick with my own imprisonment in words that cannot be spoken.

Smithson produced work about his place in history, and his role in its intervention. I have been trying to find my own origins in this search for my own bearings as well as the dark places that are subconscious and formative and a place where history can begin to be re-written.

More immediate history was unravelled by my discovery of the Judge. From Sydney I wrote to an aunt, Mary Anderson who gave me a photograph of the Judge’s daughter, Mary Day was her great grandmother. She was banished from the family of her stern and punishing father. Arthur, the son rebelled against his maniacally dispassionate Catholic father by becoming a Baptist, and also he refused a sizeable inheritance calling it ‘filthy
Figure 10: *Drawing of the Map of the Boronia Garden* (2000- ) work on hessian with bitumen, latex, baby wool, nails, seeds, washers, sequins, balloons, etc.

Figure 11: St Georges Hall, Liverpool UK and inside the large ballroom.

money’. He wrote a book about the life and times of the Judge that sits in the Library in Dublin. I would like to find out more. I walked around the building filming the giant edifice, its columns, the lions besides the queen. Wide steps reach up to the entrance of a great ballroom where the privileged danced.
A Point on a Network of Movements

Reveries in my Parramatta Road Studio, Sydney

The Bruny Island Studio deserves to be included in my thesis on migration and the transplant, because this building/artwork can be understood as originating in the same transmuting space and performative trajectory as well as spatial post-painterly aesthetic understandings, as the grass View from the Sixty Third Floor series (1999-2010). This building (as is the whole set of images) is an extension of this series. The View grass work shown in this section was discussed with architect Drew Heath whose design transpired. I have also included there several images from the Boronia Garden project showing some of the work at the end of my interaction with its progress. I refer to these

---

1 Parramatta Road is a major exit from Sydney’s central district to the West. I have had a studio there for around fifteen years during which time all the projects discussed here were made or developed. My accumulated presence there can be seen by some relics of old exhibitions and a few works in process. Often over these recent years my practice takes me to other locations, states even countries. I share this space with three other artists, also from elsewhere. We work always tenuously, waiting for gentrification of the old buildings including our dilapidated three-story warehouse along the major arterial road. I want to quickly make reference to this as the negative, the flip side of the other projects that I am writing about in this section. I am reading about Bruce Nauman’s project that challengingly asks at what point is an artistic activity art and at which point is it not. Many of Smithson’s projects did likewise. Since moving to this city twenty-five years ago away from family and any other kind of status one could have from being ensconced over time, in order to maintain a creative output, I have sacrificed financial security, for time. Like many who have migrated, there is a need to first live in the cracks of a city.

At the Ludwig Museum in the Netherlands was an exhibition titled Mapping the Studio 1 (Fat Chance John Cage), 2002. Bruce Nauman made a film of his absences from his studio, mainly during the night in order to think about what “creativity” means. In the inclusion of the house I ask what processes one can call art? In this section I want to string all the projects together and look at what they have done. The fact that I wish to include the Bruny Island Studio on that string is applicable because (as I am doing in preceding chapters) I make a connection between creativity and migration. In writing about making a creative project in a prison I make the point (as the digitalised age is the new panopticon) that the cracks such as the cheap(ish) studio on Parramatta Road will get harder to find. I know only too well both the difficulties and the necessities for people such as myself who are creative and hence need to create. As Gaston Bachelard writes in Earth and Reveries of the Will, Translated from the French by Kenneth Haltman, Foreward Joanne H. Stroud, Earth and Reveries of the Will: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter University of Chicago, Chicago, USA. (2002) As Bachelard states here dreams have to overcome earth, the force of gravity. Much of this chapter is about dreams that have been made of nothing. Bringing them all together I hope to be a consolidation.

2 This project is outlined in Chapter Four. I worked with the group for eighteen months, and then they took it over which was for me, a mark of its success.
two ‘real world’ projects in the terminology of Robert Smithson as a Site, which in his case were actual places. They were the spatial extensions, the materialisation of the presence and absence dialectic, of his gallery works, the Non-sites. Like Smithson, who saw his work as a challenge to art institutions, there is an implicit association with those who would see themselves as part of larger ‘artist-run initiatives’.

The idea of constructing a lived space designed for what Ehrenzweig\(^3\) has described as low-level scanning, is combined with the other projects discussed here. I think of both the administration of Boronia and the Bruny Studio as performance. I am creating spaces for creative work to occur. Smithson claimed to have used this process as defined by Ehrenzweig when he was devising his major work, Spiral Jetty. The image, the site and the necessary processes needed to be fused —through an essential vagueness which allows important ideas to form. It is almost a behavioural cliché now for artists to absorb a potential installation location in this way.

For the purpose of my argument I want to stress that it was Smithson’s intention to transport Minimalism beyond the gallery based art for art’s sake situation that was prevalent in the 1960s, and still pertains to much contemporary Minimalism.

In this argument to bring the studio on Bruny Island into a trilogy of projects, I will signpost here the discussion of Smithson that will occur in Chapter Three. There are a number of conceptual intersections with the work of Robert Smithson, especially relating to the recurring theme and form in his work of the journey as metaphor. This idea of travelling through time and space has a link to the research on the stranger. In Chapter One I have listed four headings, Entropy, Earth and Time, Site/Non-Site and Exile to create an opening for the discussion of my own projects.

---

At this point, I refer to works such as the *Monuments of Passaic* and *Mirror Travels in the Yucatan*. The expanded space of art has permeated from the seventies into current practices which now occur in all possible locations such as hospitals, back streets, shop windows, beaches, farms, post offices, toilet blocks, vineyards, as is the case with another of my Doctoral projects, in a prison. Wherever is considered by the artists to be an appropriate context has the potential to be a site for contemporary artwork.

Smithson’s influence on the *View* series could also be perceived in the way the individual segments of the ten years project are all sited as interventions in relation to historically significant locations. Smithson made insertions into time, hence connecting through a site to the past, making a proposal for the future. The earth to Smithson as it was to Heidegger is taken as a measure of the destructive effects of Western metaphysics that has lead to our current technologically dominated (and on the brink of disaster) world.

Other works of this series appeared at Werribee Park in Victoria, next to an ancient Aboriginal corroboree site; Martin Place wash house, behind a row of free-standing houses dating back to 1840; a workman’s hut at Port Arthur, Tasmania; Bondi Beach, St Mark’s Park, where there are a number of Aboriginal rock carvings; Artspace in Woolloomooloo, Sydney site of early disembarkment to the colony, and several others.
Two projects this year are incorporated in the Liverpool/Liverpool: the skin of Translation exhibit in Liverpool U.K. and Liverpool (Casula) N.S.W.

*Mirror Travels in Yucatan* makes us consider our own placement in the history through the creation of his crystalline openings, of the *Nine Mirror Displacements* that are receptors of the ground. These also question the values of a society, which destroyed their indigenous occupants. Time, in Smithson’s understanding extends to include geological and cosmological histories, which are implicated in these works that operate around the *dialectic* of presence and absence.

Amongst the colonial trajectory of most of my own series of artworks, is the carpet produced at the Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna. Significantly for me, this was the art school where Adolf Hitler was refused entry. Twentieth century perversions of power and their relation to Diaspora could be perceived as woven into the ‘floating’ textile’s content. Mobility and the promotion of the structure of rhizomes is a constant in the “grass roots” proposal of the carpets made of grass (literally a rhizome) and other native grasses. Like the Vienna grass carpets, which were transported from Australia (migrating with difficulty through customs) life is fragile, but can resume the energy of movement, despite discontinuity at any time.⁴

Adventure Bay where the Bruny Island studio has been built is near to where Captain James Cook landed with his crew in 1770, on his exploratory voyage around the southern coast of Tasmania. Amongst the remarkably untouched beauty of the location, we could contemplate another genocide, of many of the Tasmanian race. I am attempting to draw forth some of the lateral connections between the works which describe a life lived often

---

⁴ Dried washed instant turf was rolled, boxed and transported as excess luggage to Vienna. The grass was sprayed to decontaminate it and a letter from a curator at The Academy in Vienna alleviated some concerns in its transit through customs.
in transit. Kristeva and other theorists of migration have demonstrated through their writings the necessity for those who are transplanted to have to think all the time.\textsuperscript{5} In the vigilance required in order to keep a living artwork alive in a foreign environment, one might read the alertness required of one not ‘at home’. These carpets are always on the edge of falling apart. In the open plan Bruny studio, the living workspace defines a place of mutation through articulation that a creative practice provides, which is only possible through deep introversion. There are some formal, proportional links between the grass works and the 0.5 metre wide windows that extend across the roof of this light-box design.

Bringing together the scope of the projects threaded together over the period of this Doctoral program (as well as extending beyond and before it) it is important to add the project with women prisoners (mostly migrant and Aboriginal). The \textit{Boronia Garden} that was completed in 2005. In the inclusion of this work, the points of tension in the suite of works might be perceived to be deepened as I bring into the texture, the abject, the repulsive unacceptability of the zone in which this project functions. I am motivated to create out of the necessity one feels in being at odds with the world. It is important for the powerless women to have a conduit to creativity. In Chapter Three, there is reference to

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.45\textwidth]{bondi.png}
\caption{Bondi, Sydney 2004}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.45\textwidth]{academy.jpg}
\caption{Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna 1999}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{5} Kristeva, Julia, \textit{Strangers to Ourselves} Harvester Wheatsheaf, Colombia, University Press, 1991, p. 21.
Kristeva who perceives herself as a stranger both in terms of her being an exile and also as a woman. Reading Kristeva one becomes aware of the extended space of the maternal. The light box house/studio is also a connection to a global community of creative people through existing networks of artists. *Heimlich* rather than *Unheimlich*.6

Smithson’s dialectic arises from the condition of loss brought about by the death of his brother several years before his own birth.7 This imprinting of a subjective condition permits an opening, a channel as it were into some broader condition. The nine *Mirror Displacements* draw us closer to Smithson’s grief and confusion masked by his own confession by his attraction to his dominant theme, the entropic. I will explain this further in Chapter Three.

Without the inclusion of the *Boronia* project, there is a risk of Romanticism in the series. The carpets do bring life (literally) into the gallery space. In the context of this interlocking series to make it possible for destitute women in prisons to be creative with the earth. If accused of unworkable idealism it would be possible to meet this criticism with evidence to the contrary. It is now six years since my work as a co-ordinator was completed on that garden. That it is still significantly being used at Boronia convinces me of the importance of the earth in my communication with these women, and its necessity in the restoration of their lives. By using Robert Smithson’s work as a model for my own writing and visual output during the writing of this exegesis I have been able to include the performance of administration. The garden at Boronia’s history is outlined in Chapter Four. Even small acts of creativity are very difficult in the prison environment. The overall work on this carpet journey has now spanned over ten years beginning with the production at Artspace, Sydney in 1999. That project also incorporated a hydroponic

---


Figures 15 & 16: Sections of the garden work showing pathways which followed animal tracks, below is a circle which its makers described as their sacred site and adjacent to the beginnings of the pathway in a herb garden history. It also refers to Australia’s convict heritage which sits somewhere in our national psyche.

system with its nature/culture implications of hybridity. Taken as a whole, the work’s recognition of not only the points on the network, but the spaces in between, there is overall acknowledgement of The productive space of the hybrid in reference to colonial site.

Smithson opened up the space of what happens between the gallery and the landscape with his Site/Non-Site works. The ‘art’ occurs in his case and many subsequent practitioners in these spaces between. That is, between a gallery, an outdoor location in a desert, mine or a suburban wasteland, or in one of his ‘printed matter’ publications. Current globalised art practices take these relationships to space and text as a given. I indicate here, writing about this building that it is part of a continuum of images in a variety of locations (eight) inside and outside galleries. Nine can be counted including the studio.

The design of the building at Captain Cook’s Adventure Bay incorporates the idea of motion in the extensions, which roll out from either end of the building (on tracks). As this happens there are flashes of colour. There is play in the vitality of the design. Situated five minutes away from Cook’s landing place among pre settlement trees, the minimalist design is inspired by the stripes of the extinct Tasmanian tiger. The studio is a
designated creative retreat, on an international website.⁷ To refer to Smithson’s works which embody the idea of the journey enables the interplay of a series of points of tension or oppositions, the dialectic. In the ‘carpet’ images, especially as they appear in locations such as Martin Place, nature is both far away from and near. Life in those grass green squares is fragile and threatened on the pavements of the city. The architect designed eco-motivated studio building is in the same grided idiom as the carpets. It evokes mobility. Hybrids and clusters embrace complexities, multiplicities.⁸ That is their rich advantage. I would like this project to sit amongst a network of interconnecting pathways.

Being from several places enables comparisons. The mind works to create new orders and designs, new confluences. Theorist of globalisation, Arjun Appadurai has proposed the chaotic world of fractals and their shifting shapes as a model for understanding the vast new flows and ebbs of populations across the planet.⁹ Movement now is the only constant, which has led to new interdisciplinary practices such as Migration Studies. This field of knowledge seeks to develop models of understanding, which might assist with a tenuous grasp on the scope of accelerating transformations brought about by increasingly turbulent global fluctuations in population.

The colonial reference in this ‘carpet’ also connects with the one at Port Arthur where it was placed in the garden of a worker’s cottage. Likewise in the garden of the stately colonial mansion, Werribee Park the carpet included as part of the grid, a grave dug into the grounds within the varied surface of carpet, roots, root prints, astro turf and occasionally plaster. The works define a journey of and between the various locations. There is an accumulation in the reiterated image of dis-location, which I define in this paper as a contemporary condition.

⁷ Resartis.com


Bruny Island, Tasmania is virtually unchanged — apart from the previously glossed over genocide of the Tasmanian tribes, since the arrival of Cook. It is becoming the home to writers and artists who seek to be able to live cheaply and get on with their work. This series of grass carpet-works informs the building of the studio. The entire work speaks to what Ehrenzweig¹ describes as low level vision, as does the house on its stilts² which allow for the wanderings of the indigenous animals. Though I did not design this building, I provided images of the carpet works to the architect³, who translated this migratory thesis into a building embodying movement, with its sliding sections, and other random elements.

Miwan Kwon wrote about the post-Smithson tendency for artists to move and exhibit globally, and examines critically the spectrum of site-committed and site-specific practice versus one that is nomadic.¹⁰ In 1967 Smithson wrote:

The notion of centrality gives people a security and certainty because it is also a place where most people gather. But they tend to forget the fringes. I have a dialectic between the center and outer circumferences. You really can’t get rid of this notion of centrality nor can you get rid of the fringes, they feed on each other. It is interesting to bring the centrality to the fringes and the fringes to centrality.¹¹

This series can be seen as to creating mutations between the various sites. Many of the sites were obscurely located. Of View from the Sixty Third Floor, several were central as was the case with the Artspace version or The Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. The series


¹¹ Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings referencing Fragments of a Conversation, p.188

¹² drewheath.com.au is the site of the architect of the Frances Lane Studio on Bruny Island
has a possibility embodied in itself for a home, which moves. The design of the Bruny Studio suggests a transitory life, which might be lived there.\footnote{12} I will not live in this house, except for brief periods when I need to work intensively on projects. It is a non-private house. Other people will share this space. It speaks of transit and also the possibility of having to think through optional isolation. With its retractable ends, the building is almost a packing case. I hope that it does bring, an invigoratingly cross-pollinating and decentring influence into the system of this quiet region. Yet, I do not wish to disturb the peace of the island as much as allow a conduit for it to overflow to elsewhere.

The \textit{View from the Sixty Third Floor} series might prompt consideration of our displacement as migrants in this continent, and also if Smithson’s use of the word \textit{dialectic}, implies in some way a provoking of the perimeters of the discussion, that is my intention. In his major work, \textit{Incidents of Mirror Travel in the Yucatan}\footnote{13} Smithson contemplates the entropic movement of the earth. A state of sadness and loss is inextricably bound into these nine images. Likewise my grass images recognise the global catastrophe that seems immanent.

Five minutes from the site of the studio is where Captain Cook arrived on the southern coast of Tasmania, and stayed for some time naming plants and even establishing gardens. Bruny Island was the home of the last Tasmanian Aboriginal full blood Trugannini, who was the queen of Bruny Island. Visiting Adventure Bay is a journey taking us time-travelling into that not so distant time before Cook’s arrival. The \textit{View} series of images brought something of Tasmania (as it appears to me) to each location. This is the work’s persistently hopeful vision.

\footnote{13} \textit{Incidents of Mirror Travels in the Yucatan} is a nine piece photographic work made by Smithson in 1969, that is based around Dante’s \textit{Inferno}. 

41
Despite the prison project, there is some nostalgia in both this attachment to what is alive (as it always was, such as we see in the Wilderness areas) and also to Tasmania, the home of some last remaining real undamaged nature. I love its concern and gentleness (a quality almost embarrassing in Sydney). My almost invisible carpets assert this possibility of concern, an ethical sensitivity to the environment. Through the inclusion of the Boronia Garden, I am able to say that this is not an idle wish, it is a reality.
Decisive points of exile have existed to my knowledge amongst our family for the last three generations. At some points in time, one or two members of each generation, were the appointed individuals to have been eliminated by a silent refusal to communicate with them. They were given the cold shoulder to put it mildly. ‘We’ve had enough of you.’ Like the example of Alice and Frank, two circumstantially institutionalised relatives whose story, as young people we talked about with superior disdain. We would never be as horrible as he was you said —meaning Herbert our grandfather. I think that now, like your grandfather before, you act out of a righteous certainty. You KNOW unflinchingly what is right. It is not that I necessarily am right either. But you won’t give so much as a hearing, the time of day. We live out an unresolved story that I imagine might have begun decades ago.

I write now out of a surplus of unspoken words. You were the writer whose words I respected. It is really strange, did it have to happen this way? That you had to treat me so badly? You treated me as though I had nothing to say, and if that had been the case I would really be in trouble. Now, my sisterly love goes on to the page. Out of that I will become a writer and I will speak the silences of those of ourselves who were silenced.

Silencing in your case is a passive/aggressive act of not speaking about something that needs in some form to be said. Discrepancies occur with friends, but if you care you listen, you can argue, agree or disagree. But, you once said, protests are futile and that you didn’t have time for them. You read my strength gained of the independence you forced me to have, as ‘dominating.’ I wasn’t supposed to object to your disregard about my having become a stranger. That is to say when you didn’t want to listen to how the world had changed me in my absence. You had edited me out of existence. I wondered, did you want me to stand by acceptingly like Alice did? Take yourself and that barrage
of protest elsewhere you said and I have! With a little generosity a not too difficult knot
or even a quite difficult one, could have been undone. ‘I haven’t got time’ was your
reason. Thus you have closed the door on me. I have walked out and gone away.

A new bridge might have to be built out of words. You found that too hard —too much of
a challenge or effort. There were many places we both travelled to which could have been
enriching. That was not important enough to you either. I loved in vain. I was standing
sadly in Alice’s shoes. Left out and given no access. Words were choking me as they land
on this page. I would not be so determined to be writing if it weren’t for this gag you
have placed over my mouth — I can hardly breathe for the necessity of speech.

The rhizome carpet I made many times over, welcomed strangers. I have re-grouped, re-
formed. You made me have to cross the threshold away from you. You were once my
sister but aloof standoffishness is hardly worth knowing. Sister my love for you over
thirty years of abuse died of starvation. I walked out of the room and left the house.

Herbert, our grandfather didn’t want any of the children to so much as breathe a word
about their mother once he had put her away. There must have been such a lot to say
then too. I’ve tried to imagine their young lives amputated bit by bit by her disappearance
into sadness before the final cut. The blood would have stopped at that place and the
words frozen. The girls were teenagers when he said, ‘Keep your mouths closed about it
all.’ She is finished he said, she is disgusting. Final. Part of their minds were always there
for her, their mother. Her love was frozen, on ice, like mine is now.

I am bound to you sister by blood. Even as I wrote this letter there’s a text that bleated on
my phone. My once beloved sister is asking me whether I am in tonight? She knows I’m
going to disobey her. She is about to loose control. I too am resolved by her obstinacy. I
want no part in tact, silence and the nice perpetration of cruelty. She can tell I’ve had enough. I am struggling for air. Is it resentment that I did get away that causes her anger? These words here are a refusal to seal off the abject as she would have me do. In order not to be part of the on-going chain of unfortunate exiles —my case to speak through writing gets greater. Sorry. You have made me not care what you think.

1930s England where Alice Hodge was ‘put away’ for post-partum depression.

In this waiting room my papers will be signed by him and then this is where I’ll be. I asked if there was any chance that I might come home later, in few months perhaps. He shook his head definitively, “No Alice”. His chin is quivering with set determination and I am too sick and tired to think but know that my husband is abandoning me. I am truly judged as unworthy. The more I say the more it will incriminate me as being of unsound mind. He takes my protests as signs of ‘aggravation’. Yet the hole I am in is already too deep. He has forbidden that I see my children. I have moved to the bottom of that dark cone. It is the absolute end. There will be no further argument or discussion because what I am, this unfathomable icy illness that makes me mute is unforgivable. I am he says not fit to be his wife or their mother. It is true that my state of reclusion has brought inestimable shame on them. I have despaired lying in a darkened room all these months —years. Margaret, Marion, Hilda, Dorothy my beautiful girls and my baby Frank I will never see again or hold in my arms. Now I find myself alone in this new room. The walls are white and at least there is stillness. Herbert didn’t know how to reach me and I didn’t know how to reach myself as the children crowded in around me with needs and their love. After each pregnancy it became insurmountable especially now with Frank’s birth which drained the last ounce. The more I needed Herbert’s love and are the less I have received it. I have reached the end.

I slipped out away from them down this long grey corridor. There was no point in the end in fighting. I let him bring me here. There were no attempts to run away. I am too subdued for that even though my sisters wanted me to stay with them —they did not insist in the end. He was determined I would not find happiness or even comfort. I don’t
know yet but I will be imprisoned here for forty years away from them all. How could he put up with me? My reluctances which caused his fury. With each child the withdrawal grew deeper. I neglected them all and there was nothing I could do. I sit in my stillness here where the kindly nurses bring me supper and I stare out of the window wondering what am I going to do for the rest of my life —without the farm, the seasons and my girls. There is nowhere else for me to go now and this is where I’ll be. My piano might make some sounds and let me speak but they’ll give me none. My heart is empty. If the illness was bad this place can only make it worse. The thought that I will never again see my children grips my chest, not even tears come to my eyes. He told my five children never to speak of me again. I have begun my exile.

I want to write about a streak of maybe obstinacy more than cruelty —or is it just an absence of kindness that threads through my family —to my knowledge starting with my grandfather, but it would probably have been prior to that. In the place where our migrant family were born in the North of England, especially during the 30s, madness was a state of disgrace. Alice Hodge went to the Warrington Infirmary in 1937 and was never released. Our maternal grandfather had been shamed by his wife’s retreat from the world after bout after bout of post-natal depression. She had been told after her second child that there should be no more. Frank was the fifth and last when she finally gave up —lost any grit said my great aunt, her sister. It follows that it might have been better for him at least had he not been born. He also spent a good part of his 63 years in a mental hospital, though at the time of his internment he had advanced as a scholar to the point where he was studying wave motion in the Physics Department of Leeds University.

After despatching his wife, Frank’s father Herbert Hodge enjoyed with his new mistresses the freedoms of not being encumbered by this overly sensitive and depressed woman. Margaret, my mother, the eldest child was deeply distressed by the new women who padded through the house to her father’s bedroom after they, the children were supposed to be sleeping. There were several women who were ostensibly ‘housekeepers’.
Margaret, my mother knew there was something amiss about their presence. Her aunts watched her also too grow thin and sad. She had a mad mother, as well as the inexplicable presence of the women and the unspoken and mysterious occurrences in the night. These made her aunts shake their heads when they spoke about the family. It was wrong and she missed her mother. Yet, she knew and accepted with understanding and gravity that her absence was in fact deathly, final and unspeakable. Alice her mother might as well be dead. She was forbidden in her father’s house to even ask what was happening to her. It was a silence she would never relinquish until her outburst of tears on hearing of the death in 1973. Silences became a part of my life too.

Margaret married and went to Tasmania in the 1960s with her three daughters including myself, leaving behind in a state hospital her mother and her brother. Frank had lived with us I am told, during the early years of my life until he become too difficult. My remorseful parents said that with a little bit of help from the other relatives —we could have kept him out. It seemed as though it were a necessity that he be ‘put away.’ I never liked those relatives whose prime concern seemed to be the getting of wealth. They didn’t like me either.

My father said that Herbert Hodge had made Frank sleep in a small room under the stairs while his new wife Sonia let her children occupy the comforts of the larger bedrooms upstairs. This show of spinelessness on the part of my grandfather in the face of his son’s suffering self-esteem was surely a contributing factor in his not coping with life. I do not know the full story of Frank, but by the time I was seven, he had spent most of his holidays with us. I try to imagine what he might have been going through working on his Wave Theory thesis. He went into the Warrington Infirmary after he ‘became too difficult’, my parents said to keep him at home...’There was nothing we could do,’ they said. I’m still not too sure what that meant because it causes such distress when I ask questions. ‘We had already started making plans to go to Tasmania and it was really his father’s responsibility to look after him. His illness was diagnosed as schizophrenia.
‘These days there might have been some medication.’ Though it might have been her father, Herbert Hodge’s job to look after him, she would have known too well that that old sentimental fool of a father with his eyes that welled up easily with tears, wasn’t going to be any use. Sensitivity and compassion are near to the surface in our family, but don’t always run very deep.

I am still disturbed by the disregard, the indifference that this looks like — ‘Liz you have no idea what it was like then.’ Even now she doesn’t want to acknowledge after the happy life she had that she could perhaps have done something to find her lost mother. I am judging. It is true what she says. I don’t have any idea how badly mental illness was stigmatised in the 1930s. That I am not allowed to talk about it still gives the subject a charge, an aura that attracts something unhealthy around it.

She heard by long distance call that her absent and invisible yet always present mother had passed away in Warrington. Finding my mother weeping one day when I came home from school was the first I knew of my grandmother’s life. We knew that Sonia was not our real grandmother but the rest had been left unsaid. To this day 40 years on, her life is not something one openly discusses — a scrap or two I have gleaned from time to time when I cautiously and apologetically enquired. ‘It’s a long time ago my mother would say and I’ve had a happy life with your father.’ I feel guilty now telling her secrets but maybe I’ll only air this after her death (or behind her back which would make me wicked in the eyes of my sisters.)

The sadness has already surfaced in these paintings using chewing gum: *The Assorted Spat Out Ones* and the *Cosmos* works. These works are full of pathos and depict a world of the pavements — of rejects, which I got to know through working in a prison. I think I had inherited or was genetically impregnated with the knowledge of the distant places behind chilly institution walls. When I walked into an Australian convict prison in the
early 1990s that was to become my place of employment, it was already familiar. It was easy to be there, like a surreal subliminal world I already knew. My curiosity fed upon it and what felt like latent knowledge submerged in a conduit of flesh via my mother that had seeped into my own mind and memory —even when it was still unborn. Her silent knowledge was in my bloodstream. My intelligent and loving mother would have thought always about her own, trapped mother on the other side of the world. The knowledge of the silence lay coiled and dormant in the domestic regularities of our house by the river with the beautiful garden, in which my mother also planted other memories. Yet, she, like her own father she had closed a door on her brother as well as her mother. ‘You just have to get on with things.’

Figure 19: Assorted Spat out Ones blue and brown chewing gum on hessian 0.4 X 0.3 m 2005

The sorrow that I had inherited lay already uncomfortably but mainly painlessly covered until I was surprisingly stung and affronted as it was forced into view by a photographer’s exhibition of women interred during that precise era. Was it a coincidence that I had become what I thought was friends with this woman? Fifty years had lapsed and the images held in secret by the state were permitted into the public domain of the internet. I was physically stunned that she wanted to use them. I protested. My response seemed irrational. What disturbed me was that her connection to the images was a
theoretical one. She had no way of deeply knowing what those images might mean to someone.

Don’t do it I thought unless you ask all the families concerned, thinking of my mother’s mortification, but there was my own too. I hated that one detached from the experience could parade sympathy —it was too easy —as if she understood! It isn’t your story to tell —a contentious response. She had thought I was fortunate to have such a painful history —a story to die for! So she claimed it and left me speechless. I could understand the resentment and indignation of Aboriginal communities towards white people who might take their images and put them on exhibition, out of context. Outsiders could see a painting design as dots, colours and signs without understanding. They might think it beautiful without knowing that it was a dreaming of a grandmother and that it held a secret not meant to be spread around to anyone.

However well meaning white people have sometimes been this good intent may not help those lacking in power or suffering from the effects of abuse. Get off my case was my response —as it is theirs. She didn’t care what I thought and my own close knowledge of this situation in the end meant nothing to her. I didn’t think she would spend much time with disabled women alive now, if she met them. Her life was pretty clean and comfortable.

Even at that moment those women 50 years ago were having their photographs taken, they turned their heads so as not to be seen. They had apparently lost their minds, but one could tell they had no inclination to be recorded. They were unkempt, un-groomed for a camera’s eye. They were averting their eyes and their pudding bowl haircuts from the camera. She prolonged their agony fifty years on. In a strange guise of protecting them was putting them out there in the public —again! It seemed a heavy-handed determination to parade someone else’s misery. I thought that she was colluding in so
doing with the institution —the powerful ones, the colonisers with whom she apparently had had an issue. It seemed to me an unkind stubbornness of intent that missed the point.
Introducing Main Character Melanie Daniels.

(Fact and Fiction) Character for an unwritten story

The prison is used again here as a zone of fertile difficulty where mutations can take place. There is a challenge in working on the edge of a hierarchy that is constantly threatening anything remotely rhizomatic. I want to introduce here too the image of the hybrid bird, crazed by its own seduction into alien eating habits —unable to find its own way back into its comfortable native skin.

Melanie Daniels is the name of the character that Tippi Hedrin plays in the Hitchcock film The Birds. I used this name when I was asked to do a piece of writing about the Viaduct Project, a site-specific project at the Annandale Viaduct initiated by two friends, Barbara Halnan and Rose McGreevy. Each artist installed a segment, though the architectural feature provided an image of unity. I wrote in third person about myself and when I asked a couple of people I know what they’d thought about Melanie’s writing they said they were trying to figure out who that person might be who seemed to know quite a lot about my practice, and who wrote knowledgeably on the subject. I am to a degree Melanie.

Hitchcock’s Melanie Daniels is a person besieged by the attacking birds. I’m naming my character after her because the condition of being besieged —usually by work and the addictive necessity of keeping afloat the possibilities of exhibiting. She’s out of sync with current bureaucracies. The ‘birds’ in my instance are these institutionalised demands. The need for ‘data entry’ it seems, compounds.
Being an artist of any kind is almost impossibility in Sydney at this time. It is a city for the predatory and business savvy. It is not a good place for those who act because they want to see the world change into some gentler form. Such people are vulnerable. It takes hard work on hard work to survive. Anyone who has lived here knows that it’s a city that moves at a brutal pace. Sometimes it seems that there is no haven, no retreat.

Some years ago now, Melanie had to make a transition from being a stranger off a plane needing to find a place to stay, to someone who has succeeded in making a stable enough place to work and to bring into being something of value. That has taken 25 years of continual effort. She owns a 1993 car and lives in a tiny apartment. She, like many gets to make art three days a week because the rest of the time she is teaching. Many people will have seen her around, but few know what she does. She is an exile from a small town. There was little support for contemporary art there in the early 1980s —she lives with groups of strangers from other places in derelict parts of the city —along Parramatta Road where the trucks rip through with the daily stream of six lanes of cars moving to and from the West, relentlessly past her studio window. The strangers become after a
few years something like family, supporting each other’s visions, attending each other’s exhibitions, staying in touch.

Coming to Sydney she certainly didn’t talk the talk, which would have found her in one of those upmarket galleries. It was difficult to place her. There are many anxieties and she wonders still why she doesn’t give up and go back to a life of relative ease and quiet family support. At the same time small successes give an indication of purpose. Opportunities arise that wouldn’t in a small town. Melanie gets an occasional grant, has invitations into exhibitions that seem to be enabling her off beat vision. If she went back home what would there be to do? Go bush walking? Life away from peace makes it seem important to create it.

Melanie is empathetic and gets into difficulties because of this. Not as much now as before when naive benevolence let in some dreadful surprises. She has learned to be to a degree guarded. She works as an art teacher. One place where she works is in a prison. She thinks that it is fortunate that she gets paid to provide art classes for criminals or this strength and weakness of wishing well might create even more risks for herself. Sometimes people —and not only her students, take all she has to give, without respecting her vulnerability and she has been left several times with the task of having to reconstitute from the wreckage, her husk (and seed) of a life. An endless belief in creativity and its positive outcomes enabled her to work with damaged people for years, but she wants a change. A change is on the back burner waiting to happen. There’s a labyrinth in the meantime that she is trying to find her way out from.

When Melanie is offered that job in a prison teaching art it enables her to make a bridge between some haunting damage —what was she doing over here away from people who cared about her? and that loose collection of people, places and functions called the art world. This work provides her with a stable income and a little self-determination. At the
same time she knows that without the wealth of a family, partner or even a full-time job much could go badly wrong in this city. It is fast and forgetful. Crime might just look as if it would make the first step on the rung feasible. Knowing that makes her a useful art teacher because the world one constructs on a page as one paints can be the first step to rebuilding a life. Images can sometimes become facts.

There are those for whom she works, who make the decisions that shape the outcomes of lives that have fallen through the grid—or those that might. She too is on that web like a spider spying its chances. Every now and then she makes a nimble pounce and collects a small trophy. These trophies are small gains such as accessing funds and a little bit of power to enable the massive frayed garment of her own life—and the society she serves, to be mended. She becomes ensconced in this bureaucracy of misfits for misfits. Often silently and stealthily she is able to work out ways of operating within them. She always hopes they won’t find out who she really is, but it has been so long now that it is hard to know where she stops and it starts. She devises projects within the system to remind herself that she is an artist.

One such work was the site-specific project at Boronia Centre, a women’s prison in the West of Sydney. It involved the transformation of a large tract of land into a cultural garden with the collaboration of the women incarcerated there. These gardens were merged and interwoven with the bush setting.

One lunch-time when the women were locked away in their group houses, I was wandering around the pathways of the garden where the native animals had marked the ground with habitual repetition around the clumped she-oaks. I was looking at a new planting of a tree, stooping over to assess the work of the women. Out of nowhere a kookaburra flew towards me until its muscular form swept past my face and into my neck like a fighter plane. A splash of blood appeared on my white t-shirt as I instinctively tried
to knock the distraught creature away. There was the unfamiliar sensation of its feathered underbelly on my hand as I pushed in self-defence —afraid. It came back a second time undeterred. It wanted to harm me with its muscular laughing beak! I pushed again guilty that I might harm a bush creature; it was on the ground, then a third assault came towards me with undiminished determination. I grabbed a stick and swung it against the powerful, knife-like head smashing it to the ground running as fast as my legs would carry me. I heard later that it had been seen in pursuit of one of the inmates. Obviously I had done little damage with the stick.

As I ran towards safety, confused and traumatised I thought about the intersections of fact and fiction. What was happening? Was the ghost of Alfred Hitchcock trying to wreak revenge on a plagiariser? If I signed my real name would this have happened? These turbulent and traumatised thoughts rushed through me. Corrections were later found guilty of allowing these birds who had been fed by inmates to come out of WIRES —a wildlife welfare organisation, where they were being ‘decontaminated.’ Clearly too early! Decontaminate is a word used to describe the condition of such creatures who some people —sometimes well-meaning feeders have imposed on the bird. Bush birds should not eat bread or chocolates. A false expectation as well as bad nutrition, can cause anger when one such as myself —with nothing to offer, comes by unsuspecting. Melanie Daniels could have sued. Prison is a dangerous place to work between the birds and the humans who have also been contaminated by something —there’s much that can cause trouble.

Melanie was always an interloper in the gaol. She always thought that someone would guess, figure it out and make her leave. Creative projects are not exactly welcome there, but they could do such a lot of good. The image of the unhappily hybrid kookaburra brought this home. It attacked her. She is also a hybrid. This place provides an income and she makes a virtue of necessity. A migrant from another place, she is perched like the kookaburra in this in between garden —ever wary.
For too long Melanie has tried to make something worthwhile out of her job, and that turned her despite herself, into at times, a subversive element, a meanderer in a rigid grid which reads on the observation monitors like trouble. Several of her workplace superiors in this castle-like hierarchy — aspiring economic rationalists tried to get her out. They could not understand for the life of them what she was doing, and went to considerable lengths to eliminate her — spit out the fly in the ointment. Hence I am working with the image of Melanie Daniels who is risking attack and expulsion — simply because she wants to work creatively.

Melanie isn’t good at Quality Assurance Procedures (QAP you could pronounce kwap!) though along with all the other artistic people working in institutions, she has to feign competency. She can just about manage, but there’s anything she would rather be doing. Numerical functioning is described in Sebald’s book *Austerlitz* as being very highly regarded by the Nazis. Austerlitz is a character who intersects the narrator in this book by coincidental meetings over a number of years. They dine and converse. They visit significant monumental sites. Similar to what I would want my character Melanie to be, Austerlitz is lost in time and space. As a Jewish Austrian child he was removed from his native Vienna and adopted in Wales by an austere Presbyterian couple. Austerlitz is the “exemplary subject” as migrant/ displaced person. He is noticed by the narrator of Sebald’s book because he is sitting in a railway waiting room making notes and drawings with a focus that sets him out from the nearby faces that stare undirectedly into space. Melanie also, always has something that seems important to get done.

Perched looking over gritty Parramatta Road writing as I plan new creative projects, I wonder what will happen.
Chapter Two

Writing on the Stranger

This chapter introduces some of the key concepts of this thesis, which are migration, mutation, hybridity, uprooting, transmutation, particles, estrangement, the stranger or the exile and some of the leading theorists in the field.

I will also develop the idea that migration has a major impact on creativity by looking at key theories of several proponents of Migration Studies such as Stephen Castles, John Berger, Nikos Papastergiadis, Arjun Appadurai and Julia Kristeva. The section on Kristeva provides the most insight into some of the effects of migration. The last section of this chapter will address migration and the artist. Mieke Bal’s writing on the
movement and migration of concepts across and between the humanities has been valuable in thinking about how to read the overall content of my own diverse practice, and her writing on narration and its relationship to subjective expression in the visual arts has also been crucial in thinking through my aims in the practice of writing that has become such an important part of this current body of work (inclusive of visual and written components).

I will first create a context for migration studies and transplanting within the overarching notion of globalisation theories, and will begin by asking: what is a stranger? The writing of Julia Kristeva, especially Strangers to Ourselves, researches the ancient condition of exile. It becomes the focus of this chapter as well as aspects of her image of the female traveller. In Chapter Five I want to make a link between the fluid, evolving image of Kristeva’s traveller to the work and evolution of post-seventies Performance art and its envigorating influence on more static arts.

**Migration Studies is situated in the broader context of Globalisation**

Globalisation has seen the advent of a new model of the artist as some one who travels widely and has a cross-disciplinary and - in every sense - mobile practice. *Globalisation* describes the process by which regional economies, societies, and cultures have become integrated through a global network of communication, transportation, and trade. The term can be applied to economic, technological, socio-cultural, political, biological factors but also is used in relation to the trans-cultural circulation of ideas, language or popular culture.

---


Migration Studies analyses the tendency for population movements in the twentieth century to accelerate. In thinking about creative production in relation to migration, the binary of traditional attachment to location/avant–garde nomad is an opposition to work through and within. This *glocalising* of the world has intensified the need for networks, which bring the distant close through travel and the internet. A huge range of practices now exist which use local, global, gallery and non-gallery, as well as internet spaces.

Lucy Lippard’s one time commitment to an avant-garde of ideas was transformed into a commitment to a particular location. In this decision there is a desire I think, to step out of the oppositional mode the avant-garde represented, and into a more community based ethic. The ecological costs of travel might now also be factored into the choices around the two tendencies. On the other hand, there is an increasing globalising of artists in the Bienale system. This is burgeoning across many countries —involvement in these international circuits is widely regarded as the sign of an artist’s success. Critic Miwan Kwon surveys developments in contemporary practice, after Smithson. She expands the many questions that arise from the effects and nuances that are created by the opposing tendencies of commitment to site and commitment to travel. The idea of international regionalism afforded by many contemporary arts practices and organisations creates the possibility for a multitudinous range of hybrid practices including cross-disciplinery collaborative and socially engaged ones. In contrast, local habit can be very limiting and uncreative. This can be contradicted in itself by theorising about mobilities and

---


4 *Glocal Imaginaries: Writing/Migration/Place* is the name of a conference at Lancaster University 2009.

There was a wide range of artists, writers as well as urban planners as well as Migration Studies specialists speaking. ‘Glocal’ is a term used to describe people who think globally and act locally. It was popularised by Roland Robertson in the 1990s. Two Canadian sociologists Keith Hampton and Barry Wellman use the term to refer to people who have friendships, kinships as well as business and professional dealings via international networks.


movements of populations. Kwon’s work is ambitious in its attempt to create some developmental and historical rationale for what has been since the seventies, an explosion of difference.

It is my claim that through expanding my understanding of the field of Migration Studies I will show (in this chapter) how the idea of a mutation links with this other key process of my work, migration. This is to affirm and extend my work in my paper *Migratory Worlds, Migratory Words*\(^7\) that I presented at the *Glocal Imaginaries* Conference, an essay that focused on these key concepts in relation to grass projects unravelled in chapter four. (Also see Appendix 3 for the full document). In it I discussed my visual practice in relation to what Nikos Papastergiadis has referred to as *discontinued narratives of migration*\(^8\) or what we as migrants bring with us and how this becomes incorporated into a country such as Australia with its ancient Aboriginal past. I refer to the earth as an image of productivity and regeneration.

In articulating the relationship of this thesis to the concepts listed at the start of this chapter, I make a link between migration, and Smithson’s practice, which spatially and temporarily situates itself amidst historical and social landmarks as it sets out to create co-ordinates and anchorages. I am looking here at only a few of the thinkers in the field of Migration Studies whose work sets out to name and in some cases organise these global flows and whose work has been particularly important in thinking through the conceptual issues with which my practice as an artist engages. This study is not intended as part of Migration Studies, though ideas from that field are referenced.

---

\(^7\) *Migratory Worlds, Migratory Words*, will appear during 2011 in *Crossings: Journal of Migration and Culture* UK.

Insofar as my art practice is a feminist practice, I draw upon the feminist critiques that emerged in relation to (what is now called) Migration Studies in response usually to the lack of mobility of women throughout the nineteenth and most of the twentieth century.\(^9\)

In Western countries at least, women’s mobility has increased. Kristeva’s writing on strangers creates an ethical proposition that we are all on some level strangers and that the challenge is to know the stranger in oneself. How else can we meet the stranger in others? In trying to peg my own situation amongst theorists, the responsibility to which Kristeva refers, of unearthing the stranger in oneself features powerfully in my research and travel during the course of this doctorate. For in writing about the dislocations in history that one can experience as a migrant on both a personal and collective level, dislocations I am inevitably writing about myself, the dislocations I have experienced as a migrant. This severance leads to the necessity to be a rhizome,\(^{10}\) the root form which at any moment can re-establish itself when it has been broken off from a larger whole.

Much of the twentieth century writing indicates the condition of the stranger as a fairly wretched, isolated one. I prefer not to see it that way.

One of the most powerfully affecting works of art on migration is for me Mieke Bal’s *Nothing is Missing*\(^{11}\) It is an installation revealing a group of women whose children

---

\(^{9}\) Ibid. p. 69. Chapter 3 *The Gender of the Stranger* p. 66.

\(^{10}\) Parr, Adrian, ed., *Deleuze: A Dictionary of Terms* (entry by Felicity F. Coleman). Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2005. The rhizome is a root structure that has used to define a revolutionary philosophical position, that is opposed to hierarchies. Many existing institutional structures block creativity and desire. Rhizomes are a plant form that can extend themselves underground developing new extensions. Deleuze and Guattari use this term to describe networked, relational and transversal thought. P. 231 (The roots that I have chosen to work with in my grass carpets have been specifically and literally rhizomes.)

\(^{11}\) Bal, Mieke Bal is an artist/art critic and artist from the Netherlands whose work was featured at the *Glocal Imaginaries Conference* where *Nothing is Missing* was presented in 2009. This was a multiple screen video installation 25-30 minutes long (looped) 2006. Mieke Bal has written around the central thematic of subjectivity in such books as *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide*, Toronto, 2002; *Quoting Caravaggio, Contemporary Art, Preposterous History*, Chicago 1999; *A Thousand and One Days* was a collaborative work with Zen Marie, Thomas Sykora, Gary Ward and Michelle Williams). Another important focus of her work is narration in art with her famous work, *Narratology*. Some of the above information was also found in an online journal in an interview with Mieke Bal’s friend, Micheal Ann Holly in onlinelibrary.wiley.com. (miekebal.com)
have migrated to the West to improve their situations—educational, financial etc. She threads the dispersions of individuals along maternal lineages by an overlaying of sound tracks onto the main speaker’s voice. Each woman is recorded speaking as if to an intimate relative—a grandchild they never got to see growing up, to an emigrated child, an in-law who robbed them of their child. Many of them sob uncontrollably on camera. We hear (barely) other voices as they speak. The monitors are installed in a homely living room, a space of comfort and sharing amongst strangers. We are invited to take a seat in the armchairs provided. Sometimes we hear the voices of the person being addressed, sometimes not. Sometimes says Bal ‘we hear three generations speaking at the same time.’ She sought to find connections in Nothing is Missing through the maternal lines, as these women talk at home so to speak in the living room between themselves—or that, I think, is the inference of the living room installation. In terms of my own sense of discontinued narratives of migration, where family members have been left behind on the other side of the world, Mieke Bal’s work offered much to contemplate. The women in her Nothing is Missing had the benefit of knowing that their children were away from them for beneficial reasons—such as education or financial betterment. In Chapter Four I will write more about my own project with destitute migrant and Aboriginal women which has been a significant source in this text.

This work was presented first at the Ministry of Justice in Den Haag, it is an ongoing project that began in 2006. She also presented it at the Glocal Imaginaries Conference. Literature and the work of diasporic artists was featured at this event. Bal was a key speaker—exemplary as she is of a dynamic migratory interdisciplinary artist and researcher. Of interest to my own projects also was her work titled A Thousand and One Days, which are narrative accounts of working class migrant workers. In an article by Michael Holly, Bal said that she had never learned as much than as from the production of that film about cultural processes, the role of traditions and the insinuation of politics in everyday life. Mieke Bal has researched the subjective effects of migration—what
she calls migratory aesthetics (metaphors relating to migration after the psychoanalytic work of Mary Jacobus).\(^{12}\)

Research papers at the *Glocal Imaginaries Conference* also came from a range of disciplines including anthropologists, linguists, urban planners and sociologists. Though drawn to the purpose of sociologists, I will be emphasising theorists who perceive the metaphor of transformation inherent in migration, and its accompanying creative force which has produced so much art and literature.

Migration Studies, according to practitioners such as Stephen Castles,\(^{13}\) *requires* interdisciplinary research and active involvement to work with the level of change and activity being generated by global and local population shifts. A post-modern understanding of the migratory according to Papastergiadis\(^ {14}\) would think in terms of movements and spaces rather than oppositions of here/there, presence/absence, us/them. This is an approach proposed by various postmodern thinkers as well as *new science* models. *The Turbulence of Migration*\(^ {15}\) and its acceleration has lead to the need for new paradigms in many fields. These changes hence require new, creative responses.

In accord with migration theorists, I see that the trauma of migration and its upheavals needs to be recognised. Kristeva’s requirement that language reorganise experience opens out the space of possibility to move through the trauma of loss which can persist for

\(^{12}\) Ibid. p. 72


\(^{14}\) Papastergiadis, Nikos, *The Turbulence of Migration*, 2000, p. 65 uses the following example from David Frisby *Simmel and Since*, Routledge, London, 1992. p. 66

\(^{15}\) Ibid., the phrase is taken from the title of Papastergiadis’ book *The Turbulence of Migration*. P. 134.
generations. My own writing here in chapter three follows aspirationally, in the path of Alice Munroe’s *View from Castle Rock*¹⁶ (and to a degree Kristeva). Munroe incorporates a mixture of fact and fiction in its study of a family’s migration some centuries ago. Even the fourth or fifth generation migrant, such as Munroe writes, has an almost cellular biological connection to her place of origin which haunts her life as an unknown secret, until she revisits the lands of her forebears, uncovering her connection. I have experienced this, and her biological formulation has taken seed in my own work.

Coming from the North of England and returning there recently—to my place of origin I uncovered my profound link to people there. I also discovered a sense of deprivation about the loss of my own ancient history—that I had lost my part in the landscape and architecture of Britain. In Chapter Five I explain how my visual art practice uses earth as a way of thinking about this connection—or absence of one. It also seeks to meet the ancient history of Australia. In assessing my own discontinued narratives there’s an implication that such stories abound now in this country where Liverpool NSW is now home to around 150 nationalities.

Papastergiadis states that space is an active part in a process which has no origin and no simple end. Departures and returns are seldom final he says; therefore it is important to recognise the effect of the journey¹⁷ and in general recognise that the transformative effect of that journey and that it is an active field of production not to be denied.

¹⁶ Munroe, Alice, *The View from Castle Rock*, 2007, is a book I read prior to the Confirmation of Candidature presentation and it assisted me in trying to formulate this obscure condition and also to think about how I, who is basically a visual artist would like to write in a way which grew from my own experience. Munroe’s own voice is formed by the voices of her own forebears in the long letters they wrote, which had been passed down.

In Regenerated cities in the United Kingdom (such as Liverpool) it is possible to see the convergences of art, architecture and sociology. The Urban Regeneration movement is a response to these recent variations in population, industry, technology and shifting populations. Events such as the Liverpool Biennial (and possibly the wider phenomenon of Biennials in general) have arisen as a response to such movements and migratory trends. Now due to the global recession such events are under threat —despite the fact that in the case of Liverpool UK for instance, contemporary arts practice have generated a great deal of revenue for the city.

In this section I create a collage of some thinkers of migration, having by no means the full scope of the discipline. There are many ways which one could engage with the pervasive movements we now inhabit. According to Papastergiadis, Georg Simmel developed early twentieth century definitions of Modernity and it is to him that the idea of the stranger, someone from elsewhere, has been attributed. He was a forerunner in the writing on movements of populations, and the stranger, for him, is a product of the transformations of capitalism in the later nineteenth century.

According to Papastergiadis, the vast extent of writing (and art) on the subject of the stranger in twentieth century literature is perhaps indicative of a disjunction between inner and outer that some seek to resolve through various modes of creative work. For Simmel, the stranger (1908) or the flaneur was the most emblematic figure of

18 Tallon, Andrew, Urban Regeneration in the UK, Routledge, London and New York. 2010. Efforts are continually being made to regenerate Liverpool UK, which suffered an economic crisis in the 1990s. I refer elsewhere to the prison where one of my projects was situated as an entropic site. Similarly I see Liverpool and its regeneration in a similar way. Worlds are brought about where there were none in this city, often by newcomers—migrants.

19 www.liverpoolbiennial.com


21 Ibid. p. 62.
Modernity. With this figure Simmel, says Papastergiadis, weaves together the fluid patterns that shape inner experience and social interaction.

The essence of modernity as such is psychologism, the experiencing and interpreting of the inner world, the dissolution of fixed contents in the fluid elements of the soul from which all that is that all that is substantive is filtered and whose forms are merely forms of motion.

The foreign and the familiar were at the centre of Simmel’s consideration. For Simmel, the stranger’s position to the group is defined by being both ‘outside it and confronting it. The stranger may import qualities into a group that it does not already possess’. This stranger in Simmel’s day had often moved from a rural to an urban environment and was thus a participant in the developing cities of Modernity and their accelerating systems. For Simmel the stranger usurps tradition and represents a unity of here and there. He is thus capable of objectivity. In spite of being inorganically appended to a group, the stranger is yet an organic member of it. Its uniform life includes the specific conditions of this element. Only we do not know how to designate the peculiar unity of this position other than by saying that it is composed of certain measures of nearness and distance...’ Simmel’s trope of the stranger was a critically and spatially mobile figure. In a city such as New York the imagination is grasped as the means to convey what is mobile and migratory —and hence its large number of creative and critically demanding people.

Papastergiadis, after Simmel, claims that migration is a central force in Modernity, but he critiques the fact that Simmel’s model of the stranger embodies series of dichotomies,

22 Ibid. p. 63.
23 Ibid. p. 65
24 Ibid. p. 65
25 Ibid. p. 66
us_them, modern_traditional, insider_outsider; and while the stranger oscillates between these positions. It presupposes that these prior positions are fixed and counter-posed according to a binary logic. This problematising of Simmel’s vision leads Papastergiadis to consider other models, which are more fluid and avoid association with the shifting pattern of exclusion and inclusion such as those of Arjun Appadurai.27

Understanding migration, if that is possible states writer John Berger requires metaphor – a need to approximate likeness and hence recover a place, a bearing in the world. Two differing entities are shown in their relationship to one another.

A man’s resolution to emigrate is to be seen within the context of a world economic system. Not in order to reinforce a particular theory but so that what actually happens to him can be given its proper value...if the forces which determine the migrant’s life are to be grasped and realised as part of his personal destiny, a less abstract formulation is needed. Metaphor is needed...Yet his migration is like an event dreamed by another. As a figure in a dream dreamed by an unknown sleeper, he appears to act autonomously, at times unexpectedly; but everything he does unless he – revolts – is determined by the needs of the dreamer’s mind. Abandon the metaphor. The migrant’s intentionality is permeated by historical necessities of which he nor anybody he meets is aware. That is why it is as if life were being dreamed by another.28

Edward Said’s faith29 in the migrant intellectual does not so much correlate creativity and adversity as promote a relational rather than a fixed consciousness. Said argues exile is comprehensible through the internalisation of rupture. The modern exile is not exclusively confined to the massive displacement of people from their homelands but can, as Kristeva and others describe, be anyone.

---


29 Ibid. p. 68
Opinions vary on the question of adversity. Pain and other difficult affects involved with shifting cultures are described by many sources. W. G. Sebald’s books, *The Emigrants*\textsuperscript{30} as well as *Austerlitz*\textsuperscript{31} have informed my speculations. *Austerlitz* is a place, it is also the name of the central character of the novel who is an exemplary study of a disjunctive intelligence alerted to his own impossible situation. Austerlitz studies architecture, he researches, writes, probes the past with which he is at odds. This work, might be regarded in some ways as the literary equivalence of Robert Smithson in its floating vagueness, a state Smithson would call after Ehrenzweig, ‘low level vision.’\textsuperscript{32} Austerlitz floats in history as I think Smithson’s practice invites his viewers to do. The stranger, Austerlitz strives uncomfortably to piece together a new identity out of fragments from the past.

In the course of reading I have made a list of creators effected by migration. Clearly, many people these days move very comfortably and freely around the earth, though this has much to do with levels of affluence. The condition that I am trying to describe has nothing to do with the excitement that tourism or incidental travelling might bring. With this sort of travel one returns to a home or a job, disrupted but stimulated by a new window on the world. I, however, refer to mutations that are much more fundamental and lasting in character, where return is not a possibility. Amongst many conceptualisations of this transitional phase of migration which could be described as a mutation, is the ‘third space’ of Homi Bhaba.\textsuperscript{33} Bhaba refers to the disjunctions of hybridity, originally thought in terms of a *mulatto*, someone who might be born in *between* races. This idea is a descendant of the stranger. This idea, the assemblage of the hybrid, is described by Bhaba as a third space within which differing elements meet and produce a process of change. Papastergiadis also seeks to find new models to describe

\textsuperscript{30} Sebald, W. G., *The Emigrants*, Vintage Press, London, 2002. (both The Emigrants and Austerlitz, in their style and content informed this writing. Specific pages of these fictions are not relevant).


\textsuperscript{32} Roberts, Jennifer L., *Mirror Travels: Robert Smithson and History*, p. 211

ways to think about the multiplying creative possibilities, in the idea of the *hybrid* or the cluster. These are representative of concepts which suggest ‘that origins, influences, and interests are multiple, complex and contradictory, but also to suggest that our sense of self in the world is always incomplete, and that we are formed through experience not prior to it.’ The interpretation of identity as hybrid is a direct challenge. Homi Bhabha is referenced by Papastergiadis in the same section as saying in reference to the quasi-scientific claim that hybrids are weak, mentally inferior and morally confused as colonising ‘master races’ have stigmatised them to be. Bhaba proposed the hybrid as a positive figure, a *bridging person* one that is the benefactor of cultural surplus and the embodiment of new synthesis.

Sociologist Stephen Castles recognises the necessity of interdisciplinary, mobile, migratory, creative thinking to deal with complex global situations. He stresses the value of Migration Studies as a practice of social transformation, giving recognition to his assertion that migration and social change are more complex than at any other time in history. The idea of interconnectivity recurs in his writing, claiming that simple binaries are no longer applicable to the current global situation. The earlier Modernist rural/city shifts have changed. Contemporary migrants move from other urban centres. He recommends that research should be done in interdisciplinary teams involving historians, anthropologists, sociologists and so on. Artists and writers are not named in his *Methodology*[^34], though one recommendation under a heading, *Organisation of Research* suggests 'on the ground' activity such as working with community groups or migrant associations. Castles is a social activist, for him, research is necessarily a part of the process of social transformation, which needs to be understood spatially, on local, regional and global levels. He thinks that it is not inappropriate to compare labour migrants with various forms of *unfree labourers* ranging from colonial slaves, bonded labourers, and the industrial workhouses, forced labourers in concentration camps and the

[^34]: Castles, Stephen and Mark J. Miller, *Methodology*, an on line unpublished article.
ghettoes of apartheid. Both are caught in a situation in which little or no free will is possible. Castles regards it as a necessity that Migration Research be applied to the world as it stands, as it is a pragmatic discipline. A process such as *Regeneration UK* in England created opportunities for such application. The mobilities of populations in the United Kingdom over the last 20-30 years has required the re-thinking of urban areas, as is the case with Manchester and Liverpool. Places that are regenerated often have a post-industrial past, migrant populations, global shifts and transformations that need to be given specific attention. A school I was able to attend in 2009 in Kirby, a derelict outer district of Liverpool, where regeneration was taking place was a first hand example of this activity.

**Arjun Appadurai**

The Indian writer, Arjun Appadurai offers other insights into the complexities of migratory movements. He has argued that we should be looking to the physical sciences to make sense of hybrid identities and de-territorialised cultures, using the terminology of fractals and polythetic forms. In attempting to think about the effects of migration and possible creative outcomes, one could visualise the planet as seen from space. Such a view might indicate migratory pathways as the arteries, veins, eddies and whorls of movements from above as one sees veins traced with a dye that is introduced into our bodies to detect cancer. This scientific model generates a clearer encapsulation of what is happening globally with regards to migration and *transplanting*. As wars, famine, floods, fires, unpredictable events and other catastrophes, which are on the increase multiply, the movements, will accelerate. There are now over 100 million international migrants and 27 million stateless refugees. Papastergiadis also points out that though migration has

---


36 Urbanisation09 was a Regeneration event in Kirby, a suburb of Liverpool UK see www.urbanisation09
been with us since ancient times, at that point in history its volume, speed and distances that could be travelled was restricted.\textsuperscript{37}

*Deterritorialisation*\textsuperscript{38} is a key concept for Appadurai. He stresses the instability and volatility that emerge from this process. On the other hand, diasporic communities have not always championed tolerant and inclusive attitudes. Yet, de–territorialised, moving populations can give rise to exciting new cultural links and hybrids in the arts. Deleuze and Guattari concepts suggests that negative, attractive and repulsive are all folded within one another ‘and form complex planes that either connect or bifurcate. These processes are so inextricably mixed that they can only be diagnosed now through the psycho–social types like the exile, the migrant, and the stranger. The concept of deterritorialisation suggests intellectual mobility and refers to a critical sensibility of improvisation and innovation.\textsuperscript{38}

Appadurai\textsuperscript{39} also makes a connection between globalisation and violence in a chapter by that name suggesting that there may be a relationship between the growth of the prison industry in the United States and the fact that regional economies are being pushed out of more humane forms of employment and wealth creation. His consideration of the flows of capital bring me closer to the subject migrant trauma in a prison and its consideration


\textsuperscript{38} *Deterritorialisation* is a concept first used by Deleuze and Guattari to locate the moment of alienation in language. In a feminist extension of Deleuze and Guattari, Rosi Braidotti claims it is ‘a critical consciousness that resists settling into socially coded modes of thought and behaviour’. (Papastergiadis, *Turbulence of Migration* p. 117).

\textsuperscript{39} Appadurai, Arjun, *Fear of Small Numbers: an essay on the geography of anger*, 2004, p. 44

\textsuperscript{40} In Chapter 2, in a section titled *The Black*, I have written about how trauma can be transported with us across the world.
of the inclusion and exclusion of minorities.\textsuperscript{40} I have used the image of the prison in the Australian landscape as a theme in some bodies of work, therefore the relationship of the prison to forces of globalisation is relevant. Also if one thinks about what is defined as abject, as Julia Kristeva has done, these definitions regarding what is borderline have to be given some thought. In Chapter Four I will write about the *Boronia Garden*\textsuperscript{41} project as well as another work being developed with Casula Powerhouse, which recognizes the class factors in operation in defining behaviour. The transposed British prison on Aboriginal land is a image inherent in the gridded grass works and these speculations on migration.\textsuperscript{42} The prison as an image, generally contrary to the production of creative rhizome forms, is both real and virtual in my work.

Kristeva lists some of the complicated affects of migration, such as the soaring exhilaration of travel and the anxious dread of loss and discontinuation.\textsuperscript{43} There is also a kind of depletion, shame, guilt from the inevitably discontinued narratives of relationships and what I would call the lingering ghosts that require different models for understanding this complexity. There are many more issues which arise from displaced persons being sometimes or often, dangerously close to financially not surviving and also emotionally on the brink. In writing about the conditions of transplanting and mutating there are many layers to consider.

\textsuperscript{40} In Chapter 2, in a section titled *The Black*, I have written about how trauma can be transported with us across the world.

\textsuperscript{41}The *Boronia Garden* project was completed prior to this Doctoral program. It was a cross-cultural garden project involving migrant and Aboriginal women. I frequently reference this project throughout the exegesis. Another similar project is being developed for the Liverpool area in conjunction with Casula Powerhouse.

\textsuperscript{42} Carter, Paul, *The Road to Botany Bay*, Faber and Faber London Boston, 1987, p.321. Carter suggested that convicts were treated in a similar way to Aboriginal people from the early accounts of the colonies whatever the difference of the racial and cultural origins, the convicts and Aborigines constituted a rebellious nature which the authorities had to subdue.

Appadurai\textsuperscript{44} has sought to demonstrate, that mechanistic models cannot capture the dynamics of cultural exchange and that we need more subtle conceptions of the flows, collisions, and juxtapositions across cultures. Seeking images and ways of understanding new experiences, fractal movements have much appeal. Appadurai’s writing describes the qualities and characteristics of population flows.

In discussing the relationship of the stranger/migrant to the idea of mutation I am in accord with the perspective that \textit{the mutations of migration} can be regarded spatially and temporally, as does Appadurai’s conceptualising.

Government decisions impact on individual lives as was the case in the 1960s when the British and Australian Governments decided to increase the population of Australia by importing British and other European peoples. My experience was a result of such a decision. We, like many others, came to live in Australia during the 1960s in search of a better life. There used to be various well-worn routes of migration, such as the one I traversed, but Papastergiadis argues that these routes have become more diversified and profuse. This proliferation of movement has become a daily and palpable experience, especially noticeable as one walks around Sydney, particularly in Liverpool NSW where there are 147 different languages one might hear spoken.

Julia Kristeva’s writing on the exile and the female traveller\textsuperscript{45} helped to define a trajectory within my own practice, which has in part been an attempt to maintain a cohesive sense of myself through many changes. I was exiled from memories of childhood in the North of England, and then became a self-determined exile from Tasmania when I moved into the very different cultural milieu of Sydney during the 1980s. Hobart at that time was not

\textsuperscript{44} Papastergiadis, Nikos, \textit{The Turbulence of Migration} p. 119

a place to be for someone interested in contemporary art. It was very culturally restrictive. The artworld revolved basically around what looked like to many, a monopolised art school. Though only interstate, the removal of myself from a small but familiar context, to a larger and more challenging one — reasonably commonplace I know, did present frequently both emotional and financial stresses. Undoubtedly this broader arena was nonetheless more comfortable and expansive. The distance in this migration was not something one measured in kilometres.

Kristeva’s book *Strangers to Ourselves* has been a major reference in this writing as she presents and explores the notion of the stranger, the outsider who is in a country not their own. She wrote extensively on her transition from Bulgaria to Paris, where she became the philosopher we know today.\(^46\) Her research encompasses enquiry into the stranger in Greek tragedy, the Bible, the literature of the Middle Ages, Renaissance (in Dante, Machiavelli, Rabelais, Thomas Moore and Montaigne) and into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Kristeva suggests that Dante’s *Inferno* can be read in one register as the story of his exile from Florence.\(^47\) This is of particular relevance in the next chapter on Robert Smithson and *Mirror Travels*.

In *Strangers to Ourselves* there is the utopian proposition that it is something within ourselves which prevents us from taking strangers and foreigners into our houses and countries. The inference is that we will never be able to live in peace with the strangers around us if we are unable to tolerate the otherness in ourselves. Her questions are ethical ones. Mieke Bal’s work, *Nothing is Missing* attempts, I think, to model a possible ethics and morality of strangers through her reference to the maternal connection. The solution


\(^47\) Ibid., p. 194.
to this ethical dilemma Bal’s work proposes is through the recognition of the women’s capability together to not be strangers.

Translation is a metaphor for the very process of communication, says Kristeva — emerging out of fragments, and attempting to approximate the totality of the other. It may result in a dynamic interaction in which conceptual boundaries are expanded and residual differences are respected.\textsuperscript{48} When one moves to live, from one place to another, a process ensues of translating the previously known together with the unknown into something that is knowable, naming new associations, which engenders new meanings. Re-translation is the means by which ‘foreign’ elements are introduced into a culture.\textsuperscript{49}

Kristeva writes that the transplant has complete freedom. She likens this to an orphan who has lost its mother and is without guideposts. She also recognises in the transplant the drive to move elsewhere in order to do something better, to achieve further. They are workers who sacrifice everything, because they are nothing. Kristeva also recognises the reversibility of the master/slave dialectic. Each wave of migrants tends to resist the preceding one — as has occurred in Australia, first to post-war Mediterranean migrants, then to British, then Asians and now Middle Eastern. Kristeva cites Camus’ character Meursault as the stranger in all of us whose emotions are anesthetised, never at one with things and indifferent even to his mother’s death.\textsuperscript{50}

The semiotic and the symbolic are terms of Julia Kristeva’s theory of language which define a gap between the formative drives which bring forth new ways of thinking the world and the already formed conceptions of the world in the dominant language. The

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid. p. 194

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., from the chapter titled \textit{Toccata and Fugue for the Foreigner}. p. 1

\textsuperscript{50} Camus, Albert, first edition, \textit{The Stranger}, The Everyman Reader, New York, 1942.
migrant feels the gap between the 'semiotic' and the 'symbolic' even more palpably — that is to say that if a state of home at its most elementary level, can be taken as the maternal body.\(^{51}\) By virtue of being dislocated from her context of origin in which certain conceptions of the world were secured and then being slightly adjacent to the given views in the new context, the traveller as defined by Kristeva turns the familiar into something strange, the unheimlich.\(^{52}\) When reading Kristeva’s \textit{Powers of Horror}\(^{53}\) we are informed that abjection is a borderline state undergone after birth before achieving a sense of separateness. Much more could be elaborated, but during that period of psychic development we experience the transformation from the once secure state prior to birth. I am interested here, in regard to the foreign state, the unheimlich in the implicit necessity to grow to develop to extend oneself, extend the use of language in the image of the Traveller.\(^{54}\) Language says Smith, renews the subject and turns crisis into a pretext for innovation. The experience of strangeness she says is, like abjection, the sign of incomplete separation from this first home—the mother’s body—where the drives do not remain housed securely in the unconscious, but return in estranging bodily symptoms and affects. The stranger’s experiences of ‘black silences, irritable pushiness, torpid solitude, wandering longing for affiliation, their aloofness towards reality, their defensive paranoia, their celebration of the orphan’s freedom, their humble sacrifice in the brutality of work, and in all their perverse pleasure become symbols in her kaleidoscopic view of culture.\(^{55}\) Kristeva’s book exposes the stranger in order to familiarise her to herself. For the stranger, the movement in and out of different lives is a powerful celebration of the rights and creative potential. Movement stimulates empathy that we feel for others, and radically extends the boundaries for defining the self. Papastergiadis suggests that in the accelerations of population movements, that there are increasingly blurred boundaries of


\(^{52}\) Ibid., p. 12.

\(^{53}\) Kristeva, Julia, \textit{Powers of Horror An Essay on Abjection} European Perspectives A series of the Colombia University Press, 1982. especially chapters 1, 2 and 11.


\(^{55}\) Ibid. p.167, \textit{Into the Cellar of the Native House.}
individuals and communities —leaving us more vulnerable perhaps to violation. One of my stories in chapter three sets out to explore this vulnerability. Kristeva, writes Anna Smith, believed that maturity comes from recognizing that to speak of objects and experiences or to write about them enriches the psyche.\textsuperscript{56} We can transform the 'blinding shocks' into psychic revelations, the encounter with literature literally, she believed enlarges the compass of the mind.’

In addressing the stranger, or as it has been widely referred to, the transplant, one taps into a major river, a torrent of enquiry traversing western history. Papastergiadis describes it as an archetype; a persistent desire, to change an island of suffering into a rock of redemption.\textsuperscript{57} There are many such powerful descriptions. Moving away from the familiar systems and traditions transports individuals to a new necessity of creation. The Oxford English Dictionary describes exile as a reduction and fragmentation. \textit{Ex} means privature and \textit{ilia} means entrail, a disembowelment.

Kristeva demonstrates in her writing, the need to write herself out of exile and to consider its historical role and condition. This performative role is almost a cliche of much major art and writing of the last 30 years. Kristeva’s \textit{Tales of Love} ‘offers the subject a new relation to embodied space and its representation in language through re-reading the estranging effects of love on philosophy. Kristeva has turned psychoanalysis to philosophy because it is the latter discourse that has had the most to say about transcendence, the ideal and the notion of the good, and it is philosophy that she wishes to immerse in the maternal folds of the semiotics tongues of fire.’\textsuperscript{58}

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid. These ideas are helpful in connecting me to a very deep, painful and forbidden to be named experience, which was ‘left behind’ when we migrated. I think that a great deal of the visual work that I have done is an effort to find a vocabulary for this experience —as well as my work in an institution, including the Boronia project. p. 52.


\textsuperscript{58} Smith, Anna, \textit{Julia Kristeva: Readings of Exile and Estrangement} p.87.
In her writing on Julia Kristeva, Anna Smith says that her impression is that for Kristeva the language of exile was the only language worth knowing. ‘How can one avoid sinking into a mire of common sense, she asks, if not by becoming a stranger to one’s own country, language, sex and identity?’ Writing is impossible without some kind of exile. To become a subject Kristeva argues, we have to become writers. Language renews the subject and turns crisis into a pretext for innovation.\(^{59}\) Kristeva was writing in the 1960s when feminism was an erupting political force which influenced and shaped many artists of that period and has left a lasting legacy upon artists such as myself who followed on after this period. I made large kinesthetic energetic drawings laden with affect, and used this process in quite a diaristic way. They frequently would have spontaneous writing scrawled over them. They were significantly inspired too by my interest in the work of Eva Hesse who uses sculptural processes to define her own psycho/sexual condition.

Kristeva’s subject is a generative one —that is to say she regarded homelessness as an exemplary site where meaning and the subject were continually produced and erased.\(^{60}\) We now live in a world where the transmutations of homelessness have multiplied. No more elsewhere than in Australia. As a visual artist and a producer of text in this instance, I am developing ideas in both these stories and my visual ‘cast grass (and text) works’ that address the issues of displacement, glocal movements and attendant ecological issues.\(^{61}\) Being included in the context of the Liverpool/Liverpool work, literally cast in roots as quotations, I have incorporated the texts of a number of migrant writers. Kristeva’s writing on the maternal body emphasises love as source for feminine becomings. The immense care required in the production of the grass carpets (months of tending) reveals an abiding concern for my subject.

\(^{59}\) Ibid., p. 89.

\(^{60}\) Ibid. p. 89.

Metaphor is a way of understanding movement.

The word metaphor itself is a way of expressing similarities and differences of one thing to another. Is it a coincidence that so many exiles became writers and artists? In making movements from place to place, some level of translation is essential — comparisons are made and language has to be devised for any translation to occur. Writer John Berger described himself as a shuttle between insiders and outsiders. The Greek word for 'porter' says Papastergiadis is metaphor. This is a reminder of how deeply the act of transporting, dispatch and delivery is intrinsic to the imagination. Movement, severance, disjunction lead to comparisons when things are out of a familiar, habitual circuit creating a need for re-configuring. The fact that many who are at odds with the world are the ones who have produced compelling imagery, suggests a link between a condition created by the state of exile and the production of this imagery.

Viewing from a critical distance or perhaps one of detachment, is another mode typical of those who do not belong in one place or another. Being on the outside of experiences characterises a condition of what Georg Simmel began to define and understand as the new condition of Modernity. Others have followed on in attempting to describe this condition Simmel established as that of the stranger. To emigrate is to dismantle the centre of the world, so that it moves into a lost, disoriented one of fragments. Berger, says Papastergiadis, is quick to see that embedded within the etymology of metaphor is the

---


63 Ibid. p. 11

64 Joyce, James, *Ulysses*, Penguin, London, 2002, also the film of this book by Joseph Strick made in 1967 Joyce’s characters in this novel are excellent examples. The writers and artists of this time were in fact stepping into the un-known of Modernity, and therefore having to re-define themselves and their world. Joyce’s *Ulysses* is a voyager who speaks (almost) another language, a stream of consciousness, a montage of dreams and inner monologues. Stephen Dedalus, (Joyce’s alter ego) buries his Catholic mother and travels alongside Leopold Bloom in the sordid backstreets of Dublin, into the unknown world of Modernity, plagued by demons and phantasms. Like the travelling *Ulysses* he is in the process of redefining himself. Like Leopold Bloom in Ulyssess they were often experienced painful and difficult separations from the past as represented by family and traditions in art-making which existed.
theory, which links the process of naming through differentiation and the dynamics of movement and creativity.65

The experiences of being a migrant are very well documented. A list of twentieth century writers whose work deals with the idea of the stranger would include John Berger, James Joyce’s, Ulysses, Albert Camus, The Stranger, Nietzsche’s Wanderer, Baudelaire’s flaneur, Georg Simmel’s stranger, Edward Said, Homi Bhaba’s The Third Space of Hybridity, Wole Soyinka, Carl Marx, Jacques Derrida, W.E. Sebalds’s Austerlitz, and many more. The stranger has been interrogated in terms of its gendering by writers such as Julia Kristeva, Janet Wolfe, George Sand, Elizabeth Wilson, and Doris Lessing to name a few. Migrant artists such as Joyce and Picasso are among the most celebrated figures of Modernism. Both of these groundbreaking creative figures separated markedly and profoundly from their traditions. Modernism and the idea of the stranger enabled explorations of new ways of being.66 Cezanne had demonstrated in his assertion of what he described as underlying structures how an artist IS part of the work that they make67 Cezanne’s identification with the visual world as mathematical, architecturally form has contributed to his often used title, as father of modern art. I am trying to point to the way subjectivity —almost as a spiritual state- began to be emblematically represented by Modernism. The representation of the ‘I’ continued, according to Rosalind Krauss, until the advent of an artist such as Smithson.68

As the most mobile members of society strangers also can also be described as ‘outriders’ of the transformations between the global and the local. Nikos Papastergiadis critiques

65 Papastergiadis, Nikos. The Exile in Modernity, 1993, p. 10
67 Ibid. p. 21
Simmel’s representation of the stranger because of the ‘almost imperceptible elision’\textsuperscript{69} between the figure of the stranger and the process of estrangement as a trope for creative and critical thinking. In relation to my argument and study into what I am calling the \textit{Mutation of Migration}, Simmel’s writing has provided a seam to follow. There is a powerful connection between migration and the necessity to create and the concept of the stranger encapsulated in this connection. In agreement with Papastergiadis there would appear to me to be value in emphasising the space of the journey, which encompasses the \textit{dialectic}\textsuperscript{70} of here and there, centre and periphery and so on. This might mean that the complexity of the situation can be considered rather than polarised.

I wanted in writing this chapter to look to some writers on migration and its mutations in order to begin defining a subjective condition and a kind of perpetual movement commonly experienced in the world beyond, and by me. The work here began in relation to what will later follow—a discussion of the \textit{View from the Sixty Third Floor} series which spans over ten years produced partly in response to my own condition of transience and strangeness.\textsuperscript{71} The section on the Grid in Chapter Five will assist in providing a focus for the translation of the exploratory reading in this chapter into a cohesive visual form. Though I am first a visual artist, working in the Writing and Society Research Group has given me an incentive and impetus to try to develop a voice as a creative writer. There is much that I will continue to work on of my own discontinued narratives after this project is complete.

My choice of Smithson who is the subject of the next chapter was partly on the basis of his being someone who ekphrasically brought writing into art and art into writing. The

\textsuperscript{69} Papastergiadis, N., \textit{The Turbulence of Migration}, 2002, p. 69

\textsuperscript{70} \textit{dialectic} in the sense that Robert Smithson uses it, which encompasses dialectical opposites, and intends to provoke an encompassing conversation with what lies in between.

\textsuperscript{71} Images of \textit{View from the Sixty Third Floor}, the sequential grass works are to be found in Figures 2-10 p. 166 – 169.
choice was also on the basis of his being an artist who used the earth —famously bringing the earth into art during the sixties with *Spiral Jetty*. The development of my own grass work makes a crossing of the two forms. The surface of the grass cast ‘carpets’ are in fact the ‘texts’ of a migrant —myself. However, I also wanted to try to write creatively in ways which would develop my own voice in written words on a page. Chapter One includes *The Black* where this happens. Autobiography, art and criticism and their relationship to other themes selected in this chapter’s collage of writers.
Chapter Three

How does Migration Studies coincide with Robert Smithson?

Chapter Two surveys some reading on mutations, migrations and mobilities since the advent of modernity. I am positioning myself amidst this chaos particularly in relation to Julia Kristeva’s research on the exile. Kristeva’s writing on abjection also has been helpful in thinking about institutional boundaries that have been part of my own exile, as well as my personal history as a migrant.

In terms of ficto-criticism my inclusion of Smithson has helped to span a range of my own interests and locations in all its mutational, metamorphosing and transplanting scope. In the choice of Smithson, there’s the possibility of referencing some of my own
odd mix of cultural influences into a more unified global concern for environmental issues, which Smithson developed around the concept of *entropy*.

Among the various strands to which I refer is my own Tasmanian connectedness to the environment; but then there is also a Northern English influence — that mining imagery that relates to something subliminally to do with Blakean vision, which can be perceived in his visionary imagery and writing, the effects of the Industrial Revolution. I was born in Wigan, made famous by George Orwell’s *Road to Wigan Pier*, and re-visited by feminist Marxist Beatrix Campbell in her book *Wigan Pier Revisited*. Mining and industry were a profound part of my growing up, as was the knowledge that I was in a place that out of necessity and hardship had been called the ‘birthplace of Socialism.’ *The Black I think* has a lot to do with Wigan and mines. There is in Smithson as choice, also a relationship to art history via the United States where I have travelled and studied some of the late Modernists whom Smithson worked both with and against.1 Cultural cringe, being the south to the more important north is what many involved in Australian culture continue to accept as a given. Smithson’s spatialising of the world gives me a way to think about that distance. Very significantly however in my choice, is that Smithson is a visual artist who theorised about *contexts* of artistic production.

I regard Smithson as a role model in interdisciplinary travel. Many lines of flight began with his work, and continue with their own trajectories. He was sometimes accused of ‘raping the environment’ with works such as Spiral Jetty. I see where this is coming from but much worse damage gets done to the environment than the construction of the breathtaking Spiral Jetty. I admire the way such work has contributed to an awareness of the earth — by its incorporation into art, in such an aesthetically convincing way — especially implicating earth, in the Heideggerian sense as an enabler of creativity.

Smithson is regarded as a major figure by writers including Rosalind Krauss, James

---

1 In 1990 I went, thanks to an Australia Council grant, to New York to the Greene St studio to study the work of Eva Hesse and Cy Twombly.
Meyer, Lucy Lippard, Jennifer L. Roberts as well as the more recent people to whom I have referred such as Miwan Kwon and Amanda Boetzkes and as a decisive point in art history. Reading extensively on Smithson has helped to fill in some gaps regarding codes and assumptions that I took on as a young artist in the 1980s when what I understand now as a Smithson-related influence must have permeated the Australian scene. A cultural migrant from a then unsophisticated Tasmania I stepped into many assumptions that were being made regarding site-specific practice. Why had the frame disappeared? My now expanded reading into these related fields has been in itself valuable. Smithson prioritised the idea of de-centring, moving away from centres and hierarchies — though always eager to stay in the vanguard of ideas. He might be a forerunner of the artists run initiative. Living precariously as a newcomer artist to Sydney I have had to mostly patch together a practice and frequently had to make a virtue out of lack. Like many artists, we have to become adept in many ways to survive —administering our own work, developing projects, imagining curatorial contexts. Smithson’s celebration of Passaic, his return to make a work in his daggy home suburb and its integration into the mainstream New York art world, appealed to me as I experience myself as still an outsider in Sydney — my for the time being, adopted city. In *Monuments of Passaic* also Smithson celebrates liminal spaces and is disparaging of the monument.

**Key linkages addressed in this chapter.**

My research has endeavoured to create an overlap between aspects of Smithson’s practice and also the field of Migration Studies. In this paper, three domains of knowledge — Migration, Post-Minimalism and Smithson as well as a subjectivity come together most explicitly in the grass works produced during the Doctorate particularly *Liverpool/Liverpool: the skin of translation*. Some points of intersection in these fields could include:

* An insistence on a spatial and interdisciplinary understanding: The journey is a temporal form Smithson frequently used enabling the folding in of ideas subsequently discussed in this chapter. His practice relied on his lifelong knowledge of the sciences of
geology and crystallography. Movements, journeys, shifts of location and references to locations as polar opposites are thematically and formally present throughout Smithson’s work says Boettger, ‘His writing crossed horizons and mixed literary genres into a fusion absorbing travelogue, diaristic reflections and poetry.’ Smithson’s references are useful to think about the implications of migration globally and its accelerated dilemmas. He focuses on oppositions as manifestations of fundamental existential concerns, such as centre/periphery, image/text, ephemeral/permanent, life and death, here and there—the complex space of hybridity and animation rather than an A to B, an either/or. The Site/Nonsite form that I make central in bringing my practice into a relationship with Smithson’s is explained below.

* Underlying subjective trauma, what could be described as a rupture or wound. Mirror Travels is a confrontation with what is in reality the horror of entropy (as well as the death of Smithson’s brother). Mirror Travels deconstructs the cultural stratifications of the Colonial history of North America in a way that could be applied to the Australian landscape. Travelling or migrating can refer to the possibility of transcending trauma. Smithson’s Mirror Travels in the Yucatan project takes him straight into his own unconscious pain.

* Sequencing in time. Mirror Travels in the Yucatan exists in multiple forms and nine different locations. It is threaded, externalised, and extended by written language. In the choice of this interdisciplinary work, I wanted to imply recognition of the temporal and spatial in thinking about globalisation and glocalisation as well as the multiplying and increasing chaos of trajectories of migration. Mirror Travels is a work produced with mirrors — the mirror becomes a painting, yet it is a mirror, a receiver of what surrounds it. One form dissolves seamlessly into another. The carpet images that I have made since 1997 record a sequence in time. Each responds to its particular site. They relate obtusely to the Boronia garden and other works in that there is a significant aerial viewpoint.

• The artist and the exile frequently are concurrent categories. I associate Smithson’s work with the migratory in its restless, transitioning expansiveness. He is an

---

interdisciplinary traveller. His concepts traverse different systems of knowledge. Bal applauds the notion of travel as a process of the discovery of ignorance of which Smithson’s *Mirror Travels* is almost emblematic.

* The overlap of Smithson and migration enables a focal point to develop on the use of earth as a meeting place of migrant/Aboriginal cultures with regard to ecology. As I say in the introduction, ‘In line with Heidegger’s thinking, I propose that art can be thought of as ecology and the artist as ecologist, as the transplantation/transplanter of the creativity of earth into the creativity of art. Here art becomes commensurate with, and faithful to, what earth is.’ (See footnote 4 p. xv)

* Grass or ‘turf” has been a material of choice in the production of major works produced during this Doctorate. Though not in a specific ‘earth art’ category (I use a wide range of materials) I will establish some bearings with other earth related practices, especially Smithson’s. In *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: a Rough Guide*, Mieke Bal uses the word focalisation to describe a ‘narrative inflection of imagining, interpreting and perception that can but need not be visual imaging...narratives and images have envisioning as their common form of reception.’ The key words of this thesis all refer in one way or another to transitions and movements. This is a way of focalising my concerns. I think that the inference after reading Mieke Bal’s writing is that this concept, focalising enables a communication between narratives and the visual.

Key concepts addressed in relation to Robert Smithson’s work are: Site /Nonsite,

*Entropy, Earth and Time and Exile, Presence and Absence*

---

This chapter draws on the visual work—art objects, assemblages, installations, etc—as well as writings and creative administration of Robert Smithson⁴ to introduce his key concerns (listed above). Not only do such concerns inform his work, I claim they are given singular force in *Incidents of Mirror Travel in the Yucatan*, a work my thesis takes as privileged and will examine closely. The work of this chapter provides the ground to my argument in Chapter Three that the concept of the stranger and certain key implications of Migration Studies are central to my own post-Minimalist art projects. A major aspect of the chapter is an examination of the thematics of *Mirror Travels*, a work, which based in Dante’s *Inferno*,⁵ foregrounds the moral journey, which Smithson, like Robert Rauschenberg⁶ contemporised from the thirteenth century poem. Robert Smithson’s practice says Tsai performs a Dante-esque journey, not only in space but in time presenting us with a profound and profoundly moral intervention in the ancient and recent past upon which his images of possible futures act.⁷

In Chapter Two I have done speculative reading about the twentieth century figure of the stranger who has had to re-invent herself through creative output. As a migrant, I have had to do the same, the result of my loss of an accustomed, established, familiar local and historical context, the displacement integral to the nature of migration and the migrant, and a desire to articulate what Nikos Papastergiadis describes as unspoken secrets of the ‘discontinued narratives of migration’ which in Chapter Two, I claim make of the migrant a stranger, including to herself, necessitating a reinvention. This experience of

⁴ Administration is an inadequate word to refer to the process that presumably occurred in Smithson’s works such as Spiral Jetty which must have involved considerable organisation. The bringing into being of such a work required operations or performing in the actual world with skillful administrative agility. I want to recognize these aspects of the work as significant and part of their process and meaning. There was pioneering taking place on many levels.

http://www.members.tripod.com/AJ_Gonzalez/Dante.gif
http://novaonline.nvcc.edu/eli/eng252/danteques.htm

⁶ Robert Rauschenberg contemporised the *Inferno* with a series of lithographs housed at MOMA

exile has compelled me to reflect deeply upon not only the nature of social institutions in shaping and transforming the individual but the transplanting intrinsic to migration and, integral to that, my relationship to the earth, where in Australia white culture which colonised this land is barely a skin on the surface of an ancient place. This understanding has informed the major projects discussed in Chapters Four and Five.

**Art historical bearings**

Smithson’s practice came to an early end in 1973, when his plane crashed over one of his sites, the *Amarillo Ramp*. That was approximately the time that ancient Aboriginal traditions were being transposed onto a western format, the canvas. As a white Australian, and as an artist born in England, I find it crucial to take bearings on two tendencies in contemporary art practice, the gallery and site-specificity as I think about how I define my practice as a contemporary artist who uses earth as a primary material. Smithson’s work is recognised by most major commentators as at the forefront in thinking about our relationship to earth, time and place as well as to exile and displacement. His contribution to site-specific practice, that many of my contemporaries and I now take as a given is enormous — including those like myself, for whom migration has constituted a *re-siting*, which once begun, continues without end.

1. *Site/Nonsite* refers to Smithson’s works that operate between an external location and a gallery.9

**Extending the space of Minimalism**

---


9 Ibid., p. 59.
In his famous essay *Art and Objecthood* Michael Fried describes Tony Smith’s drive through the unfinished New Jersey Turnpike in 1963. To Smith the experience offered a richer, multi-sensory experience than most of the gallery art he was seeing.\(^\text{10}\) This was the significant moment when the end of painting seemed immanent. This moment signified the end of the dominance of the pictorial and an illustration of how sixties art was exploring an ever expanding site. The Minimalist artists conceived this expansion as a broadening of art’s formal and experiential potential and Meyer claims that it confirmed Greenberg’s view of minimal art as ‘theatrical’ and therefore as non-art, that is in Greenberg’s terms.\(^\text{11}\)

Smithson extended Minimalism into the environment beyond the gallery spaces he perceived as creating its limitation. His practice allowed for a considerable shift in the interpretation of our relationship to space, which I hope subsequently to demonstrate is useful in the thinking of migration, or more specifically the state of exile as described by Kristeva.\(^\text{12}\) The *Site/Nonsite* works of Smithson are typified by *The Spiral Jetty* (Utah, 1972) *Monuments of Passaic* (New Jersey, 1970) and *Mirror Travels* (Yucatan, Mexico 1969). These are three examples of Smithson’s processes of production, which were made and documented in remote deserts of Utah, his hometown Passaic, New Jersey, and the Yucatan Peninsula. The ‘art’ of Smithson occurs between and inclusive of these locations. *Sites* were in and of the landscape; the *Nonsites* appeared in the gallery space often using rocks and earth from the *Site* and mirrors or metal containers, which establish a relationship between the two places. Also included in the *Nonsite* productions are his writing, photographs, films, as well as maps, diagrams and other signifiers of the processes of the work’s development. It is the rich interweaving of these many forms that introduces the sense that I describe as migratory, transitory or pertaining to movement.

\(^{10}\) Fried, Michael, *Art and Objecthood* Artforum, 1969.


think that a link is possible to be drawn from some of the new ways of defining migration to the fluidity and inclusiveness of binaries, that Smithson produced. His works also frequently took the form of the journey bringing a temporal dimension, which operated in Smithson’s practice as a personal and historical intrusion into existing time. There is also a concern for the local at the same time as having a global spatial sense as is indicated in the *Dallas Forth Airport Project*. Time and its relativity to deep space is significantly part of this proposal that never came to pass. I have referred to Smithson’s use of the aerial perspective of the earth because clearly the airport is representative of global travel, but also the aerial position is in contrast to the deep dark hole in the ground of an abject misery/entropy. One tries to understand one’s afflictions.

Julia Kristeva claims it is possible to interpret the *Inferno* in the light of the knowledge that Dante was exiled from Florence during the time it was written (between 1307 and 1323). *The Nine Displacements* have been shown by Tsai to have clear numerical links to the poem’s nine circles. In Dante’s Hell there are nine circles each denoting a different crime and a different punishment. The Hell in New Testament and modern belief is the final punishment and retribution for all unrighteous. Eugie Tsai’s book

---

13 Fluidity is possibly the right word for a way of thinking which is never pre-packaged and which is always provisional. Taken from a section in *Mirror Travels*, p. 41 Jennifer L. Roberts. Smithson’s work moved in all directions at the same time. Smithson’s fascination with crystallography is a poetic understanding based on reading into the science of how crystals come into being. Jennifer L. Roberts writes in her book *Mirror Travels* in regard to his fascination with the formation of crystals that these often involved molecular misalignments —these allow a crystal to grow; it does not prevent but compels the deposition of a solid crystal structure. The expansion and growth of crystals in Smithson’s idiosyncratic view is a spiral built around a fault line which cause endless displacements. I reference elsewhere Deleuze’s reference to crystals as representative of shifts between the real and the virtual. Like film’s sequences —static images are joined together with spaces in between. *Mirrored Ziggurat* has a pellicular quality —like a stack of films.


16 Gary Shapiro mentions Eugie Tsai, in *Mapping Robert Smithson* writes of the importance of maps and cartography to Smithson. She also draws attention to his drawing on the literary model of the *Divine Comedy. Earthwards*, p. 187.
Unearthed\textsuperscript{17} looks at Smithson’s earlier figurative paintings from where his imagery developed. There is much affliction and confusion in these paintings, which often take nineteenth century mystical poet/artist William Blake as their reference point amidst post-industrial damages to the environment. Suffice to say here, that he finds aesthetic resolution for his internal and external conflicts in the mature Site/Nonsite works of the sixties. There is a major shift away from figuration.

As already stated, Smithson’s practice includes his printed matter. According to Jack Flam in the introduction of Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings,\textsuperscript{18} this was a further attempt by him to engage with the grid. Smithson’s obscure journeys, actions and semi-permanent interventions would not be known to us now without these regular publications in major art magazines such as Artforum. While Smithson speaks of his desire to demolish the grid he continued to use it. His early sixties figurative paintings of monsters and dinosaurs incorporated a grid in their compositional structuring.

Smithson’s practice is useful to me in its articulation across forms and disciplines of rhizomatic versatility —in a Deleuzian sense. Smithson saw and treated the whole world as a giant text.\textsuperscript{20} Much of our understanding of content of the work arises from verbal supplements supplied by the artist. Robert Smithson’s writings and artworks are inextricably interconnected and as Jack Flam points out, they are part of the same undertaking. Many of his ‘sculptures’ incorporate text and many printed articles incorporate images.\textsuperscript{21} The act of writing —like the activities of drawing, mapping, mirroring, digging, diagramming, filming and photographing were all part of Smithson’s

\textsuperscript{17} Tsai, Eugie, \textit{Robert Smithson Unearthed: Drawings, Collages, Writings}, Colombia University, Press, New York, 1991.


\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., p. iii

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., p. iii
process, and the Site/Nonsite form is a clear indication of this. The work lives in the space between the Site and the Nonsite.

A section in Chapter Five will discuss the grid that is based on an essay by Rosalind Krauss, *Grids You Say*, written in 1966 for an exhibition by that name. The synthesising possibilities of the grid as realised in the practical component of my work for this Doctoral project on migrations and mutations are a key figure in the thought threaded through this text. *The View from the Sixty Third Floor* series are the most overt expression of my own connection to this.

The imagery that I have produced, that is substantially my thesis also relies on an understanding of the grid in twentieth century imagery (expanded further in the last chapter) that Rosalind Krauss has attributed to the advent of science’s transformation of creation myths. In the chaos of movements and transformations of Modernity and Post-Modernity, the grid might be seen as a constant for my investigation — it enables massive diversity to be woven into endlessly different patterns.

![Image](image_url)

**Figure 1:** From left to right: Works by Robert Smithson include, mirrored and glass sculptures *Untitled* (1963), *Mirror Statum* – similar to Ziggurat, Red-Sandstone Nonsite.

---

The gridded images of the twentieth century can be viewed as a history of innovations (mutations) both internal to the subject and external. The two works of Smithson called, Untitled (1963) with their inset mirrors are among the most literal exemplification of the idea of the altered space of the work that the *Site/Nonsites* project continued to develop. Mirrored surfaces are set into a framework, which supports the reflections of a concatenated interior. The interior surfaces of the room, says Smithson in a description of his own work, are instantaneously undermined. The surfaces seem thrown back into the wall that are extended spaces of the mirroring, In *Untitled 1963* for example, and in a number of the first non-representational gallery sculptures there is a formal aesthetic logic, which stretches into all of his works including the *Writings*. Smithson’s practice relies on the grid at the same time as he abandons it, says Rosalind Krauss. The crystal image is derived from his interest in popular science fiction, and is an approximate symbol of de-centred centredness.

Smithson uses the system of abstraction to address the transformed understanding of space he was devising and presenting in his works. Jennifer L. Roberts quotes Rosalind Krauss in *Mirror Travels* as saying that Smithson’s bi-cameral vision was perhaps his major revelation. His motivation for *The Endomorphic Chambers* was the changing of the ‘I’ into the ‘eyes’ and a shift towards spatial awareness, which was inclusive.

---

23 Robert Smithson catalogue organised by Eugie Tsai with Cornelia Butler for the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 2004, show illustrations of these “crystal” sculptures that reflect the world beyond them. At the end of *An Interview with Robert Smithson* by Moira Roth, p. 118-121.


25 Ibid., quoting from Rosalind Krauss’s *Grids you Say* essay p. 49-51

26 Ibid., Enantiomorphism provides (like a mirroring quality of crystals) provides a model of resemblance, repetition, and reflection —it constitutes says roberts an identity riven by alterity. Indeed she says the fault line, central axis, or hinge of the enantiomorphic relation encapsulates the empty centre of post-Modern subjectivity. p. 49.

Smithson’s *Site/Nonsite* works, which began to appear around 1964, were refusing the gallery format as the primary site for art, and New York at its centre. This aspiration led to many artists abandoning the art world altogether. There continues now to be a plethora of ways to be an artist outside and inside the ‘system’. Art practices now manifest globally incorporating multitudinous sites and forms. Smithson has been written into twentieth century art history by several major theorists including Krauss and Lippard as initiating a number of breakthroughs including his ‘team player’ or collaborative approach to making work —his projects required groups of workers and participants. Certainly the recognition of the collective art practice as opposed to a singular one persists and expands. See Papastergiadis’ references to ‘the hybrid and the cluster as positive re-formations and open–ended points of enquiry in the massive flux of migratory influences that now exist in our globalised condition.’

Smithson’s early earthworks had a relationship to painting in that they occurred against the backdrop of Jackson Pollock’s practice. Smithson admired Pollock but described his work as lacking ‘composition,’ or structure, and seems to have wanted to reject what T. J. Clark calls the *vulgarity* of abstract expressionism. Asphalt Rundown is the title of an image of a large truck tipping a load of asphalt into a disused mine, creating a magnificent pour. The spill or pour’s fluid quality is not difficult to compare with the drip of Pollock. This occurred in Rome in 1969. It represented a commentary of Smithson’s own on the drip of Pollock. After Smith’s journey Smithson saw the necessity of incorporating the wider world with its substances and processes into a ‘work’.

---


Unearthed, Tsai’s book about Smithson’s early work, one clearly sees Smithson as a painter. Looking at actual works of Smithson’s in situ one sees they have a powerful connection to the history of painting. I say this also in relation to this use of colour, which is incorporated as a reflection in the mirrors, such as is evident in Mirror Travels in Yucatan. The mirror remains constant and yet catches everything around it. The word site also has a double reference to the word sight that Greenberg and Fried had privileged over other senses. Returning once more to the Tony Smith car ride, we see the beginning of the critique of the Greenbergian privilege of sight.

The Asphalt Rundown was a painting or a performance, or an action or all the above. In a consideration of what the content is arising from the genre or medium of an artwork of Smithson’s we need first of all to determine what that genre is. Asphalt Rundown (1969) continued in the tradition of painting. At the same time it is deconstructing the practice ‘by emphasising how the essentially entropic nature of the act of pouring differs from the individualistic gesture of painting.’ It is a performance in its process of arriving on the landscape, tipped ceremoniously from a truck. This work said Stella forced all thoughtful artists to seriously reconsider the role of touch and surface in painting. The Asphalt Rundown occurred in the wake of several intensive years of discussion regarding the merits of abstract Expressionism, Greenbergian High Modernism and the machismo of this genre. Smithson is stepping away from painting by this gesture of pouring. He does not return says Flam, like Marcel Duchamp, Smithson started out as a painter and found painting inadequate to what he wanted to do. Jack Flam thought that

33 ibid p. 14
reading Smithson encouraged one to reconsider a number of things one might have taken for granted, such as what he described as the question of artistic unity and how it might be settled or left unsettled. Flam goes on to say that in many aspects of Smithson’s work he brought together what seemed to be impossible polarities and made them meaningful precisely because of the dialectical tensions that cannot be satisfactorily resolved. The Site/Nonsites create an opportunity to work within and amongst these oppositions and difficult to resolve tensions, setting up what Smithson describes after Hegel as a dialectic.37 Spiral Jetty for instance brings together the ancient indigenous site, with its proximity to the place where the east and the western ends of the trans American railway joined at the Golden Spike, Lucin Cutoff in Salt Lake, Utah in 1869.

According to Jack Flam, throughout his Writings, Smithson makes persistent attacks on the categories of painting, sculpture and architecture. ‘Given this, it is doubly ironic that most recent art histories place him in the earthworks or earth art catagory.’38 He goes on to claim that Smithson’s practice transcended not only traditional categories but also what ‘being an artist entailed,’ and ‘he saw the activity as going beyond the creation of objects, and as an ongoing process that involved an engagement with both abstract ideas and specific material presences... Smithson says Flam, put a premium on his freedom to act outside traditional definitions and expectations, and to maintain a constant tension between a number of polar oppositions: image and word, object and idea, inside and outside, presence and absence.’39 This diversity makes his work rich in associations with the mutational possibilities of the migratory—which is evidenced in the way aspects of Smithson’s practice have metamorphosed over the last three decades into multiple new possibilities.

37 Ibid., p.157.
Smithson saw precedents for his earthworks in Frederick Law Olmsted, the nineteenth century landscape designer whom he regarded as America’s first earth artist. Olmsted designed Central Park in New York. In his essay *Frederick Law Olmsted and the Dialectical Landscape*, Smithson begins with an opening paragraph about the site of Central Park one million years ago. He regards the design, like his own *Site/Nonsite* works as processes in time, this included the geological and paleontological pasts, as well as sites to be viewed as if from space, cosmologically or astronomically. Central Park Smithson says is a ground-work of necessity and chance, a range of contrasting viewpoints that are forever fluctuating, yet solidly based in the earth. He also looked to the impact of more recent history. The site of Central Park was, he says, the result of urban blight —the early settlers without any thought of the future cut down trees. Smithson also preferred to work with sites that had been disrupted by industry, reckless urbanisation or nature’s devastation for his Earthworks. Examples of these are *The Spiral Jetty, The Broken Circle* and *Spiral Hill* as well as *Monuments of Passaic*.

With reference to space again, Smithson’s essay *Aerial Art* gives us another indication of the scale of Smithson’s enterprise. Smithson wrote an unsuccessful application for the Dallas-Fort Worth Regional Airport, intending to ‘make us more aware of the new landscape.’ The entire airport was considered conceptually as an artificial universe. Its focus he says in the same essay was on “non-visual space” and time. He began to shape an aesthetic based on the airport as an idea, and not simply as a mode of transportation.

---


41 Ibid. p.157.


The airport is but a dot in the vast infinity of universes, an imperceptible point in cosmic immensity, a speck in an impenetrable nowhere, and aerial art reflects this vastness.\textsuperscript{45} \textit{Spiral Jetty} was made, and filmed from an aerial vantage point, one now readily available via satellite imagery. Much of Smithson’s imagery implied simultaneity of vision that is now capable of being manifest through the virtual space of the internet. Space and distance are highly deliberated in the work of Smithson. The \textit{Site/Nonsite} works exist in the expanded and inclusive space of here and there, and the theme of absence and presence are exemplified by the use of mirrors in \textit{Mirror Travels in the Yucatan}.\textsuperscript{46}

Smithson’s processes create historical overlays through the use of film and photographic and process work. By viewing various films made by Smithson during the production of \textit{Spiral Jetty}, one is exposed through the medium of the voiceover and the aerial photography and other collaged imagery, the thinking during the production of the work. The film made during and after the construction of the spiral was finished, as well as the essay \textit{The Spiral Jetty},\textsuperscript{47} significantly brought the presence of the earth into contemporary practice, and lead us into important questions about what it means to make art in this era—in relation to the perception that nature is damaged.

In relation to my own inquiry into migration and transplanting I see Smithson’s research into extreme contrasts as between the immediate present and the most remote geological past, or between the enormity of the earth itself and the significance that can be contained by a small section of it, needs to be focussed upon. A movement, journeys, shifts of

\textsuperscript{46} Roberts, Jennifer L., \textit{Mirror Travels: Robert Smithson and History}, 2004, p. 67
\textsuperscript{48} In Chapter One, \textit{The Black} describes a transition as similar to being in a lift shaft of a building being demolished. There is an attempt to define some of the process of displacement.
\textsuperscript{49} Roberts, Jennifer L., \textit{Mirror Travels} references a change in the demographic of Passaic in relation to race relations. Smithson had the ‘time crystal model of history’ that referenced the intersection of his personal intersection with history and the collective history.
location and references to locations as polar opposites are thematically and formally present throughout Smithson’s work.48

In Chapter Two some Migration theorists are introduced whose writings have created understandings of current global mobilities and migratory trends as well as the internal discombobulations, altered states of the migrant. Smithson’s imagery starts to aid my visual understanding in that it incorporates, as well as visualisations of space, emotional processes of his own transiting experiences such as we see in Monuments of Passaic and Mirror Travels in the Yucatan. Significantly both artworks are based metaphorically and physically around the journey. Monuments is infused with Smithson’s own childhood memories as well as observations about race and other social relations.49 Mirror Travels in the Yucatan takes us into Smithson’s obsession with entropy which he confesses many of his own internal ‘fractures and fissures.’50 Yet entropy is also related to what is created by migration and industrialisation at the beginning of the nineteenth century and the irreconcilable tensions with the landscape that were produced. Smithson’s practice is valuable in that it acknowledges this reality and does not idealise a solution. He recognises his own profound malaise about the death of his brother prior to his birth and whether or not in the guise of entropy he confronts it. In Incidents of Mirror Travels in the Yucatan he also synthesises themes and forms relating to movement and mobility.

Smithson’s use of the temporal journey follows on from his pre-1960s figurative images, which specifically refer to Dante’s Divine Comedy such as Walls of Dis, Inferno,

50 Robert Smithson, catalogue organised by Eugie Tsai with Cornelia Butler, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 2004. Suzaan Boetgger In the Yucatan: Mirroring Presence and Absence p. 200


Paradise and Purgatory. Dis was a shadowy city containing the lowest region of the netherworld and is drawn from Canto VIII of the Inferno.  

2. Entropy

Entropy was a popular theory at the time of Smithson’s practice (1960-73). It presupposes an initial order and a deterioration of that order. Robert Smithson made entropy his motto though other artists were attracted by the idea. Entropy took a variety of forms says Yves Alain Bois, such as accumulation and infinite profusion, such as Arman’s trash cans, by degradation, Gardon Matta-Clark’s brûlages and tearing in the case of Richard Serra’s torn lead are all works connected to the entropic.

Entropy involved the idea that the world was winding down, that energy was escaping and that it would finally run out. In an essay titled, Entropy and the New Monuments, Smithson wrote about the monumental, usually hard edge minimal sculpture of artists such as Ronald Bladen, Sol Lewitt, Robert Morris, Donald Judd, Robert Grosvenor and others, as monuments of the past, as monumental sculpture had once done, but monuments to cause us to forget the future which is winding down, in a way that he predicted would create something like a new Ice Age. This theory seems to have undergone some major transformations and to a large degree been discredited. Other theories have now surfaced such as global warming that clearly has wide scientific currency. For Smithson entropy provided a conceptual framework for thinking about social and industrial spaces such as the suburbs of New Jersey, urban sprawl, and ugly shopping centres and depleted mine sites.

The British practice of Regeneration is a massive enterprise in post-Thatcher years to revitalise cities that have declined economically and culturally. It is also a response to problems presented by profusely shifting populations. Visiting Liverpool UK, I found not only the place of my childhood but also a confluence of two major strands of this exegesis. Liverpool UK had been until recently substantially a slum. It had been badly damaged as a result of World War 2 bombing and many sites remain in that condition until recent developments occurred. Its massive creative transformation has lead to its becoming Cultural Capital of Europe 2008. This was one of my interests in pursuing research on the idea of the mutation in relation to migration there. Understanding the (at the time) radical processes of Smithson, has contributed to my understanding of the history of this zone of endeavour. There is a trend in urban development to incorporate the creative input of artists and other creators. Miwan Kwon has critiqued developments in public and community developments commenting that much of the work now is complicit rather than critical with what have often become gentrified locations.

The practice of Regeneration presented itself at the Glocal Imaginaries Conference, and this inspired my visit to the derelict outer suburb of Liverpool called Kirby, where I experienced this process in action. Interdisciplinary teams creative people including architects, designers, writers, anthropologists, linguist, demographers are brought into a under-developed site where there is no social cohesion and process the area to make it more habitable – less prone to crime and so on. Smithson thought that entropic spaces, such as one frequently finds in resettled parts of cities where new populations are often moving through whilst developing more stable means, were important places to work against entropic decline. Later on in this paper I outline the development of a garden

54 This was at an event called Urbanisation 09 in a suburb of Liverpool called Kirby. A range of expertise including artists, writers, demographers, urban planners, anthropologists were brought into a derelict neighborhood to revitalise it. I had not witnessed this kind of co-operative, inter-disciplinary intervention on location.


project in a prison, which I propose as a variation of Smithson’s entropic spaces. My work in these zones that often include migrant and indigenous inmates has contributed to my interest in Regeneration as a practice.

Boetzkes notes that earth art brings into view the degree to which natural processes are present within our lives.57 The effects of entropy were possible for Smithson to measure by the damage to the environment. Hence in his work is the recurrence of the earth. The reality of damage to the environment is exposed in Smithson’s use of these and other ‘wastelands.’58 This poem was about post-war London. Smithson wrote sardonically that in their blandness the urban ruins may hold, the ‘secrets of the universe, which might be as dreary as a parking lot,’ The Monuments of Passaic represented a return to Smithson’s earlier life and a way of enabling a fusion of his past with the present.

Eugie Tsai claims that the journey as a form grew out of his early experiences as well as his study of the writing of Dante that influenced Mirror Travels.59 The Inferno is a poem, a narrative, a journey through Hell, up the mountain of Purgatory and through the revolving heavens into the presence of God. I will later look to the Yucatan writing of Smithson, but this metaphorical idea of the journey implied passing through various difficult transitional phases, suicides, sicknesses, turning over rocks to see what lay beneath, experiencing horrendous loss and so on.60 I refer again to Marina Warner’s writing in her chapter about mutating, that Hell opposed to Heaven was state of foment

58 T. S. Elliot’s poem is referenced.
and breeding hybrid monster, mutations. Smithson’s work *Mirror Travels* critiqued the ‘progress’ of Western civilisation as it referenced the nineteenth century explorer’s travels amidst the ruins of the Yucatan. Simultaneously, it is by his own confession, touching on a tragedy that occurred in his own family with the death of his brother prior to his birth. One sees in this work that the whole idea of entropy provided Smithson with an encompassing concept to describe a perception of life draining away. In the photograph of the ‘monuments,’ pipes, bridges, pontoon sand a sandbox, *Monuments of Passaic* more entropy being represented. In this work we are very far from a painting, a ‘sculpture’ or even a photograph. The instamatic snaps are another element in his account. We step with him from the hub of the New York art world onto a bus and through the various ‘monuments.’ This journey became a well-worn track that Smithson and his wife, sculptor Nancy Holt took friends to see. Transitional processes are part of both series.

As mentioned earlier the *Nonsites* might manifest in a gallery as rocks in a steel box or a hexagonal structure, which contains rocks or earth, connecting it to a location miles away from the gallery. Smithson’s ‘monuments’ are largely understood through the writings he did and other verbal supplements of the artist. The essay, *A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic* reads like a travelogue or a journal entry. The day out is in itself the artwork, the trip to New Jersey in contrast to the staid but respectable listings of the art shows in the newspaper, which Smithson is sitting on the bus reading as he recounts. There are references to landscape painters being sold in auction rooms. Without the verbal

---

61 Flam, Jack, is commenting on Robert Smithson’s essay *Monuments of Passaic*, p.ii.


64 Flam, Jack, Introduction, p.vi.

supplement of the essay, the meaning (and Smithson’s place in the artworld) would be lost. The monuments and their photographic imaging may not be regarded as ‘art’ at all.

Robert Smithson sought an artworld that would be continuous even to some degree coterminous with the real world, but at the same time would go beyond surface appearances and transcend the realm of the organic: an art that could evoke the furthest reaches of time and the remote and incomprehensible notions of space.\textsuperscript{65} In contrast to the humanistic and organic, his writings and images posit the notion of the ‘crystalline,’ a glacial and impersonal concept that disdains viewing from a single portion of time and space \textit{Spiral Jetty’s} form and construction are ‘crystalline.’\textsuperscript{66}

3. Earth and Time

\textbf{Mirror Travels in Yucatan Project}

The \textit{Incidents of Mirror Travel in the Yucatan} (1969) is a \textit{Site/Nonsite} work and can be referenced in relation to a discussion of Smithson’s use of earth and time as primary media. This work continues to exist from the temporal installations at various locations on the Yucatan Peninsula because it was photographically and textually documented. It came after \textit{Monuments of Passaic}, and is a development of that form relating to an actual journey. Below I will be considering the content arising from the genre or medium of the artwork. As well as being most significantly made of earth these works are performances,

\textsuperscript{66} Crystalline. According to Roberts Smithson had not read Deleuze and Guattari, though he was reading some of the French Structuralist writers such as Levi Strauss and Michel Foucault. According to the Deleuze Dictionary a crystalline structure is a process in Deleuze’s schema, and is also a place of exchange that is enacted between the real and the virtual. Bergson’s concept of a ‘reflective perception’ described in the 1896 book \textit{Matter and Memory}. The crystal is a philosophical mechanism that is illustrative of concept production. ‘The crystal’s states of formation, mutation and transformation are thus effects of different processes of time.

\textsuperscript{67} Boetzkes, Amanda, \textit{The Ethics of Earth Art}. 2010, p. 63.

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., p. 63
diaries of events, and also photographs of the low-key imagery, which revealed plant life, rocks and landscape. *The Ethics of Earth Art* written in 2010 has been referenced as a current critique of this genre.\(^67\) In it, Earth, claims Boetzkes, presents an ethical stance because it is a receptive surface. Earth, the material withdraws and defies representation and describes what she called an aesthetics of ruination — *Spiral Jetty* describes a sense of loss.\(^68\)

The scale of most of Smithson’s *Sites*, included vast areas of earth and landscape. Also, significantly defying representation are the sounds, smells, light and weather conditions. Time is/was intrinsically an element of these locations. Smithson was opposed to the monument, the marker of time and history. Yet we see how in *Spiral Jetty* for instance, the marking of time and history is very much part of its content, placed near to the Golden Spike where east and west train lines met in 1869 at Promontory Summit, Utah. This work does have a ‘monumental’ aspect to it. Unlike the non-monuments of Passaic, an association is made to a monumental moment in American history.\(^69\)

Early in Smithson’s career he wrote essays, which began to articulate his questioning of the institutions, museum practices, criticism, the gallery, which Gary Shapiro says could be read as early manifestoes of post-modern art. Smithson, Shapiro acknowledges recognised the strategic and philosophical necessity of challenging the modernist view of history and time.\(^70\) I refer above to *Entropy and the New Monuments* that indicate Smithson’s preoccupation and relationship to entropy and history and also the effects of technology, that have lead to a necessity to re-evaluate history.


\(^68\) Ibid., p. 23.
Shapiro points to the frequent connections between Smithson’s practice and Martin Heidegger.71 A large part of Heidegger’s project was to uncover and clarify traces of stories told by ancient Greeks in order to clarify the culmination of technological fulfillment of Western metaphysics. Heidegger asks what has become of the earth in our technological world? Heidegger makes the relation with the earth a significant, even indispensible conception of the work of art says Shapiro asking —what kind of art might provide a ‘saving power’ in the age of technology and ‘devastation of the earth’. The work of art claims Heidegger, discloses a truth, and that truth is a relationship between a human world and the earth or ground on which it rests.

Heidegger’s ‘earth’ is not identical to the physical material. Earth, says Shapiro is what resists and grounds meaning, it is what never becomes completely present and therefore can not be completely re-presented but it can emerge in the struggle or agon (contestation) that a work of art sets up between the earth and the world.72 Heidegger defines art in a way, which might have been appealing to Smithson.73 In the same chapter Shapiro goes on to say in reference to Heidegger:

The Greeks called art in the true sense and the work of art techne, because art is what most immediately brings being (i.e. the appearing that stands there in itself) to stand, stabilises it in something present (the work). The work of art is wrought, made, but because it brings about being in an essent; it brings about the phenomena in which the emerging power, phusis, comes to shine.74

71 Ibid. p. 23
72 Ibid. p. 24
73 Ibid. p. 24
74 Shapiro, Gary, Earthwards: Time and its Surfaces: Postperiodization. 1995, There is also here a reference to Heidegger’s essay where he writes about the work of art’s coming into being, hence the term phusis. This can be translated as self-emerging presence, suggesting self-initiated and self-directed movement rather than the fecundity of nature. This is a quote taken by him from Martin Heidegger’s ‘The Origin of A Work of Art in poetry, language and thought. Translated by Albert Hofstadler, N.Y. Harper and Row, 1971.
Reading *Earthwards* one finds Shapiro’s perception of the extent of the influence of Heideggerian philosophy on Smithson. The idea of a post-history indicates a disillusionment with progress: another Heideggerean theme, which is reiterated in *Incidents of Mirror Travel in the Yucatan*. There are profound implications on the earth when one considers the technological and industrial impacts of mobility and movement. Heidegger spends a great deal of effort posing the question of what kind of art might provide a ‘saving power’ in the age of technology and of the ‘devastation of the earth’. *Partially Buried Woolshed* and *Spiral Jetty* are works which stress the entropy of the elements, Smithson is attempting to disclose that *surd*\(^75\) and ineluctable dimension of things which Heidegger calls the earth The scientific and technologically defined earth is a first approximation to this wider understanding of the earth. Certainly without this larger sense of the earth it would be difficult to make the connection between the pre-historic and the post-historic earthworks that Smithson announces several times and which receives its fullest realisation in *Spiral Jetty*’s concatenation of the ancient legend of the numinous whirlpool at the edge of the lake, the allusion to sacred inscriptions of the earth by peoples who have left us little other writing, and the contemporary technology and sense of inevitable entropy that inform the work’s construction.\(^76\)

Smithson also had a lifelong interest in geology, as well as paleontology, that has informed his crystalline forms, they intended as descriptive references to time. One of Smithson’s favourite books was *Crystals: Their Role in Science and Nature* (1964) in which he underlined the following direct reference to crystals and time. ‘When growth takes place the step can advance only by rotating around, the dislocation point somewhat

---

\(^75\) *Surd* is a term frequently used by Smithson as in the drawing *A Surd View for an Afternoon* that is a map of Smithson’s career that is without a central logic. Smithson’s collages of 1961 indicate someone who thinks in disparate images and who creates meaning out of juxtapositions and incongruencies. A surd literally is an irrational number. Smithson had little time for bureaucratic systems and frequently had to work around these to get projects accomplished. Being a migrant (or an artist) there is a challenge to ‘get through’ as it were.

like the hands of a clock.' The growth of *Spiral Jetty* is shown in production on a film made by him at the time, as the earthmoving equipment is shifting the boulders into place. In the developed jetty, photographed subsequent to Smithson’s death, the entire spiral has turned into a salt crystal replicating the microcosm of the crystal. Time is made manifest in the form of the crystal for Smithson, which features in a various forms within his imagery. The crystal, mirrored objects of 1964 described a world outside themselves. They are insubstantial, yet they are receptors. In relation to this section on the earth it is important to note that Smithson likened text to geological layers of verbal sediment.

Smithson frequently used the term *de–differentiation*, which is from Ehrenzweig-'De–differentiation is the dynamic process by which ego scatters and represses surface imagery’. Ehrenzweig describes a state of essential vagueness that allows new creative directions to form. Smithson used this process to describe how he selects a site and it has subsequently influenced generations of site-specific practitioners. ‘He uses it’ said Shapiro ‘to explain the de–centering in his work.’ Smithson said ‘any site which lends itself to the de–differentiate, low–level situation excites me because everything is...moving into an ever deepening background. There is an almost complete lack of foreground in terms of the site. And then the only thing that holds it together is the shrunkent containment of the *Nonsite*.’

---


79 Anton Ehrenzweig’s *The Hidden Order of Art*, Paladin, 1967 was a very popular text read by most artists at that time. Ehrenzweig’s psychoanalytic theory of art appealed to Smithson because it provides a way of understanding the process of artistic perception and production. This is a reference by Jennifer Roberts describing Smithson’s process of responding to a space or location. pp. 101-2. In a sense we move, in our understanding of the man-made intrusions, the mirrors, recent and ancient, through time in the nine *Displacements*. Roberts quotes Smithson’s version of his *Yucatan* essay, in *Smithson and Stephens in Yucatan* as she refers to *low level scanning*. This was described by him as a simple “gathering”, a purely receptive faculty, indifferently absorbing undifferentiated visual refuse. Site responsive or site-specific work continues to involve ‘low level scanning’.


81 Ibid. p. 88-89.
Smithson and the post-colonial

Robert Smithson describes Ormsted’s design for Central Park in his essay, *Frederick Law Ormsted and the Dialectical Landscape*. Smithson’s practice emphasises his relationship to time including geological and prehistoric. He describes his work as opening up a *dialectic* with processes that have occurred in particular sites. *Spiral Jetty* for instance is close to a location where the east and west train lines cutting across the United States met in 1867, a fact which he folded into this work. The spiral is derived from an indigenous symbol and references an ancient belief that there is a treacherous whirlpool in the Great Salt Lake. Smithson’s work opens up debates about environmental issues concerning the use of the earth’s resources as well as a developing relationship with Post-Colonialism, though that relationship is possibly more explicit in *Mirror Travels*. Smithson’s work might be seen as mutating out of Minimalism or *de-territorialising* it: a moment in art history when he amongst others re-defined the scope of art and what a creative subject could embody.

In writing about the *discontinued narratives of migration* I am attempting to recognize what I perceive as a profound shift in these archaeological layers for the migrant from any culture in Australia. There is an archaeological shift from one country’s history to another, a revelation and acknowledgment of what mutative forces are occurring in that transition. This also begs the question of how we as migrants are to relate to the Aboriginal history of this country, Australia. Smithson’s work acknowledges time in a way that I find applicable to my own questions.

---


84 *What the artist could embody* refers to the fact that Smithson was extending the scope of ‘art’ by the use of the Site/Nonsite. He felt at the time that art had become too self referential — art about art. I think that art after Duchamp “embodied” the artist as someone who makes a creative trajectory through the world, rather than a maker of things. The practice of Eva Hesse for instance, enabled women to BE in their work more fully than had previously been the case.
Mirror Travel is a work, which references the pre-colonial state of the earth on the Yucatan Peninsula and the early colonisers exploratory cultural forays there. It is also self-consciously a journey into the unknown of Smithson whose own life was (as he told critic, John Perrault) fundamentally defined by the death of his brother two years before his own birth. This entwinement of life and death created a strong awareness in Smithson in regard to whether or not something exists. Smithson himself claims that his use of the idea of entropy was in large part a masking of ‘a whole set of complete breakdowns and fractures.’ This fusion of internal and external factors contributed to the selection of this work in relation to my own grass works. I am trying in this section to create a ‘dialectic,’ a tension, a set of points of reference and even opposition, in the interests of opening up an enquiry between this work and some of my own defined subject area, the transplant, and discontinued narratives of migration. The mobility of Smithson’s work exemplifies the creative process. Smithson’s use of Hegel’s term dialectic is adapted to his own purposes, which is to define a play or movement between fixed oppositions. I am using the elasticity (its potential for animating ideas or spaces of this idea) to think about migration as an extended space between two points — an arrival and a departure or a space which is included by having an art-work exist in two locations. (Such as was the case with Liverpool/Liverpool, and other dispersed projects.)

Smithson’s mature work occurred in late 60s. One imagines the pressure that existed, for artists to become politicised. The Mirror Travels has been interpreted by Roberts as a jaundiced vision of the Yucatan Peninsula and its future. Here, it significantly contains two of Smithson’s favoured materials, earth and mirrors. Boettger said, ‘There are frequent references to colour, which is sick, sombre and decaying. This work looks, in its

85 Robert Smithson: organised by Eugie Tsai with Cornelia Butler, additional essay by Thomas Crow Suzaan Boetgger In the Yucatan: Mirroring Presence and Absence, 2004, p. 203.

86 Ibid. p. 203

87 Shapiro, Gary, Earthwards, 1995, pp. 83, 89
travel format at the idea of progress, of attaining the desired. ‘One is always crossing the horizon, yet it always remains distant’

In this introduction to Smithson’s use of history and time, Roberts suggests that it would be a mistake to see the early works as irrelevant to the post 1963 post-Minimalist developments because it was through these earlier works that he arrived at many of his theories and ongoing themes. The depiction of timelessness was one of his expressed concerns in the earlier works. Roberts, writes that many of Smithson’s ‘post-modernisms’ such as ‘the inter-changeability of centre and periphery, his engagement with the corporeality of perception and his sense of the reified and particular nature of time’, derived ultimately from his engagement with ‘lugubrious premonitions of Christian mystics bemoaning a fallen world’. Smithson had been highly influenced in these earlier works by William Blake’s visionary poetry and painting based thematically around the destruction being wrought by the industrial revolution. When Smithson made the shift from figurative painting he described an intense spiritual crisis. He had been producing paintings, which came out of what he considered to be ‘Divine Suffering’. Smithson shifted away from such overt Catholicism but claimed that it had appealed to his search for origins. According to Jennifer L. Roberts by the end of that year he had been able to temper this with passion with irony, resulting in his mirrored ‘crystal’ work, as described above. Smithson had found an aesthetic resolution.

**Exile, Presence and Absence: A Description of *Mirror Travels in the Yucatan***

I am writing as an Australian migrant. Not a 60s Brit. There is a need for another image

---


90 Ibid. p. 14
that is beyond any colonial residue.\textsuperscript{91} Like traditional Aboriginal people there are, where I came from, allegiances to places. I am a Northerner from Wigan. That means unassuming, hardworking as described with much admiration by George Orwell in \textit{Road to Wigan Pier}. I, like many migrants return to their generational place of origin and have a powerful sense of attachment. What has that to do with ecology? What has that to do with Smithson’s crisis that was behind \textit{Mirror Travels}? I hope that this question will be answered below. Current debates about migration and mobility speculate and propose that it is now necessary for there to be less travel in order to at least slow down global warming. Global economists are predicting food wars. Smithson’s work, through the use of the revelations of process was intending to set up a dialectic with what is/was happening environmentally through processes of industry. Like Heidegger, Shapiro says, Smithson had little patience with those who would fantasize about escaping the technological world.

Ecological questions will not necessarily be answered, they are too great to imagine a convincing solution, but they will be posed in this writing about the connection to the earth as a material substance of sculptural production. Travelling across the planet to produce \textit{Liverpool/Liverpool} was a meditation on my own fracturing and was a fortunate and fulfilling reconnection. Clearly such travels that make life bearable for many first and even second-generation migrants but possibly will not be sustainable for much longer.

I began this section with a description of \textit{Mirror Travels in Yucatan} using information from the writings primarily of Jennifer L. Roberts, Gary Shapiro, Suzaan Boettger and Eugie Tsai. I have not yet witnessed this series of nine photographs of the impromptu installations taken on his travels in the Yucatan. They exist in slide form at the Guggenheim in New York. There are a number of good print reproductions of these initially ephemeral, images that together with their ekphrastic texts were published. The

\textsuperscript{91} With thanks to Loma Bridge for a conversation on this subject.
journey to Yucatan is a performance and re enactment of a mythical ‘loss of self’, and hence rediscovery through artistic production. Yucatan translates as ‘I don’t know where I am,’ or ‘listen to those words!’ a Henry M. Sayre’s interpretation. In either case this was a confused interpretation of an early Portuguese traveller, which became a name on a map. *Mirror Travels in Yucatan* thus speaks to a degree to the condition of the stranger, and the capacity of an artwork to redefine who one is.

Ehrenzweig’s concept of *de-differentiation* is related to his psychoanalytic theory of art. This appealed to Smithson because it provides a way of understanding and articulating the process of artistic perception and production as entertaining and playing with differences that associates it with the chaotic and entropic. For Ehrenzweig, as for Freud the unconscious mind is timeless and un–differentiated, without negation, failing to make distinctions, identifying opposites and ‘allowing firm boundaries to melt in free chaotic mingling of forms.’

Smithson’s travels in the Yucatan Peninsula with his partner the acclaimed artist, Nancy Holt, and gallerist Diane Dwan might represent personal as well as an aesthetic research into a condition of history. The nine documentations of the various places along this way occurred significantly and consequentially on a road journey, emblematic of twentieth century life. Suzaan Boettger claims Dante’s *Inferno*, is inscribed in this work with its reference to nine, terraced circles in Hell, the charring, burnt tree stumps and “shy mess” feature in the first *Mirror Displacement*. Smithson read Dante, but also the poetry of T.S. Eliot, *The Wasteland*, which features Eliot’s own interpretation of the *Inferno*

---


95 Ibid. p. 201
initially produced between 1307-21. Literally the *Divine Comedy* was about the displacement of souls after death; references to mortality also recurs, says Boettger throughout Smithson’s discussion of *Mirror Displacements*.96

The *Mirror Travels* (1969) series of works entailed the temporary installation of the same group of twelve-inch mirrors at the nine sites throughout the region of the Yucatan. Each of the separate installations involved the placement of mirrors in roughly parallel arrays, either balanced among tree limbs or cantilevered into the soil. There are continual references to the ancient culture which once inhabited the Yucatan Peninsula’s varied terrain over which they are traveling. The third analogizes reflections to fleeting instances that evade measure, ‘as if ghosts or shades, and space’ as, enigmatically, ‘the remains, or corpse of time’. The mirrors are always emblematic of transience and the insubstantial or fleeting.97 They are screens or palimpsests readily erased and re-written. The ancient gods even can speak through them. In these images we are walking amongst the ancient ruins and temples which the ancient Mayans inhabited —yet Smithson shows none of the ruins. In this omission he is distancing himself from the artist Frederick Isherwood 98 who travelled with Stephens drawing the ruins surrounded by indigenous Mexicans imaged as lazy and irresolute.

The fourth *Displacement*, ‘is the nexus of mirrors, reflections —and death enlarges.’ says Boettger.99 The dismantled configurations of mirrors, ‘now rests in the cemetery of the printed page, and mirrors display a conspiracy of muteness concerning their very existence’. Akin to the frustration of continually traveling without arriving, ‘each of these qualities’, continues Boettger ‘presents absence, whether of actuality, logic, or

96 Ibid. p. 202
97 Ibid. p. 202
Smithson said, ‘inexpressible limits are on the other side of these incidents’, as if on the underside of his mirrors—the reflectors of these incidents and ‘they will never be grasped. Being is presented as ineffable and pervaded by a sense of absence.’ Smithson repeated these sentiments in his description of the fifth locale, the jungle. ‘Here all the light is paralysed’ and, ‘particles of colour infected the moulting reflections, suggesting disease’. Boettger comments on how his intense absorption with the visual and sensory experiences of the site lead to declarations of mortality, such as the claim that very lack of existence is so stark, so profound, so terrible. The emotional eruption that takes place in relation to the fifth, like the fourth Displacement reveals a strong sense of loss. This is not about one’s own future lack of existence but the lack of his performance in the landscape—photographs that are only kept in slide form.

The sixth Displacement entry notes that a small plane flew overhead. The mirrors are slanted as if to catch a glimpse. In the seventh Displacement the mirrors among gnarled branches of mangroves dematerialise. The mirrors are mute says Smithson but reflections are ephemeral and cannot be grasped. Boetgger thought that whatever Smithson wanted these reflections to show cannot be objectified. It appears to have been something Smithson himself found very difficult to articulate.

It is important to note that even though some of Smithson’s installations are within view of some of the most famous Mayan ruins, that none of them appear in his photographic works produced from the installed pieces. They repudiate the picturesque, perspectival

---

101 Ibid p. 201  
102 Ibid. p. 202  
103 Ibid. p. 203.  
104 Ibid. p. 203.  
105 Ibid. p. 203  
representations of the Mayan statues in the jungle that were produced by nineteenth century explorer, Stephen’s accompanying artist Frederick Catherwood. Catherwood’s, *Portion of a Building Los Monjas, Uxmal 1844* is interpreted by Jennifer L. Roberts as an indication of Catherwood’s criticism for the laziness, and lack of interest in their own monuments on the part of the group of native Americans. Roberts describes Smithson’s anti-archaeological tactics in the Yucatan project not as simply picturing ruins but as a systematic attempt to oppose the nineteenth century explorer John Lloyd Stephen’s visual imperialism. Smithson’s *Mirror Travels*, a response to Stephen’s *Travels* are an extended reflection of nineteenth century archaeological exploration. In every respect, says Roberts, Smithson’s work in Yucatan can be interpreted as an inversion or undoing of Stephen’s operations.

After the seventh *Displacement* Smithson stepped away from his sequence of displaced mirrors to enact the constellation of dualities that had been circling around—mirror/reflection, presence/absence, time/timelessness, existence/death— in a different form. At Yachlin he planted his third version of *Upside Down Tree*. This is a symbol which she states could be representing the international nautical sign for distress, as well as St Peter’s martyrdom on an upside down cross. Generally the types of sinners, which Dante associated with all the nine circles can not be compared to the nine displacements, though Boettger thought that there may be a analogy with the *Woods of Suicide* and the inverted tree. Following the comment Smithson made to John Perrault regarding his reference to entropy masking a ‘many fractures and breakdowns’, which

---

107 Ibid. p. 103.
108 Ibid. p. 103.
110 Ibid. p. 203-4.
Figure 2: Smithson’s installed mirrors of Displacement #2 in the Yucatan 1969. Image taken from the James Cohan Gallery site. The original slide is housed at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

might relate to the death of his brother with whom his life was woven in a life/death opposition.\textsuperscript{111} We can only speculate on this powerful tragic image of what? Global suicide? A horror story of some kind is there in the upturned and amputated trees.\textsuperscript{112} Smithson’s insertion of mirrors into the landscape created what Roberts describes as a porous quality. This crystal image is an amalgamated form of virtual and actual in its various stages of infinity ‘One must see the world through the eyes of small foraminfera, corals, brachiopods, molluscs and crinoids.’ The mirrors speak of an amazing receptivity to small life forms within the terrain and to the earth as an element. The landscape is ‘propped open’ by the mirror installations. Smithson was aware of what Levi Straus had written about \textit{hot} and \textit{cold} societies. Hot describes twentieth century ‘business’ and quick expenditure of energy as opposed to more ‘primitive’ societies who attempt to maintain

\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., p. 204.

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., p. 203-4.
equilibrium. *The Enantiomorphic Chambers*, and the *Mirrors* allow the enlightenment perspectival landscape to relax into primordial non-presence. To briefly finalise the descriptions of the nine *Displacements*, I return to Boettger’ reference to Smithson’s analogy between states of mind and the earth in his *Sedimentation of the Mind* essay.

‘The earth’s surface and the figments of the mind have a way of disintegrating into discrete regions of art’, Here, the river at once ‘annihilate(d)’ Boettger quotes Smithson again ‘and shored up clay (loess), [a type of clay but also an homonym for loss], and similar matter’. Elliot’s *Wasteland* was an inspiration, ‘These fragments I have shored up against my ruins’. The challenge Smithson insisted here is ‘knowing clear ideas of what had been done’, as ‘sight consisted of knotted reflections bouncing on and off the mirrors and the eyes.’

In the ninth and final *Displacement* Smithson described ‘two assymetrical trails that mirror each other’, as ‘enantiomorphic’, and extended the riff on doubleness to

---

Quetzalcoatl, the hybrid god of the wind (feathers) and earth (serpent). A mirror is looking for itself but never quite finding it. Specifically says Boettger ‘Smithson’s play with mirrors and reflections in ‘Incidents’ is one of a number of twinship in opposition motifs recurring throughout his oeuvre: site/non-site, presence/absence, existence/death.

Smithson, Migration and connection to the earth

In writing about my own role as a migrant, it is partly his implicit and explicit connections to ancient cultures that speak of something deeper than a few centuries that I look to in Smithson’s practice. As migrants, even fifth generation Europeans, some of our ancient history relates to Greco-Roman, even Celtic civilizations and beyond. Smithson’s work as I show above through the commentary of Shapiro frequently referenced Heidegger and his critique of Western metaphysics. Another American artist of a similar generation, Cy Twombly has produced the famous paintings of the Peloponnesian Wars titled 50 Days at Illiam that deconstruct that past also using text. With those works, he can reach into that ancient past because it is his past. In Australia as a migrant I can contemplate an ancient past but it is not my own. The grass and the text partly came out of some earlier research into Twombly, whose work invites us to consider how much of our language and imagery is built on Greek and Roman mythology.

Smithson’s imagery sometimes touched on the indigenous imagery, as in the case of his use of the myth of the ‘whirlpool’ in Spiral Jetty, but the spiral imagery also has a strong connection to the crystalline spiraling process that expands fractally in time. There is some rigorous investigation and scientific understandings always informing Smithson’s work. Smithson wanted to intervene in history with works such as the Spiral Jetty. After such 60s writers as Gyorgy Kepes who wrote The New Landscape in Art and Science

\[\text{\textsuperscript{114} Ibid. p. 201}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{114} Fifty Days at Illiam, is a series of Cy Twombly’s paintings presented in the Philadelphia Museum, 1991.}\]
which expressed serious concerns about the environment, Smithson’s imagery was influenced, and derived from an investigation into systems, patterns —and poetry which spanned such diverse fields as crystallography, geology, cartography and art. 115

Adopting Smithson’s spatial conceptualisings, in Chapter One, I have begun to write into my own archaeological ‘layers’ describing experiences into another kind; that of the institution, of the prison, as a memory and an actuality in terms of the Boronia project — which could be regarded as within an entropic site. In Chapter Four I have expanded on my own use of the prison as an image relating to migration as well as a zone of abject memory, which I have begun to articulate —in The Black, Chapter One.

Smithson’s speculations, in 2010 have become embedded in contemporary art, design and architecture, as has his de-centring of vision and critique of perspective. His writing and work trace an intensive effort, writes Mark Linder—‘to relate or combine incommensurable modes of representation—primarily perspective, photography, mapping but also an increasingly competent use of plans—to portray spatial ideas that were specifically excluded or repressed from the era’s dominating writings of Greenberg and Michel Fried.’116 We have gone a long way beyond this point, though the gallery remains an important focus in the art practices of many including myself. The gallery was part of Smithson’s dialectic, but he saw the need to extend practices beyond the gallery. There seems to me to be a vital need to keep expanding the limits of what art can encompass.

Smithson’s process gravitates much around the use of actual earth in its production as well as his much-considered concept of entropy. In Mirror Travels in the Yucatan,


Smithson’s Artforum essay of 1969, Henry M. Sayre relates the fact that the essay starts in the present tense, then starts to drift away as we are become dissolved in the landscape. He describes the text as a ‘linguistic mirroring’ of the work itself.\footnote{Sayre, Henry, \textit{The Object of Performance: The American Avant-Garde since 1970}, 1989, p. 211.}

The tendency to be naming the winding down of the earth’s energy was a determining factor in my choice of Smithson as one of my case studies especially as it relates to post-European migration to Australia. He reveals social, cultural, historical and scientific understandings that are embedded in the conceptual production of works and their creative administrative and aesthetic processes.

In an interview with Paul Cummings for the \textit{Archives of American Art/Smithsonian Institute} Smithson probes the idea of re-cycling waste for instance and suggests that contrary to conservationists’ plea to return to a pre-industrial Garden of Eden that a recognition of the effects of entropy would be to work in a way that he sees as creatively with what has already occurred.\footnote{Interview with Robert Smithson for the American Art Archive by Paul Cumming in \textit{Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings} (1972) 1996, p. 270.} And here is where it seems to me that his practice has a bearing on the massive focus that has been given to entropic urban wastelands in Britain in the practice, which has been in operation since the 80s, \textit{Regeneration UK}

**Links to other chapters**

I referred earlier to the image of the \textit{Boronia Garden} off Google Earth that I put onto the cover of a cloth artist book also called \textit{The Black}. This is a process, which to a degree echoes Smithson’s \textit{Site/Nonsite} process. Through various technologies, including satellite photography of an otherwise accessible place I can allude to this process and this discreet history (and one which conceals earlier hidden memories). Likewise \textit{The Drawing of the Map of the Boronia Garden} alludes to this shadowy margin. Significantly for me these

---
two works are made of stitching —a process I discuss in Chapter Four in relation to my discontinued narratives. In that chapter I write alongside the illustrations of visual projects, my own interpretation of the Site/Nonsite, and the perception of the ‘dialectic’ of the Australian prison.

Smithson’s Earthworks are in many ways the opposite of an English garden. In The Black, Chapter One I have made a reference to Smithson and Frederick Law Olmsted’s design for Central Park, which Smithson applauds, which he says is ‘explicitly entropic’ rather than creating an illusion of timelessness. He recognises in the design the damage created by the early settlers who ripped up tracts of Manhattan for farming. More of my own relationship to gardening will go into Chapter Five, including the sculptural use of the British ‘lawn’. In Chapter Five I have also written about the hydroponic systems of my migrant parents. This is emblematic for me of a mutation from one place to another, and also nature/culture and nature/machine. The self-sufficient organism of the hydroponic system plugs into water and electricity supplies of its location and begins to exist. Market gardening has been one of the poorly paid migrant occupations —as such it frequently tags a process of migration. Many national groups have entered this country via this exhausting, manual and often underpaid work. Gardening continues to be a process by which I define something tenuous —something which could fall apart in my own life, or possibly the whole world such as many scientists think is about to happen. In Chapter Five I reference Amanda Boetzkes’ book which extrapolates Smithson’s work into the practices of more recent figures such as Ana Mndietta whose earth, ice, clay, sand, flowers sculptures are a conversation between herself and the ‘elemental.’

**Why mutations of migration?**

John Berger has written that in his experience, migration corresponded to something that he couldn’t understand in himself. He thought migration to be one of the most typical

---

119 Ibid. p. 271.
twentieth century experiences. In trying to define the difficult condition of ‘dynamic instability’ Papastergiadis references John Berger that I reiterate here from Chapter Two—the Greek translation of metaphor is porter to transport. A metaphor might be thought of as a kind of mutation, a transitional communication or reformative phase that weaves meaning and matter from one place to another.

Mutations, which are actual changes at the molecular level of DNA, are another vast field of knowledge where I have been barely a tourist during my Doctorate.120 Some reading is listed in my Bibliography, but so far has not resulted in a new body of work. The microbiological imagery of particles transforming that one can now view as films on U Tube are still on my horizon to develop. I have become interested in thinking about particle physics in relation to accelerating global movements. The new knowledges that are required to handle the ensuing transformations, are shifts in paradigms, such as Appadurai’s suggestion that we look to fractals and ‘new physics’ to be able to think about the new changes occurring.

The need to recreate cities in the UK has in part been necessitated by the rapid changes in populations. During the Glocal Imaginaries Conference in Lancaster 2009 I found a connection to the field of Migration Studies. My research began with the aim of also being a bridge between art and science. The fields of knowledge as Marga Bijvoet among other writers have explored well between art, science and technologies have been forming the basis of much artwork since the 1960s. In this present document reading on migration has formed the bulk of my research. I arrived at the reading of Mirror Travels,121 which asks profound questions about science and its ethics but also is a moment of very deep personal introspection for Smithson. The subjective layers of an

120 For a definition see Appendix 5 p. 324.

artwork have asserted themselves as a powerful centre of its production. I am asking myself at this point what role science, specifically the image and biochemistry of the mutation have had on this investigation? I wanted to make a connection between migration as a state of global and subjective turbulence and the biochemistry of these biological process—which I discover does involve terms such as translation. I also wanted in particular in the writing of Chapter One to look at the image of a mutation in regards to the deep unconscious disturbances that occurred in myself as a result of being a migrant, but also in an ongoing way, which probably happens to many migrants in Australia generally. My research to date however in this other vast field is something I must continue to develop. In an early phase of this Doctorate I say that the imagery will in part be derived from the scientific understandings as much as the knowledge of the subjective state and experience of being a migrant.

**Conclusion**

I am creating the possibility of a comparison between my own migrant generational grief and the uncovering of the narrative of Smithson dead brother in the above account of *Mirror Travels*. This work of Smithson’s operates within the form of the *Site/Nonsite*. A comparison between my marginal garden projects (actual places where a particular set of social circumstances are in operation) and *Mirror Travels in the Yucatan* only suggests that galleries and arts structures might be usefully extended to incorporate what might be otherwise forgotten or powerless. The comparison is useful also in its reference to re-writing colonial history. The abject world of *Boronia* and the hidden narrative of my grandmother have lead me to define another kind of spatial extension in the use of the *Site/Nonsite* form.

Smithson’s wit is evident in many of the works including *Passaic* and also *Mirror Travels in the Yucatan* where the accompanying travelogue essay has the style of a sci-fi novel. As well as being descriptive of major scientific concepts such as entropy — in relation to my own research on the transplant or the stranger, Smithson’s writing taps
some powerfully personal themes of loss. The reference to Dante’s *Inferno* in the *Yucatan* work via its numerical identifications (the nine displacements) is suggestive of some sort of pilgrimage or confrontation of ‘demons’ perhaps. Always there is something of the exile in Smithson’s practice — he is on the edge of a new frontier in all the works produced during his short life, though he finds ways to bridge various ‘fractures and fissures.’ In his bridging of the two worlds between Passaic and New York, the reality of America’s entropic wastelands is incorporated into a Minimalist aesthetic. Smithson reveals social, cultural, historical and scientific understandings that are embedded in the conceptual production of works and their creative administrative and aesthetic processes. These gravitate much around the use of actual earth. If Migration Studies is significant in its recognition of the accelerating movements of migration and therefore the need for new recognition of the complex new *clusters* and *hybrids* that are now occurring, I am presenting some aspects of Smithson’s work as a valuable model for allowing the rhizomatic extensions to happen.\(^{123}\)

The sculptural process of my own grass work has endeavoured to work in that space. Smithson’s spiral goes a long way beyond appropriation in the scope of what it brings into an artwork, though where the *Jetty* was situated had belonged to the indigenous tribes of Utah. The spiral motif might represent one ‘layer’ of the land, and one, (not simple) aspect of the content. To migrants from ancient countries it would be easy to perceive much of Australian history as trivial in its brevity, the convicts, the gold-rush, Federation and Gallipoli don’t hold up well next to millennia of Chinese history for instance. This thought is present in one of my exegesis’ questions about how are we as people from places with their own ancient pasts to relate to this continent? How do the pasts that we bring with us play themselves out in this country, far away?


\(^{123}\) Papastergiadis, Nikos, *The Turbulence of Migration, Conclusion: Clusters in the Diaspora*, p. 203.
Smithson’s use of Dante’s *Inferno* gives us a profound metaphor for transitions as well as a basically moral fable, which he interprets in terms of entropy. Smithson, I think believed that creativity can transport us away from the imploding borders of entropy.

Going back to Liverpool and revisiting Judge Day was both a desire to revisit some colonial echo as well as a spiritual necessity. Getting through the unknown and difficult to discern affects seemed important. One never knows what will appear. Vague hunches rose to the surface, which have always plagued me. I wanted to remove that layer of ‘coal dust.’ I wanted to wipe it out by confronting fears and ambitions, by being mobile and getting over any colonial relics of the migration from Britain. There might be a moral journey implicit in the work I have done, especially the prison project. In Chapter Two I was trying to isolate some chemistry of the migrant, which is the place where newness festers and hybridises into entirely different life forms.
Chapter Four

This section of the paper is based around practice with reference to the works figured here on page 133 onwards in this chapter. This includes the Grass works Figures 13-21, the Of the Earth works, Figures 29-33, the Boronia works Figures 1-3, the Mesh Works, Figures 55 and 56, pages 187 and 188, as well as the Cosmos Works, Figures and The Law Is Not Always Just, Figures 50 and 51, page 186.

There are three sets of visual works that will be described, analysed and discussed here in relation the thesis, these are: The Boronia community garden project, Grassworks and the related gallery works.
1. The Boronia Project

I am discussing *Boronia* in the context of my writing because of its being a work that existed ‘on the street’ as a Site. In the context of the travelling metaphor it is important to mention because its inclusion transports me to a place of haunting neglect, as those with whom I worked. Though this project was in the way that I admire Smithson, a feat of creative administration within an institution, it is the quality of that space that I wish to address: to bring that margin into active inclusion and attention. I have changed the name of the institution because I wish to abstract the space, even aestheticise it without fear of any of the security issues necessarily surrounding such an institution. In Chapter Two I referred to the Deleuzian concept of the Baroque fold to describe the way Smithson’s projects moved from writing, to visual manifestations, incorporating the world as they went.¹ By the inclusion of the organizational agility that it takes to get creative and perhaps Baroquely generous and inspired works off the ground, I want to imply a capacity to develop contexts and the possibility of realization of a vision that IS coterminous with the artwork. Staged or not, there is an element of performance in this process. Interacting in this way with a government institution of incarcerated women greatly affirmed in myself and significantly in the group I co-ordinated, the importance of creative production. I draw a comparison in the image of the folded inclusion to an encompassing image of oppositions.

In relation to my reference to performance, I am going to quote from Mieke Bal, quoting Malcolm Bowie at the beginning of her chapter *Performance and Performativity*.²

Performance:

¹ The image of the Baroque fold is Deleuzian. It is a term Deleuze thought of as ‘a finite number of components which yields a practically unlimited diversity of combinations’. *Deleuze Dictionary* edited by Adrian Parr, p. 105.

– the execution of an action; something accomplished; a deed, feat
– the fulfillment of a claim, a promise
– a presentation to an audience of a (character in a play, a piece of music, etc.)
– an expression that serves to effect a transaction or that constitutes the performance of a specifies act by its utterance

The Boronia Project occurred in 2005 at a Correctional Centre in Sydney prior to my Doctorate.² It was a cross-cultural garden within the grounds of a women’s prison that took place over a period of 18 months. The land adjacent to the living quarters was disused with low lying scrub and was criss-crossed by animal tracks and surrounded on two sides by high wire which was on the edge of a major road. I was given an amount of around $25,000 to produce the work. It was to be designed, built and to be the responsibility of the women. I was the co-ordinator who encouraged designs by the group and then worked with the possibilities of that design in the overall context. The individual or group garden designs were included into a network of pathways based on the local animal tracks. Thinking about the designs from an aerial position was encouraged. The women found this idea surprising and interesting partly because it invited a scale of intersection with the world that was entirely unfamiliar to this deeply disempowered and often abused group. I introduced the project to a group of about 20 women. The group who became most attached to the work were the Aboriginal women as well as a group of Vietnamese girls who made great vegetable gardens. Work was often slow and disabled due to institutional factors such as not being able to access hose pipes during the weekends, even in the height of summer.

² This project occurred long before this Doctoral program. In referencing it in the context of this exegesis I want to illustrate the possibility of contemporary art projects going beyond the more sanitized pathways of the art world. Smithson moved his work into the Site/NonSite form to embrace wider horizons of meaning. Some of my projects have dealt with questions of mental health such as the work made for Matthew and Others. I was given permission to film and take photographs within a centre, and also to show the film at Artspace in 2008. Another similar project is currently being developed in Liverpool, NSW. This will occur outside the time frame of this Doctorate (therefore no Ethics documents are included here).
I was given permission/authority by the Department to show a film at *Artspace 24/25*\(^3\) at the end of 2009. I regard this cross-cultural garden/design project with migrant and Aboriginal women as a kind of blueprint. It is as an ongoing process that interlocks with, and I think, extends the meaning of the grass gallery (and non-gallery) productions. The garden at Boronia has been passed on to subsequent generations of inmates, no doubt transformed, and persists with some memory of the original project. (See Appendix 3 p. 319, for an extended description of this and the Casula project). Some photographs are to be found in the illustrated section.

It is gratifying that the residents on a permanent basis took on the project. However, I want to write about it here in regard to its being for me, a *discontinued narrative*. My engagement with these works connects me to an unresolved trauma — possibly the institutional history of my family. There is a sense of something unresolved (an injustice) which nudges towards a desire in writing, making, administering to reclaim my grandmother, Alice Hodge’s language. I have attempted to define a situation of creative movement, which involves my own participation and frequently the participation of others in *mutational* exhibitions and projects. Through such transformative work and gestures I come to understand and find a passage out of somewhere potentially destructive and into productive reiterations of language. I seek a narrative through an beyond obfuscations of time and space via these sculpturally performative — diverse and sometimes concurrent projects. Boronia could be described as migratory in its being informed by a ‘high art’ practice while at the same time connecting successfully to a group with no artistic training.

I described the garden project as cross-cultural to participating women embarking on the project with me. Though the garden project was open to all, many of the women I worked with were Aboriginal. Though these women were also clearly dislocated — migrant from

---

\(^3\) *Artspace 24/25* was a celebration of 25 years of Artspace history involving 24 artists installing work over a weekend event.
their own places of origin — their relationship to the land was quite different to the other migrant women. ‘Totem’ animals potently affected them for instance, they were constructed with passion, even for those women who were clearly depressed or medicated withdrawing from addictions, and so forth. The film that I was permitted to make of the project demonstrates its usefulness to some women who clearly had severe mental health problems. The project invited the involvement of staff and visitors and there was encouragement for the women to research local Aboriginal history. Some did. One of the women speaks to the camera about her research. The activity of working with earth for these women created a new layer on the historical palimpsest. They reclaimed aspects of their culture, which were clearly very much alive to them, through the production of cultural gardens based on their own stories. There were various groups including Aboriginal, Islander, Vietnamese, Russian and more ensconced ‘Australians.’ It was a process that enabled my participation with them. The project was done as part of a program, which enabled participants to access horticultural qualifications. This formed an access point to ‘mainstream’ culture and at the same time a way of retaining their own culture. There are further projects now being negotiated with Casula Powerhouse and also Penrith Regional Gallery.

**An ancient relationship to earth**

This project could be discussed in a number of ways. One aspect that I want to focus on here is that the work on this project gave rise to my own thinking about the distance that I feel from my own ancient past via the medium of the earth, as a European migrant. The earth is a medium through which I have attempted to think through a connection to ancient and more recent and individual narratives. The discontinued narratives extend back to pre-Greek, Roman, Anglo-Saxon and Celtish history. In European pre-scientific pre-Socratic traditions of thought, the earth has also been given a place as the source for all creation. Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* is an early Greek poem about creation and change.

---

4 Ovid, *Metamorphosis* 1955 Edition, as is described in my film *Desire for Ancient History*, made after the *Notes on the Castle* exhibition in 2004, I would like to have a way via my own ancient culture to connect to the earth in this part of the world. Reading Ovid as well as other pre-science philosophers of the earth —such as Xenophanes occupied some time at the onset of my research.
that arises from the earth, the ‘mud’ that produced all life. Ovid is one of many early philosophers who revered the earth. Marina Warner wrote a commentary on Metamorphosis about creative metamorphoses, the ‘protean plasmatic’ quality of clay, how the world was ‘animated’, and mutated into life forms, she uses transformative metaphors of hatching, splitting, doubling, and mutating to describe metamorphic processes and fecundity. She applies these ideas to her discussion of cultural and aesthetic shifts. Bachelard also has written in Earth and Reveries of the Will about the various substances — stones, jewels, earth upon which we as a species have described a will — the earth as a substance with its potential for creative diversity that is acted on by a ‘shifting spirit.’ These two of the writers were helpful in think about the uses of earth as a medium and how my own position differed from the Aboriginal women involved in the garden project, and their absolute connection to a belief system that gave literally a hands on connection to the earth.

Elizabeth Grosz’s book Chaos, territory and art, describes the relationship between and amongst earth, art and people in her third chapter under the heading Art and Animal. She quotes Nietzsche, ‘Art reminds us of states of animal vigour.’ Amongst the work of some of the artists of the Western Desert there are instances of paintings that might be regarded as maps of dreaming country, cartographies of events, the topography of animal beings that link to the artist’s own bodily and clan history...temporal maps of ancestral spiritual terrains... these works are dynamic portraits of long past history, events of war,

I did not set out to work with an Aboriginal group but did find that this relationship was productive because they took to the project so enthusiastically and it made me think more about my own disconnection to Australia in comparison.


6 Bachelard,Gaston, Earth and Reveries of the Will: An essay on the Imagination of Matter (first published in 1943, Foreword by Joanne H. Stroud, Trans., Kenneth Haltman, A number of Bachelard’s chapters were inspiring to read regarding the imprinting of the will in various ways on materials of the earth such as clay, diamonds and other crystals, iron and other metals as well as the implements required to shape imaginary energies. Pp 13, 27, 80, 102, 222.

7 Grosz, Elizabeth, Chaos, territory, art: Deleuze and the framing of the earth, Colombia University Press, 2008, p. 92
natural destruction, births, deaths, marriages, alliances...and many of these works she continues are remarkable for their capacity to envision an aerial point of view. These are also responses to quite commonplace experiences of a people in their location who used materials at hand to describe that experience. These works are remarkable for the energy that comes from their complete knowledge of their own terrain.

**Boronia as a Site**

Robert Smithson established the *Site/Nonsite* causing a de-centredness of images that existed in two places that are joined and at the same time not joined by a text. After Smithson I am re-animating the image of an Australian prison as an *entropic* space. I have shown in Chapter Three how Smithson’s own biography related to presence/absence and in this duality the *Site/Nonsite* took root. The marginal site of the *Boronia Project* has a deep significance in my own biography of here and there. I made a narrative, created a thread through my own maternal lineage.

The works that I have listed amongst illustrations could be regarded as *Nonsite* productions from this *Site* (*Cosmos series, Figure 62* p. 190, *Everything is Connected to Everything Else, Figure 60*, page 189, and *Drawing of the Map of the Boronia Garden, Figure 52*, p. 189).

The project might have a connection to earth art in that it recognises, even works with what Boetzkes refers to as the un-representational. Earth, significantly for this and the carpet works is not a substance to commodify. That ‘it troubles vision and reveals lapses in signification are cues to a practice of withdrawal from the impetus to represent nature. Earth art,’ says Boetzkes, ‘more subtly expresses the loss of site as con-commitment with a loss of sight that accompanies sensual contact with elementals.’ The works such as the Map shown as a segment above also speak affectively through the use of materials to the

---

project and to the history of Abstraction. This relationship is most clearly presented in The Black in Chapter One, through a reference to Rauschenberg’s paintings made of newspaper and bitumen paint. The ordinariness of materials used again gives them their strength. Working with a mostly under-privileged group in a situation not generally supportive of creativity, is to set oneself a whole set of administrative problems worthwhile because they are neglected. The hybrid collaborative strategies that many of the works that I am including in this exegesis on migration are built around are visions of this work with the women.9 See also the Boronia film.

![Figure 1: The frangipani Islander garden in progress and right is a the beginnings of a turtle garden (2005)](image)

**Looking at some critical commentaries on related projects.**

The value of such a project is not in its being part of the existing art-world or system. Its place as an ‘art’ project is less important to the degree to which the women were motivated or even rehabilitated by being involved. Miwan Kwon, a critic and historian of site-specific practice contextualises community based work in *One Place After Another* her review of post seventies public art and community projects and other tendencies in contemporary practice.10 Other artists working in this way The exhibition titled *In the Balance: Art for a Changing World* at the MCA on the environment included artists

---

9 *Boronia*: see Figures 34 - 36 pp. 177 – 178 for photographs of the early stages in the evolution of this garden.

10 Kwon, Miwan, *One Place After Another: site-specific art and locational identity*, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2002, p. 11 begins the chapter on the genealogy of site-specificity which is addresses artists who were active during Smithson’s life.
whose work exists in borderline ways on communities such as Diego Bonetto and Lucas Ihlein’s gardening projects. Artists have more scope to delineate their own parameters, projects and enterprises. There is a movement in the work of such artists to work in around and across various institutions.

The expanded space of works such as *Liverpool/Liverpool* and the *Boronia* project properly belong in the category that Kwon calls *discursive site specificity.*

This ‘discursive site specificity’ opens up a space, which engages with the world and provides an opportunity for it, the world to enter the artwork as itself.

Kwon also provides the image of artists working in different places, like a string of beads on a necklace — *One Place After Another*… There is an accumulated meaning in anyone’s practice. The ‘journey’ of an artist and how they function in relation to locations and travel needs to be factored into an understanding of their work.

James Meyer wrote about what he termed *functional sites,* which is a process, an operation occurring between sites, a mapping of institutional and discursive affiliations and the bodies that move between them (the artists most of all). It is an informational site, a locus of overlap of text, photographs and recordings, physical spaces and things...it is now a structured site, inter-textually rather than spatially, and its model is not a map but an itinerary, a fragmentary sequence through spaces, that is a nomadic narrative whose path is articulated by the path of the artist.

---

11 Ibid. p.156
12 Ibid. p. 29
Lucy Lippard and Miwan Kwon raise questions about travel or commitment to the local. Recognising the increasing mobility of our era some critics such as Lucy Lippard and also Mary Jacob’s commitment to re-writing the history of a site are examples theorist-practitioners who regard commitment to a location as subversive. Kwon’s work examines the variants on this on the one hand and the nomadic tendency of international practitioners on the other.

Lytle Shaw writes also on the post-Smithson tendency to bring the real world into an artwork. Shaw criticises Miwan Kwon’s regarding ‘art’s’ ability to perform cultural work as hinging on its refusal to channel, transform, or contest the authority of other disciplines. Historic avant-garde (such as we saw with Greenberg) in that non-art discourses are engaged without appropriation or recoding. Lytle Shaw believes Kwon’s triumphant declarations yet; replicate the ‘breakthroughs’ of Greenberg’s art historical shifts, claiming that she belonged to an elite critical circle around the famous Whitney Program.¹⁵ I mention this comment that seemed a little gossipy because these debates about ‘high art’ and its cultural relevance do define a sphere in which I am thinking about my gallery work and associated ‘community art projects’. If the garden projects are to be regarded as a Site for my other gallery productions, I see my role of working with disadvantaged people as an enabler or co-ordinator (a creative administrator). On the

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 35.
other hand my own necessity to produce works without use or social purpose overlaps with these productions.

The *Boronia* garden continued to exist seven years after I have had anything to do with it. This, I regard as one of its successes. This model influences subsequent ventures — symbolically (as a migratory mutation) in a very rigid bureaucracy. The Smithson *Site/Nonsite* metamorphosing concept has allowed me to expand meaning beyond the ‘white box.’ This abject site of the prison continues to inform my speculations though that project has long passed. The earth, especially under prisons, is a junction of histories. If art can exist anywhere and beyond *colonising logic*, is there a way to assess and criticise it? How do I recognise my own history as well as the history of Aboriginal culture? Mieke Bal’s work *Nothing is Missing* uses the connection to the maternal lineage as the migrant generations come together around a dispersed thread. As I am haunted by my grandmother’s disappearance through the institution, the return to the institutional space across generations, by the active performing of creative work recovers in me, some strength lost for at the very least, two generations.

There was a reiteration in the use of the grass used in the gallery context, linking it and its significance to that of the prison, somewhat in the conceptual vein of Daniel Buren’s stripes that I refer again to later in Chapter Six.

In speaking about migration, transposed histories are a major part of the disjunction. A work made prior to my Doctorate called *Notes on the Castle* 2004 (*Figure 25-28*, p. 172 and 173)) makes my reference to this architectural transposition clearer. This work is conceptually indebted to Michel Foucault, and like the works that I have begun to make with barrier mesh, it implies the constraints of such banks of knowledge. To use Mieke Bal’s *travelling concepts* once more, there is I think a constant inter-feed in my practice across disciplines, frequently inspired by philosophical understandings but also threaded...
through is an imperative driven by a need to recover myself. This work involved the use of cardboard archive boxes (about the size of sandstone blocks). The DVD *Desire for Ancient History* (part of the *Notes on the Castle* work) which is included in the list of Doctoral projects, came out of that exhibition. When I made that film in 2005 I had no idea that I would travel to Liverpool UK in 2010 and exhibit in a ‘castle’ (St Georges Hall) implicating my own family’s place in a broader drama.

The language of migration — of uprooting, transplanting, transmutations, transporting, cultivations, hybridisation etc., — is especially relevant for the thinking of some of the processes with which I have been engaged for some 15-20 years. The figure of migration finds to date a form in my grass ‘carpet’ works, the hydroponic systems, and the “cast” grass writing. I have made four short films to date including *Desire for Ancient History* (2004); *From A to B, an Allegory of Process* (2007); *Memories of a Secret Self on the Other Side of the World* (2007); and *White Line in a Landscape* (2008). All these have a bearing, as do the texts in Chapter One, on the experience and/or the metaphor of migration. The mutation image works with what migration basically is — a profound transformation of life between two places.

Much of the ‘language’ I produce, the songs that I sing, takes the form of handmade objects, often crafted items referring to once domestic skills that — like knitting or weaving or gardening — are now to some extent part of the ‘high art’ vernacular. The mimetic knitted works, for instance — made from baby wool, which suggest that they might receive and remember anything in their vicinity — are listed later in the previous chapter. In terms of my thesis on Mutations, they are about the discontinued narrative of my grandmother. Therefore, the sometimes monumental use of the fine effort of knitting creates a contradiction or a transformation. These works are also represent the reclamation of something that my migration obscured for me. (See *The Fragility of*
Goodness Figure 58-60, p. 58 - 59).\footnote{I refer again to the absence of my grandmother and the secrecy surrounding her life that was unjustly removed to an institution. Even now I feel that I should not be writing this. This experience of shame that still silences my mother is a discontinued narrative that has plagued me throughout this work.} In addition, there are the Mesh (Figures 55-57 p. 187) works that could also be included in this exploration of migration, as well as its discontinued narratives. Central to the outcome of my thesis is my evolving understanding of mutations (often the result of the trauma of migration) that coalesce into this poetry of process and handmade productions pertinent to a site. The carpet works are openings again and again into the earth as I search for something. These works are based explicitly on the gridded format.

The ficto-critical writings in Chapter One are part of the same narratives as the handmade textiles, that are also integral components of the installations which includes the growing text ‘prints’, that are also integral components of the installation:. text into images and images into texts form in these combinations of works. My endeavour here has been to produce visual and written texts seamlessly intermeshed along with other projects. Smithson’s work has been a useful model. The specified research into Mirror Travels in the Yucatan — including the photographic and written projects — provides an understanding of how there is continuity within the various forms enabled by and within the folds\footnote{Again the image of the Baroque fold. Deleuze Dictionary edited by Adrian Parr, p. 105.} of these forms. The ‘journey’ to the Yucatan is the focus of the continuity between text and image in the example I make of this work.

Also informing and elaborating my themes and processes of production is an intersection with the maternal connection, exemplified by the administrated Boronia Project and other garden projects. The consideration of the earth in these instances informs the rectangular gridded ‘carpet’ images both inside and outside gallery spaces. I extrapolate a connection to Smithson’s Site/Nonsite continuity. Through this folded continuity I embrace the here and there dichotomies of my own fractures and fissures. And through a
reading of Foucault and his feminist commentators, the image of the British institution as superimposed on the Australian landscape implicates, that is, enfolds, all institutions, including the asylum. (This discussion was developed in the Notes on the Castle work prior to my Doctorate.)

My own migrant memories are developed in Chapter One. The referencing of the colonial past through architecture, such as in The Black, defines an intersection with national history and my own particular experience of institutions and power related situations — something that is at the basis of our British heritage in Australia. Like Smithson’s frequently used form, the journey, such as one finds in Mirror Travels in the Yucatan, migration for me defines a space of transformation and mutation. As a migrant one becomes open to the intersection of two or a multiplicity of histories.

**Extended space and other projects**

In this introduction to the images there is an attempt to bring together visual and textual explorations and to show how there is a course of action defined in the various projects that is itself mobile and migratory. Beyond the relics of the colonial past is an invigorated migrant one.

*Liverpool/Liverpool: the skin of translation* encompasses global transitioning by its form and content. *Boronia* incorporated the neglected and peripheral space of institutions. If I were to include the Francis Lane Studio project I could say that it proposes a dynamic, fluid international network of migratory transcendent creativity in the face of other less positive factors. Further, this environment and my translation of its meanings extends into the Cosmos works and also The Law Is Not Always Just. *(Figures 50-52 p. 184 - 85)*

---

18 *Frances Lane Studio* was built during the course of this Doctorate. It involved an architect who in discussion with my doctorate project has developed a house that suggests movement and
Chapter Two explained how migration can create a condition of instability and quest, an uncomfortable schism that has manifest poetically, creatively, mutatively especially in the lives of many since the advent of Modernism and movements from rural living. Kristeva reveals historically and psychoanalytically how this has been occurring since ancient times.\(^{18}\) She also demonstrates in her writing a transcendent quality of her own re-invention.\(^{19}\) To a degree I have referenced her work in thinking how I have used my own art practice.

I also relate in Chapter Five the research expeditions to the UK and the influence of this travelling on both visual and written components. There, I did experience my own latent ancient past. Knowing the strength of these transported narratives in myself, gives pause to consider their overall potency in Australia as a country of strangers.

As a way of spatially, sculpturally, and experientially incorporating time and global space two exhibitions occurred simultaneously in St Georges Hall Liverpool UK and also Casula Powerhouse in the western suburbs near Liverpool NSW. Thus the space between (and the entire planet as a sphere in space) was implicated as well as the historical stratifications occurring in two places. The presence not only of the Liverpool and Liverpool locations but also the massive movements of between and around these two points geographically and also of my own experience. (See also Chapter One.)

Regeneration UK\textsuperscript{20} was an implicit presence (in Manchester one of the major British centres of migration) at the \textit{Glocal Imaginaries} conference.\textsuperscript{21} Regeneration is a creative and spatial response Britain has made to working with past and future migratory histories and geographies in the urban environment as is Migration Studies. Regeneration is now a structurally embedded national system. Against entropy this kind of productivity is what I think Smithson believed to be an important field of focus for artists. Regeneration UK as I describe elsewhere is significantly recognised by Migration Studies because it enables conceptual transferences — travels between disciplines an essential part of its organisation. British Regenerative practice has to a degree been implemented in Newcastle NSW on \textit{Urban Regeneration}.\textsuperscript{22} There would seem to me to be much greater scope for its introduction to Australia than currently exists. In Newcastle planners have made efforts to revitalise decaying shopping precincts by giving creative people free access to real estate where in new cultural possibilities might be generated. This is a small scale compared to what occurs in Britain.

The Boronia and related projects might be understood to have come about through the impact of various non-disclosures of time and place. Newness and reinvention can come about through something deeply painful (as was the case with Smithson and Eva Hesse\textsuperscript{23}) though neither of these people were explicitly migrants in the usual sense — Hesse’s parents were however and she had in their generation the incomparable trauma of the Holocaust. Through the effects of trauma the travelling of concepts can become more of an imperative drive.

\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Glocal Imaginaries Conference}, Lancaster University, U. K September (September 2009).

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid. (conference)

\textsuperscript{22} \textit{Place Making and Urban Renewal} Forum, January 2011, The Loft Cultural Centre Wolfe St, Newcastle, N.S.W.

\textsuperscript{23} Eva Hesse’s parents and many of her family members were put to death in the concentration camps. The condition of ‘migrant’ or exile is obviously powerfully connected to the Jewish culture.
Grass Works

The range of the works in the *View from the Sixty Third Floor* series of grass carpets follow in a tradition of responsiveness to site established by Smithson’s practice, such as one sees in *Mirror Travels* as a photographic sequence. The carpets tell a sequential story of places and the mimetic variations they provoked in response to various places, though unlike Smithson who made the full series in a number of days, mine span about twelve years — in different places, cities and countries. The comparison of the two works is on many levels superficial, though there is a desire for some profound resolution being played out in both sets of work, in which the earth dominates the content and medium. My grass images are mainly made from instant turf, as well as washed instant turf that becomes a wad of dried rhizome roots (literally). They also employ other materials such as domestic carpet squares, sometimes astro-turf, sometimes cast grass writing. The materials vary in relation to the location, to a degree mirroring surroundings.

Metaphorically, in this text I am focussing on an image (that I will call the entirety of the ten separate images) of an etymological rope being dropped through to a well in moving stratifications of hectic times and imagery. As if seen from a distance from the earth, massive movement swirling around the planet earth is the still centre of my meditation. These create trans-formations, mutations are within movements overlaid on movements. Like the institutions where I found myself working, turbulence and its reappraisal in these times are the norm. Though I think all the work made by me before and during this thesis are to a degree mappings of chaos, they define an affective space in their vicinity of repose, even tranquillity. We are reminded of the earth as a scent and as a substance and as a presence that might be abused or neglected. This is the case with the ‘carpet’ works (see *Figures 13-21* pp. 166 - 170).

I will look first to one of the earlier grass carpet works such as the 2006 Helen Lempriere work at Werribee Park. (*Figure 19* p. 169) This site in the grounds of colonial landowners was near to an earlier site of Aboriginal devastation. As was the case with
others in this series, I implicate the sites into which they were placed. These temporal works have persisted with basically the same gridded design for over a decade. Each work transformed according to its location. Amongst the use of other surfaces I included at Werribee an excavation cut into the lawn the size of an actual grave. The angular excavation suggested a European grave. This note in the design was to signify what had occurred at that place — death. In the context of the overall gridded image there was universality in this bull-dozed incision — in the formality of the image there was no description or allusion to an Aboriginal grave — death is abstracted. By bringing this work into context with *Boronia* that occurred prior to this work, I want to imply that there is a connection between the community prison imagery and this gridded work.24 I want to imply as a migrant, an image which recognises and at the same time, re-enacts the past.

*Liverpool/Liverpool: the skin of translation* is the latest and possibly the last of this series made in 2010. The work’s collaborative gesture in including migrant writers’ words produced a new ‘surface’ on the gallery floor adjacent to the Aboriginal floor which has been in place since Casula Powerhouse’s inception in the 1990s. Large grass casts were made of the work of four migrant writers, Catherine Rey25, Ouyang Yu26, Sarah Day27 and Nasrin Mahoutchi28. As legibility of the text was sometimes a problem due to the unpredictability of the casting process, their texts were provided to facilitate a full comprehension of their work. I would want their words to have their own integrity beyond my ‘text’, though the randomness was indicative of the many layers of language, which are now part of the Australian suburban terrain. I wanted to work with the ‘schism,’ which has been described in Chapter Two on the stranger —conceptually illegibility worked with my image (though not necessarily with their). The ‘textile’ of

24 The grave was a Western one belonging to the grid of the work’s design.

25 Rey, Catherine, unpublished poems


imprinted words adjacent to the Aboriginal floor ‘conversed’ with the ancient past of the land and stories embedded into Judy Watson’s floor design. Each of these writers is contributing to a new cultural layer on this land. My role in this work again is to provide a context for a section of ideas.

We, as migrants in this country are but a skin on the surface of an ancient continent. The sequence of carpets encompassing the View work, including Liverpool/Liverpool: the skin of translation tries to exemplify the act of translation from one place to another. The large floor work is laid out on the gallery as if it were a carpet. The printed text is placed in segments between the strips of grass and washed roots, carpets and astro-turf. In the sequence of carpets works (nine works) encompassing the View work, including Liverpool/Liverpool: the skin of translation, I wanted to produce, to exemplify the act of translation from one place to another. The large floor work is laid out on the gallery —as if a domestic carpet were being rolled out. The printed text is placed in segments between the strips of grass and washed roots as shown in the adjacent image. The scale of the work gave the work presence in the Casula Powerhouse Museum, which had once supplied local energy by a polluting coal powered system.

LIVERPOOL/LIVERPOOL an exhibition in two cities (Curated by Paul Howard who assisted with the production of this proposal).

Proposal to produce an installed work at Casula Powerhouse (and possibly in Liverpool UK). These works would ideally be concurrent and would both involve a development of the ‘carpet’ image. Please see the attached images that are representative of a series of works that I have made over the last few years in a number of locations in Australia and Europe. (Also images of the casting process).

These carpets at once transient and ‘at home’ responding to their surroundings could have been done anywhere though some are in significant historical locations in which they
have been placed such as a convict settlement Port Arthur, Martin Place in Sydney where a convict washhouse once stood; Werribee Park, a magnificent colonial home on an Aboriginal corroboree site; and Bondi Beach where suburban housing developments encroach on rock faces where Aboriginal rock carvings are exposed. Variations were subtle…grass varieties carpet types for instance as well as ‘cast text’ of place names. The work in Vienna involved taking the Australian grass roots (washed of their soil) to that city thus incorporating something of the procedures involved in such a manoeuvre as well as the implication of a displacement.

Like these dispersed but persistent images, I seek a sense of location in a country where I have no generational history (I was born in UpHolland Lancashire, Liverpool was our nearest city). We went to live in Tasmania because our farm had been zoned in a Liverpool satellite town. The profound history of Australia belongs to the Aboriginal people. I long for a sense of my own ancient past as I define myself in these images as a skim on the surface of Australia’s history.

I am currently working on a Doctorate at the School of Writing and Society at the University of Western Sydney. I am writing about what Nikos Papastergiadis in his book *The Turbulence of Migration*, has termed ‘discontinued narratives of migration’ drawing on a sense of myself being part of the massive flows of populations into Australia, and a lived sense of this turbulence. The title of my Creative Arts Doctorate is *The Mutation of Migration*. I am researching the practice of Robert Smithson whose theoretical and visual work exposed larger historical (and pre-historical), industrial processes and significantly took art out of the museum and into a variety of sites beyond the art world. The notion of entropy, which has some contemporary equivalence in global-warming was the central concept in his very interdisciplinary output. A requirement of Smithson’s work is that we remain open to possibilities. At one level I am using migration as a figure for creativity. The use of a hydroponic system, which featured in the Artspace exhibition was both a personal symbol (my parents resolved the transformed condition of their lives by
becoming Tasmania’s first hydroponic farmers) It is literally a nature/culture machine. It represented to me the mutation of our lives. Migration offers the possibility of re-invention. Liverpool (Sydney), with its 147 language groups, to me is so representative of the profusion of changing flows of peoples and its inherent potential.

The images that I have created out of grass, washed instant turf grass root, cast grass letters, astro-turf, carpet squares etc are both real and virtual spaces of migration and I would like to raise questions of how ancient pasts affect possible futures in these transient spaces. The language of migration—of uprooting, transplanting, trans-mutations, cultivations and hybridisation—is especially relevant for the thinking of my work and practice. As part of my thesis I have embarked on a series of short pieces of writing which attempt to define something of the affect of migration through imagery relating to architecture, space and the earth.

PRODUCTION

Following on from recent discussions, I would like to continue to discuss the possibilities of producing a large scale work, a ‘wall to wall’ carpet for the Turbine Hall at Casula Powerhouse.

In my current research with the University of Western Sydney’s Writing and Society group, seminal thinker of site-specific practice, Robert Smithson is one of my major Case Studies. My debt to his acknowledgement of time and its layers (even including the prehistoric or geological), as well as the use, and implications of actual earth can be a moment to create what he calls a ‘dialectic’ with those processes, is a vital influence on this work.)
The carpet work I have done to date relies on a Minimalist grid incorporating a range of materials including washed instant turf, growing grass, carpet squares, astro-turf, a grave size rectangular hole, excavated with a bull-dozer and filled with leaves at Werribee Park, plaster casts from which the cast grass place names had been embedded were also included. The play of these ground-oriented materials can simultaneously provoke considerations of the land and its history as well as the impact of technology and migration on the earth. The use of text in a recent series called *Of the Earth* is made from cast grass roots; place names are reminders of the countries of origin. The grass place names are grown – ‘printed’ from moulds of plaster. The casting of roots, the imprinting by place and language developed in this form would lend itself to a large-scale work, and a celebration of cultural diversity and flows in the Liverpool (Sydney) area since its (white), inception 200 years ago. This work could also be developed to refer to the laying of the Foundation Stone by Lachlan Macquarie.

The initial idea for *Liverpool/Liverpool*, an exhibition in two cities arose as an approximation of an experienced connection to living on two sides of the world or in two places. I have travelled frequently over the last decade, internationally and interstate. I am studying at the University of Western Sydney (near Liverpool). I have been aware that Liverpool (UK) has become a very creatively vibrant city and have often thought that I might have been to university there had we not migrated. ‘Migrants are in constant dialogue with past and present, near and far, foreign and familiar. They never arrive at a destination; from the moment of embarkation the journey never ends’.1 Exhibiting in both cities can play upon this perception.

The experience of living in two or more places is a common contemporary subjective state. Cheaper international travel, the internet, massive information circulation have lead to a hyper-proliferation of transitions of populations both real and virtual. The *Glocal*

---

Imaginaries conference that I am attending in Manchester in September addresses these amongst many related issues.

I have begun to do some research into historical links between the two cities Liverpool and Liverpool. There are links to unionism that significantly developed in both cities; and a comparison could be made between the abusive treatment of black peoples (and hence a need for activism) that has occurred in both places. Babette Smith in her book *Australia’s Birthstain*, discusses a 19th century activist Molesworth, likens transportation to the colonies to slavery. In the nineteenth century generally there was much debate regarding the ethics of transportation which would have been evident in both cities.

The scale of the project at Casula could lend itself to a sense of movement through the space, as it sits within an imagined magnetic force field of Liverpool’ This flow like my other carpets is both out of place, and absolutely in place, on the ground, a skim of earth not hiding the Koori (Sydney based Aboriginal tribal area) Floor, but connecting with it. The carpet works exude presence of the earth and its scent. The words, the stories of the Australian writers would touch on the surface of the concrete Koori floor.

I am interested to continue to have working contact with community groups. (I have worked with a range of these including the Boronia Garden (in a women’s prison in the west of Sydney and a group of migrant women in Gymea). In the instance of the current project, I will be specifically researching writers, migrant, refugee and local of the Liverpool area. I will be seeking text (and permission to incorporate it) into the large floor work.

When one sits in a room full of migrants and listens, the need and the force of their stories is powerfully experienced. I think Wright was referring to the oral tradition of story telling which is profoundly part of her culture. The use of actual earth in these
works and actual roots implies a deep recognition of the land, and hopefully an acknowledgment of the significance of its original owners. The resulting ‘textile’ work is a skin – barely 2cm thick. As an emigrant to Australia there is no depth to my generations here. I have had to seek a bond with Australia. My work with migrant women has taught me that this schism of the migrant’s life is common. I wanted to find some connection to my own ancient past, which I started to represent in the short iMovie film *Desire for Ancient History*, a brief study of the genealogy of the convict prison. It was simply made from scanned images of castles going back to pre-historical precursors.

THE USE OF PLACE NAMES

The use of place names is a very direct, obvious and effective way of making connections to the memories and shapings of previously lived lives. A large artwork covering the ground of the Casula Turbine Hall could provide many moments of speculation including reference to the towns and cities in the birthplaces of large number of language groups in the Liverpool area.

The casting of writing would include pieces, (or fragments) of text by Liverpool (Sydney) writers, poets specifically involving thoughts on migration to the area, or migration generally. Living writers as well as earlier creators and thinkers could be represented. (In the grass root printing form).

The grass casts are not physically strong enough to take regular walking upon. The work would have to be negotiated by pathways, probably made as I have used before out of grass, or I may simply leave the designated pathways as the exposed Koori floor. These would become an intrinsic and conceptual part of the design. The work would be designed to be both walked around, the sense of being on earth as well as the affect of smell of the earth are significant sensory dimensions to this work, Specific elements of the writing will become apparent and be legible. The Turbine Gallery also offers the
opportunity to view the large floor from the first floor platform. The advantage of this perspective is that one will be able to encompass an overview of the work’s diversity. In other carpet works I have used a variety of floor covers. These materials may be considered. At Werribee Park, the grave as part of the minimalist grid indicated the presence of death. A similar reminder of the tragedy of Aboriginal history, in this work gives gravity to the content of the work. The grave obviously cannot be bulldozed, but as the earth is present already in the root textile it may be possible say to make casts of gravestones from a local cemetry. A play with ghosts of the past might be introduced.

Alexis Wright (of Chinese, Aboriginal, Irish descent speaks from her Chinese tradition in asking ‘how will the spirits of the ancestors know where we have gone?’ Many of us migrants are similarly ‘disappeared persons’.

I am currently working on tests with a variety of grasses. I have a cousin (another immigrant to Australia) who is a genetic engineer whose scientific team has devised a low methane grass for cattle and sheep. An eco-dimension of this work could also be included into its vast text. More specific designs can begin to be developed if the project proceeds.

What is the relevance to the recent research project Liverpool/Liverpool: the skin of translation?

The presence and the scent of this ‘carpet’ of earth asserted itself in this earlier and now technologically out-dated site of coal energy. I also wanted to negotiate recognition of Aboriginal culture’s relationship to earth and place. The carpet did not cover the Aboriginal floor but respectfully to the side of it in the adjacent gallery space. Local imported place names were part of my work, as were places such as Wigan, Ormskirk, Prescott which were memories of my own transition. An attempt was made to synthesize here and there. The work was designed as an active process and continued to be so throughout the show. It was tended to maintain a verdant glow in the gallery.
Hydroponics and grass casts.

The hydroponic system (see Figure 15) that I used in the 1999 Artspace exhibition was emblematic of hybrid nature/culture, but it also refers to the hydroponic farming that became my family’s livelihood when we migrated. This form of agriculture barely requires the earth. The toil evident in the production of Liverpool/Liverpool: the skin of translation at SCA is also a reiteration of the labour undergone by migrants such as my parents, many of whom in Australia were market gardeners. An image of migration prevails in the gridded carpets and the grass castings. The role of the handmade, the tactile, the touch as a conduit in bringing together imagery is revealed in various works but especially in the castings of grass roots such as in the Of the Earth series. The ‘printed’ text out of cast roots itself described the process of separation from a past which leaves a memory, literally an imprint. In peeling back the grass from the moulds I value the fragments of plaster embedded in the roots, refusing to be shaken loose.

The 2000 hydroponic work most clearly images the process for me in the obscure bringing together of migration with mutation. Liverpool/Liverpool: the skin of translation has been developed simultaneously to the community garden works that are being discussed with Casula Powerhouse. I refer again to the Site/Nonsites of Smithson, to imply a use of an expanded field beyond the gallery to raise questions and attempt to include the abject zone of habitation of these women into a mainstream culture. Working on projects especially with Aboriginal women at risk of crime enables me to live reflectively through the difficult ethical questions about migration, the land and in a symbolic way the prison system. 29

Concurrent to this written work have been my own projects that emerge from the history of abstraction and especially Minimalism and Post-Minimalism. I have referenced an

29 I reference an actual prison but have used Foucauldian references to the concept of the prison when I made Notes on the Castle in 2004. There’s a use of these institutions as symbols and as more generalised ways of organising grids of surveillance and economic justifications which cut against creative possibilities.
influence from Robert Rauschenberg’s Black Paintings of 1962. My own gallery work has a connection to the community projects I describe and that they frequently reference. In the writing of *Liverpool/Liverpool* in chapter one, I am wanting to understand the permutations of law and power that create this field in a marginal space – by taking the seat of the Judge. In the image below, The Judge is confronted with the unfurling of the statement *The Law is Not Always Just*. With Reconciliation there are no easy solutions. I am aware, as Marcia Langton observed there is a dreadful history of white people wanting to do something to assist Aboriginal people but in so doing, have made the situation worse.  

These works require little explanation – their concept and process work very effectively together. They are cast place names usually done in relation to individuals with whom I worked.

![Figure 4: Print of Sao Paulo text with a fragment of its cast below.](image)

---

30 The ABC TV series, *The First Australians* by Rachel Perkins and Marcia Langton. I wanted to define my position in my own research as a migrant who addresses a number of issues to do with Reconciliation. The garden project however, was *cross*-cultural and Aboriginal inmates to this day have taken ownership in the sense that they invested the most time and energy and use of the space. I was very pleased for this to happen as it is a way they could reclaim their culture in that environment.
They speak of place and origin and hopefully the stories that are transplanted from elsewhere. They were exhibited in six exhibitions during the course of the Doctorate. I hope that as with the ‘carpets’ to implicate the ancient history of Australia and also a virtual link between the two places. Earth the material is a central reference.

*A Lucky Country* comprised 15 segments – place names including Sao Paulo, Saigon, Canley Vale, Melbourne, Manchester, Amman, Manila and so on. Many of the place names evoke histories of immigrants from troubled cities as well as some local Sydney suburbs. I worked at the Hazelhurst Migrant Centre with a women’s group and now have access to a network that supports these women in their endeavour to assimilate. I continue to have ‘on the ground’ contact with community groups anticipating the
production this year of *Casula/Corrections*, a collaboration between the Department of Corrections and Casula Powerhouse (Liverpool Council). The grass place names that are grown – ‘printed’ from the moulds of plaster. Acclaimed novelist Alexis Wright said that Australia needs to ‘develop a new dreaming that brings together people of many’. The use of actual earth in these works and actual roots implies a deep recognition of the land, and an acknowledgment of the significance of its original owners. The resulting ‘textile’ work is a skim – barely 2cm thick. I have had to find a bond with Australia. My own introspection as well as the work with migrant women has taught me that the schism

![Figure 7: Varying root structures of different grasses](image)

of the migrant ‘s life is common. Working with Aboriginal women on the *Boronia Garden* project gave me cause to think about the connection to my own ancient past. I experimented with a range of seeds to enable more precision and play in determining how the root textures work. This experimentation continues to have scope. I demonstrated in my work the argument that that this material, of the earth has extended potential in thinking about usually secret or obscured languages of origin and transformations in response to a new place. The DVD *Desire for Ancient History*\(^31\) works with these ideas and also with imagery from the notes on the castle series. I have demonstrated how this material with its potential for impressionability, is as a kind of cultivated ‘skin’. The

---

\(^{31}\) *Desire for Ancient History* can be found in the sleeve insert on the back cover. This short iMovie was made as a summation of the *notes on the castle* project and was shown at an exhibition curated by Nicholas Tsoutas at Casula Powerhouse about migration in 2006. The film, as did the notes on the castle exhibition, is a series of images of the ancient form of the castle in Britain going back to Roman forts. These transpose over centuries and a version becomes transplanted in Australia. In the exhibition at the Tin Sheds in 2004, there was a projection of the panopticon at Port Arthur and a panopticon (based on this particular one) made out of cardboard archive boxes.
expressive possibilities of incorporating genetically engineered grasses in the production of this skin of earth, expands its possible meanings. The complex issues and paradoxes relating to movements and displacements, the use of ‘artificial’ and ‘natural’ developed into the large Liverpool/Liverpool work in two cities.

I plan to keep working for some time with roots as a medium. Some recent reading into the idea put forward by Charles Darwin of the ‘Root Brain’ begs further exploration, as do studies in the roots of mushrooms (Mychorrizone) suggests an intelligence greater than one would initially guess at work in the roots of plants. An article on the ‘Root Brain’ can be found in Appendix 4 p. 324.

Recent reading has lead me to look at the work of Ana Mendietta who takes her own bodily connection to the earth much further32 in the silhoutas — life size figurines made from various earth substances. These works bring the body into close association with processes of the earth. I think that my work growing roots certainly asserts the earth as a source of basic origins, becomings as well as language. I greatly admire Aboriginal culture, but want to find sources of connection within my own culture’s ancient traditions. I began making the grass imprinted work a few years ago as a way of thinking about place, memory and loss and death. The second series of printed roots I began in response to working with migrant women on the Boronia project. I think it is important to view the two bodies of work in close association with each other.

**Image and Text**

I see a need to define a language which moves between the written word and visual processes of materiality and production and which has a relationship to visceral bodily presence — creating affect — a direct transference of meaning. This tendency has been established in my practice and is a fundamental starting point for this study. The adjacent

section is covered with glass but in the work’s first incarnation it was hidden beneath living grass shoots in the walled garden of Sydney College of the Arts (formerly a mental hospital). It was then part of the Liverpool/Liverpool work at Casula. The framing in this instance — in rusty steel included the earth colour, but also weight to the set of four one metre by two metres rectangles which leaned against the gallery wall. This need relates to an understanding of the damage and in my own case, necessity to reclaim a voice for a maternal body denied any presence.

The thesis encompasses the need to define my role in the production of this work as an active performative participant and storyteller. I am immersed in the process of emigration and uprooting, and it is also beyond and around me. A reference to the work of Eva Hesse is applicable to this section of the study in that her processes and syntheses of ideas are driven by a need to redefine, transcend, illuminate and transport herself from a state besieged by anxieties and contradictions into a more sublime state of connectedness. The processes of making and creating are integral to working from a wound or lesion caused by migration and its turbulences.

**Issues that arose** in the process of the studio research

i). How might one conceptualise global and local space? The concept of *glocal* space was the subject of the *Glocal Imaginaries Conference*. Despite many initiatives to bring Australia in line with the rest of the world ‘glocally’, our distance from the northern hemisphere maintains a level of regionalism about being an Australian. What I am discussing fights against a tide. The *Liverpool/Liverpool: the skin of translation* exhibition worked within the ongoing debate about Australia’s place in globalism. The University of Western Sydney supported the dual exhibition’s realisation in two separate countries. The work’s existence was a reminder that a common contemporary subjective

---

33 *Glocal Imaginaries Conference: Moving Manchester*, University of Lancaster, (September 2009).
condition is that many of us live within the wide frame of the local and global, living more than one life at the same time.

ii) I had wanted to become more absorbed into a study of the biochemistry of mutation to be able to draw parallels and build new imagery. Some forays into medical imaging of cellular activity were made. I found the integrating of the new field of Migration Studies very consuming — and enriching as it also asserts the necessity of interdisciplinarity to understand vastly shifting patterns of populations. Arjun Appadurai’s suggestion that Chaos Theory might be a useful model to understand shifting populations provided me with images to think on. Understandings from microbiology will likely be part of a new project.34 Also noted in this new application to extend my work is a commentary on another field of science with which I could engage further, involving the idea of the root brain. (See Appendix 4.) There is a hypothesis that originated with Charles Darwin that the roots constitute the ‘brain’ of a plant. I conducted experiments with about 20 varieties of grass seeds to look at the various root structures that I would be able to utilise for Liverpool/Liverpool. The outlined possibility of working with Dr Nicholas Roberts, a geneticist, was restricted by legal constraints regarding these experiments, which have to be confined to laboratories. (I was hoping to use genetically modified grasses in Liverpool/Liverpool. These would not have differed greatly visually from the indigenous and imported grass seeds that I did use; but the plan had been to use literally these hybrid, mutated, genetically altered forms in this major work.) Hybrids and genetically modified or mutated seed types would have complicated the metaphoric relationship to migration in an interesting way. My research into Migration Studies could serve as grounding for the development of more imagery pursuing Darwin, and more recent research into the understanding of roots such as I found on mycorrhizone websites and also Ted.com.

34 Migration is a well-documented 20th & 21st century phenomenon that Indian writer, Arjun Appadurai, proposes is accelerating — and suggests new science models of Chaos Theory to think about this phenomenon in terms of particles, movements and change. During the recent Liverpool/Liverpool project, I spent much time thinking (and introspecting) about how migration
Mesh Works

The *Mesh* works were produced for the same exhibition at Hazelhurst Regional Gallery in 2007. Made from found and purchased materials from the suburban environment in places such as Liverpool, Cabramatta, Penrith these weavings of assorted materials, objects, fibres, hardwares like what one might find in a future archeaological uncovering of the ground of what now exists in Western Sydney suburbs. See Figure 55-57, p. 189.

![Figure 8a](image)

**Figure 8a:** from *of the earth* series (2000–2010). Steel framed section of grass root casts from Liverpool/Liverpool, with section of poem *Emigre* by Sarah Day (2011) Courtesy of Conny Dietzschold Gallery.

These works utilise an orange plastic webbing frequently used by councils whilst road alterations are in progress —available at the omnipresent Bunnings stores. Driving through the western suburbs as I have done frequently during the course of this Doctorate one sees constant upheaval and reshaping of the terrain as the suburban sprawl spreads over an ever-widening land surface. This is partly to accommodate the new migrant population for whom centres such as Liverpool, where real estate is relatively cheap are a first foothold into a new life. The roadside excavations and their trappings interest me as
Sites of processes revealed and of change in action. The plastic has a strong graphic quality which lead to my using it in the series of wall works called the Mesh series which are woven with all manner of urban are woven with all manner of urban detritus and also cross cultural materials available in the diverse shopping available out west of Sydney. The works incorporate a passion for creative shopping and an enthusiasm for diversity with a Post-Minimalist aesthetic.

The material is also basically —literally a barrier mesh, used to seclude areas from access. In a new work being designed for Cockatoo Island later this year, I am continuing with this usage for a work that will be a play on the excesses of bureaucratism — very much now in evidence on this once deserted island of history and its process. These are now arrested by its more recent transformation into a museum of sorts and a venue for film shoots necessitating (by Council authorities) O. H. & S. boundaries and borders imposed. The site once occupied by heavy ship building machinery and processes resonates with its tough, rough history which has seeped into the concrete surrounding massive machines whose sounds would have rung through the air on the island. The moment when machines were final switched off is now frozen in time, made precious and fragile by the new rulings of the Council.
**Mesh Diptych and Weeds (Figure 54)**

This image shows one of the *Mesh Diptych* pieces with the large collection of $2.00 shop flowers amidst paper handmade thistles. This began as a study of weeds during a residency at Bundanon, where especially Scottish thistles have reached plague proportions. I learned how to make a version thanks to a Korean crepe paper flower making technique. The $2.00 shop ‘weeds’ extend the question of migratory plants into a work, which asks I think, about the value to our economy of these Chinese cheapo shops which, have frequently lead to the destruction of Australian industries. These works still I think, reference a history painting — in a way after Smithson and Eva Hesse who both used everyday processes and materials artfully — almost as if they were paint.

*(knitted works)* *The Fragility of Goodness (I and II)* *(Figures 58-59, pp. 188 - 189)*

**Everything is Connected to Everything Else** made for the *Matthew and Others* exhibition about schizophrenia. They are relevant to place here in this context because of the material connection. Likewise, the knitted works that include *The Fragility of*...
Goodness (1 & 2) Page 188. These do speak of our lineage, birth connection to another place and the use of the material

*Figure 10:* A Scottish thistle made of crepe paper (2008)

suggests even a ‘mother tongue.’ Baby wool ‘speaks’ of the newness and impressionability —the mimetic potential of the maternal as I reflect on the way trauma is passed down through generations and how that damage is conveyed directly through the maternal line. These works assert the fragility of the origin, in other words strengthen its potential, vulnerability. The framed *Fragility of Goodness*, which was shown in the Hazelhurst *The Lucky Country* exhibition in 2007.36

*Cosmos* series at the Conny Dietzschold Gallery, *Figure 62*, 2009. These also can be considered *Nonsite* studies in chewing gum (chewed mostly by myself with some assistance) are ‘paintings’ which have a connection to abject spaces.

Work in progress from *Four Unfinished Poems* (2007). This work continues to develop the idea of the transplant through its reference to bodily functions, vascular and digestive systems and their metaphorical associations with architecture. It is a study for a later work that will be specifically about the artifice of organ transplanting. In this process too life is discontinued then re-animated

36 *The Lucky Country* was a two year project at the Hazelhurst Regional gallery curated by Daniel Cunningham, Ron and George Adams and Michael Rolfe, 2007-08.
DVD works which relate to these temporal grass works.

These works are edited on iMovie and have a homemade, ‘I was present’ handheld quality. All DVDs included in this document.

• **from A to B, an Allegory of Process** (6 min) DVD work shown at UTS in *Change in the Weather* (2008). This short film is about the movement of a heavy cylinder from one place to another. It stars my father whose processes of invention and innovation derive in part from his being a migrant on the land who has constantly used his creativity in the evolution of a demanding “journey” as a migrant. Migrants possess decisive independence and confidence to leave one place in search of something better elsewhere. A mechanical engineer, my father’s ability to produce what he imagines—including our being transported across the world is a major influence on this text and my interest in transiting and transforming.

* **Memory of a forgotten self, on the other side of the world** (5 min) 2008.

My father took these pieces of old Super 8 footage before we left the UK in 1963. They were transferred onto VHS a few years ago, then here transferred onto DVD. Each translation leaves a grainy trace on the surface of the old film showing a childhood on the other side of the world.
Desire for Ancient History, 2006. Made after the notes on the castle exhibition using images incorporated into that installed work of ancient castles on ancient sites. The medieval castles become Australian prisons and they become cardboard archive boxes built into walls, flying buttresses and other architectural features of the castle. Heidegger has described the subjugation of the earth and its ‘stockpiling’ as a ‘standing reserve’ and the loss of the earth’s ‘thingness’ (its elemental quality).37 I can speculate on what the earth might have meant for Aboriginal people before the arrival of white people, these systems of power and measurement which prisons and the panopticon of information, which is now covering this country.38

Whilst in the UK, I visited the part of the world where I grew up to think about generational depth—in relation to a churchyard where my mother’s family have been buried since the 1700s (and where my sister Sarah Day wrote the poem Emigre). I visited Wigan Parish built on a Roman site which had windows made by the thirteenth century Lancashire glass painters at York Minster. This is my local cultural source—but so far away. In the work Liverpool/Liverpool: the skin of translation I used earth and roots making casts of local place names from that vicinity in an attempt to think about how such profound memories might be brought to bear in an Australian present.39 Having a


38 Grosz, Elizabeth, Chaos, territory, art: Deleuze and the framing of the earth, Colombia University Press, 2005.

39 When presenting my ideas at the Trauma, Affect, Art and Writing (2011) Seminar someone in the audience, a woman from Hong Kong thought that it was laughable for a British person to think of themselves as traumatised in any way by a transition across the earth—the move was volitional on the part of my parents, and Australia is ‘The Lucky Country.’ Nonetheless, for me severance from around 25 extended family members at the time, plus the reformation of friendships with peers was difficult enough to cause sufficient trauma to put me on tranquilizers at the age of nine. There has been a tendency to underplay, even ridicule British migrants—not least because we were demonised as invaders or the “guilty party” who did all the damage. British migrant artists including Jacky Redgate, Hillary Mais, Paul Howard, Deej Fabyc with whom I have discussed the British Diaspora would like to see their category of migrant redressed.
sense of oneself as a product of many generations rather than a displaced group was an unfamiliar experience. While experiencing this direct and palpable connectedness (these people looked like my relatives) there is the fact of having been away on the other side of the world for forty years that is at the same time separating. The land, the voices of Wigan and Liverpool are overwhelmingly comfortable to be around. Northerners especially Wiganers are praised by George Orwell for their unaffected humour and generosity.\footnote{Orwell, George, \textit{The Road to Wigan Pier}, Penguin, 1989.} There is a tradition of poverty and hardship. If I have any idea of belonging—as traditional Aboriginal culture describes to the land at all—this is where.\footnote{This seems quite tragically nostalgic to even state such a thing, but many “Australians” do have such profound attachments to other parts of the world, though their own ancient history seems irrelevant to even think about as there is no context.}

* \textit{Artspace 24/25}. Movie and images based on the Boronia Project 2009. An interview with Sally Hookey who was one of the Aboriginal women working on the project. This film also shows images of the garden soon after it was initially made in 2005.\footnote{www.Artspace24/25}

* \textit{THE LAW IS NOT ALWAYS JUST} was the filming of the grass being peeled back from these words cast on plaster. This DVD was made to be sent to Liverpool UK. It was in made in response to the St Georges Hall site. The image shows this building as the monolith of the Empire with statues of Britannia. I showed this DVD in a dungeon corridor, which was very similar in style architecturally to dungeons at Port Arthur, Tasmania that featured in \textit{notes on the castle}. It was serendipitous that I discovered the connection to Judge Day.\footnote{www.St.GeorgesHall.Liverpool.uk}

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item \textit{Artspace 24/25}. Movie and images based on the Boronia Project 2009. An interview with Sally Hookey who was one of the Aboriginal women working on the project. This film also shows images of the garden soon after it was initially made in 2005.

\item \textit{THE LAW IS NOT ALWAYS JUST} was the filming of the grass being peeled back from these words cast on plaster. This DVD was made to be sent to Liverpool UK. It was in response to the St Georges Hall site. The image shows this building as the monolith of the Empire with statues of Britannia. I showed this DVD in a dungeon corridor, which was very similar in style architecturally to dungeons at Port Arthur, Tasmania that featured in \textit{notes on the castle}. It was serendipitous that I discovered the connection to Judge Day.

\end{itemize}
Figure 12: *Destiny of Objects 1995* Casula Powerhouse, Sydney
Figures 13-21, ephemeral installed work. Grass work, *View from Sixty-Third Floor* 1998-2010

**Figure 13:** *View from Sixty-Third Floor*, Artspace, Sydney (1999).

**Figure 14:** *View from Sixty-Third Floor*, Artspace, Sydney (1999)
Figure 15: View from Sixty-Third Floor, Artspace, Sydney (1999) hydroponic system with track light.

Figure 16: View from Sixty-Third Floor Sydney! Vienna! Academy of Fine Arts (1999)
Figure 17: View from Sixty-Third Floor, Bondi (2003)

Figure 18: Bondi detail.
Figure 19: *View from Sixty-Third Floor*, Werribee Park, Helen Lempriere Award.

Figure 20 Martin Place, Sydney 2004. The grass work here was a temporary intervention on the work of Anne Graham’s work *Passage* marked the site of a colonial wash-house.
Figure 21: View from Sixty-Third Floor UTS Gallery (2005)
**Figure 22:** *Liverpool/Liverpool: the skin of translation*, 2010 Casula Powerhouse, Sydney.

**Figure 23:** *Liverpool/Liverpool: the skin of translation*, section of Nasrin Matouchi, 2010 Casula Powerhouse, Sydney.
Figure 24: Detail of cast section with poem, *Emigre* by Sarah Day and close up of the root texture and text.
Figures 25-28 *Notes on the Castle*

**Figure 25:** *Notes on the Castle*, (2004) Tin Sheds Gallery University of Sydney.

**Figures 26, 27 & 28:** *Notes on the Castle*, Tin Sheds Gallery University of Sydney (2004) cardboard archive boxes built into a panopticon, similar to the one presented in the DVD of Port Arthur Model Prison. The window looking onto Parramatta Rd and at the time an Aboriginal campsite, to remind the public of
landrights was surrounded by the cardboard ‘castle’ window ‘sandstone blocks’ The film on the monitor was shot in the Model Prison at Port Arthur which was a Jeremy Bentham panopticon design.

Figures 27: Notes on the Castle, Tin Sheds University of Sydney 2005. This work proposes a relationship between the forms of the castle and the transportation of power and information (cardboard archive boxes indicated a visual relationship to sandstone blocks.) The constructed ‘castle keep’ windows looked onto an Aboriginal protest camp on the adjacent park in 2004. These are only a few details of this large-scale exhibition.
Figures 29-31: process images of, *Of the Earth series.*

**Figure 29:** wooden letters inset into plaster. This mould was part of the large scale *Liverpool/Liverpool: the skin of translation* made for the Switch Gallery at Casula Powerhouse in 2010. Figure 31 section of upturned roots.

**Figure 30**
Figure 31: underside of grass peel Fig 32 Wigan Figure 33 framed Sao Paulo.

Figure 32 Wigan cast roots
Figure 33: Amman Sao Paulo, cast grass roots in steel frame (2004)
Figures 34-26 - Images of Boronia Garden 2006

Figure 34: early planting of the garden showing segment next to the fence.

Figure 35: showing interconnecting pathways that reiterated the tracks around the trees made by animals. Access to the garden has been difficult since completing the work so no more recent photographs exist in my possession except a Google Earth shot from quite a distance that I used on the cover of the cloth book of The Black story.
Figure 36: segments of the garden were claimed and designed by various cultural groups. I worked on designs that the women had come up with bin the capacity of co-ordinator. I encouraged them to think of an aerial view of the designs and of the overall relationship of the garden to the existing landscape features.

Figure 37: part of the pathway that was constructed in the centre of the herb garden that was based on a mediaeval English design with cross and concentric circles allowing for easy access to a variety of herbs.
Figure 38: This site was made by some of the Aboriginal women. They referred to it as their ‘sacred space’

Figure 39: Katrina with her goanna garden. The women were allowed to (within the exacting constraints of the prison) do whatever they liked. Many of the Aboriginal women made totem animal gardens. Figure 40: below is the Islander girls’ frangipani garden in process
Figure 41: Poster for the film shown at the Performance Space (2006)

Figure 42: Google Earth image of the Boronia Garden. It is just possible to see the animal tracks that were incorporated into the garden’s overall plan in the green patch in between the trees to the left of the image. (2006). The Map of the Boronia Garden directly relates to this work.
Figures 43-44 details of *Liverpool/Liverpool: the skin of translation* (production)

**Figure 43:** Production at Kirkebride (Sydney College of the Arts) formerly a psychiatric hospital where I was given permission to make the work for Liverpool/Liverpool: the skin of translation.

**Figure 44:** working on the plaster casts (Robert Lake) who assisted in the production of this large work. This image shows the cast plaster ‘beds’ which have started to be covered with soil. The rows at the far side have been planted with grass seeds. (2010)
Figure 45: *Liverpool*/*Liverpool* in progress. (2010) Plaster casts with sprouting and sprouted grass.

Figures 46-49: St Georges Hall, Liverpool, Lancashire England where one part of *Liverpool*/*Liverpool* : the skin of translation was shown in 2010.

Figure 46: Exterior of this large public building that encompassed a law court below the ballroom, the lower levels were a prison.
Figure 47: The ballroom at St Georges Hall, Liverpool UK.

Figure 48: Law Court where Judge Day presided.
Figure 49: Corridor (Dickson Gallery) at St Georges Hall, with projection of *Boronia* and *The Law is Not Always Just* (2010). The DVD of the work is included in the back cover of this document.

Figure 50: From the DVD *The Law is Not Always Just*, which was projected at St Georges Hall (2009)
Figure 51: *The Law is Not Always Just* at Conny Dietzschold Gallery (2010) grass cast

Figure 52: four sections of *The Map of the Boronia Garden*, (2008-2012) work on hessian made with bitumen paint, newspaper, nails, washers, oats, seeds, string, wire, damp coursing metal, knitted white wool. The complete work follows the same pattern as the animal tracks in the actual garden work.
Figure 53: Artspace 24/25 60 minute presentation showing flowers ($2.00 shop), with map and film

Figure 54: Artspace 24/25 (2008) another Boronia film still
Figures 55-57 Suburban transplants and migrations

The *MESH* works, 2007-09 a plastic coloured mesh used for temporary fencing during suburban alterations and woven with found materials

**Figure 55:** Mesh with knitting, brocade, felt, string etc 0.4 x 0.5 m (2007).

**Figure 56:** Mesh work with embroidery from Equador 1.0 x 1.0 m framed (2008)
Figure 57: Mesh diptych (2008) with handmade thistle and $2.00 shop work at Conny Dietschold Gallery.

Figures 58 – 59 The Fragility of Goodness and other works using wool

Figure 58: (knitted works) The Fragility of Goodness (1) knitted tubes. The small black work is made out of unravelled balaclavas.
Figure 59: *The Fragility of Goodness* (11) sacking from Africa, under felt, hessian, canvas and white knitted strips on a painting stretcher.

Figure 60: *Matthew and Others: Everything is Connected to Everything Else*, includes a DVD of interviews with people who have a family member who has suffered a mental illness. The web is knitted. Large black spiders are knitted. The work to the right is a chewing gum painting from the *Cosmos* series (2007).
Figure 61: from the *Cosmos series*, chewing gum on hessian Conny Dietzschold Gallery Sydney (2011)

Figure 62: *Cosmos* chewing gum on hessian (2009)
Figure 64: *Power Is A Fluid Vertical White Line*, Cast Gallery, drawing on pare, mixed media Hobart, 1987.

Figure 65: Untitled work with second hand clothes, tapes and muslin.
DVDs

*From A to B*

*Liverpool/Liverpool, the Law Is Not Always Just.*

*Memories of a Secret Self on the Other Side of the World.*

*Desire for Ancient History*

**Figure 65:** still *From A to B, an Allegory*

**Figure 66:** During the course of the 6 minute film this tank is moved about half a kilometre from where it had a former usage in a shed. The tank is carefully manoeuvred onto wheels that enable it to slide out onto tracks before it is elevated by a crane. An allegory of the inherent difficulty of bringing something new into being.
Methodology –

Smithson’s practice easily lends itself to Deleuzian concepts. The lines of flight have emanated from Smithson, and I have stepped onto some. I chose Smithson as a way of anchoring and focussing my own sometimes dispersed and eclectic practice—as well as having a reference point in Post-Minimalism for thinking about the earth, time and meanings of space. The imagery of mines was rich in potential for my own biography. Smithson’s practice was ‘theoretical’ in that he wrote about his own work and his contemporaries’ work, opening up discursive spaces. These pertained to his own intersection with institutions of art, science, industry—and frequently literature.

The incisive thinking, sense of purpose as well as the great images generated by his practice have been inspirational to consider for this extended period of time. Smithson’s practice is a model that still seems very contemporary and has much still to teach about site specificity—and the mutational possibilities of creativity. The idea of defining oneself as specifically a painter, sculptor, film-maker does still occur, but many contemporary artists including myself use whatever means seems to be appropriate including ‘old’ and ‘new’ media, two and three dimensions, as well as time based productions which operate on websites on the internet. During this Doctoral writing I have told stories, made films, made several series of artworks, all of which move around the stable, but moving axis provided by having movement, mutation, transition, transpose—as my central point! Appadurai’s thinking about migration in terms of Chaos Theory gave loads to think about. In the choice of an artist/writer/organiser as my main ‘theorist’ I wanted to maintain what for me is an important connection with art-making which becoming something akin to an academic, might obscure.

The fact of the publicly invisible work at Boronia in 2005 before this Doctorate began persists as a reference point in writing my thesis. It is a margin, a space of need and omission that, externalises an aspect of my own experience. Through that and an ongoing work with Casula Powerhouse in Liverpool NSW along the same lines, Smithson’s practice was chosen as a study for this thesis because of its obvious engagement with
Post Colonialism, its respect and concern for indigenous cultures and its foundation in science. Even as I have read fairly widely in Migration Studies, I have returned to subjective research via Ficto-criticism.

The garden projects I am developing—including the new one in Liverpool NSW (being negotiated near Miller College) come into Kwon’s category of *sited community art*. By creating what I describe elsewhere as a *blueprint* that is useful to the women involved who were able to perpetuate interest in their community after my exit from the project) I claim a genuine ethics of care. As Kwon points out frequently such site based ‘communities’ do not develop organic lives of their own, and have vexed relationships with their organisers. In wanting to develop dialogues with these works in gallery and other contexts, such as I have with the *Cosmos* works and *The Law is Not Always Just* I attempt to embody a similar ethics.

**Poverty and Entropy**

Is the ethics of the maternal a condition of selflessness at odds with being an artist who exhibits in a gallery, and is an author of visual and written texts that sometimes appear under the name of Elizabeth Day? I am a teacher who can occasionally when possible, construct projects intending to bring marginalised people into a mainstream. Another dimension of my work would find aspects of its source in post Minimalism. The work of French artist, Daniel Buren implicates the meanings of sites through his consistent use of green and white striped fabric hangings, banners, curtains signified his participation in debates surrounding the extended discussions in the 1980s on the function and role of Museums and of arts institutions. The use of grass ‘inside’ made a visual and conceptual/minimal link to grass used in the carpet images in the several locations ‘outside’ where this migrating image appeared.

95 Daniel Buren.com
The participants of *Boronia* did not know me as visual artist, they knew me as a teacher, and I think that many would have felt alienated by ‘high art’ coming into their processes of gardening which they were, thanks to the existence of the project as public art, able to take on fully and enjoy. There were varying degrees of involvement, and I could see that some of the women were keen to find out more about ‘culture’ as a result of the project. This writing after the event, as well as during allows for further consideration of the entirety of my project as it is now woven over a number of years. I have begun negotiations with Casula Powerhouse for a further garden work beyond *Liverpool/Liverpool*. In *Appendix 3*, p. 317, I have enclosed a proposal that has been developed with Khaled Sabsabi from Casula Powerhouse. I am hoping to bring some of the women with whom I have already worked into that project, should it eventuate next year.

Another expression of the margins are the *The Assorted Spat Out Ones*, the chewing gum ‘paintings’ which embody its pathos and also the *Cosmos* series. The various colours of chewing gum are roughly grouped. I experimented with the colours of all available chewing gums mixing and blending with some help from friends. Also going further into the margins represented by what is called mental health is the work done for *Matthew and Others*, in 2005 titled *Everything is Connected to Everything Else*. I include these images as significantly related to my own transported narratives.

As Miwan Kwon among others have written there is a strong concurrence and shift towards the merging of contemporary art practices and social needs. This is a shift many (including myself) would see as problematic. I do not think that the entirety of my practice’s thinking could be fulfilled only as a community project. In Chapter One of her book, *One Place After Another*, Kwon proposed three paradigms of site-specificity, ‘—phenomenological or experiential; social/institutional; and discursive —in a somewhat chronological manner, she says in the introductory pages. The paradigms are outlined as competing definitions that operate in overlapping ways in past and current site specific
Much work over the last twenty years has been done by artists on community projects, AIDS, ecological production, women’s and gay liberation and a whole range of people based productions. My gallery work based in post-Minimalist abstraction has been simultaneously mutually nurtured by the socially engaged work, often with migrants as well as those who have for various reasons made a transition into institutional margins. As with the sub-title of *The Black* in Chapter One that is *Mutation in Darkness*, I am looking at these indeterminate in between spaces as places of fertile new growth.

Figure 66: Two sections of the *Assorted Spat Out Ones*, chewing gum on hessian. (2006)

---

Chapter Five

This chapter provides a summation of the evolving discoveries of this study. The history of the major documents produced during this Doctoral process provide an insight into its concerns and its evolution. Below is the original document I presented for my Candidature, followed by a second that arose out of the re-appraisal by the Committee at the Confirmation of Candidature meeting. The advice provided at that time was to reorient the project in two key regards. First, towards the recognition and inclusion of a theme, subject and field already existing in abstract visual form in my practice: migration. The foregrounding of this theme led to the research in Chapter Two, which enabled a better understanding of the connection between migration and the metaphorical condition of the stranger. Second, as I write further on in this chapter, engagement with Affect Theory, which enabled what was for me an experimental style of writing, drawing on what were, and are, the affects of migration. In Chapter One, I mined ideas, stories and experiences around a conceptual axis of movements, transformations and turbulences both within my own life and in operation in the wider world. Though there has been a
shift away from an emphasis on science, it remains present in the form of the grid (which has now been imbued with all shades of affect) and, via Smithson’s practice, in a recognition of what the art historian and artist Mieke Bal calls ‘Travelling Concepts’.

1. Original Proposal 2007

VIVID MUTATIONS

I am proposing a doctoral project figured around the notion of how creativity comes into being or is animated, as it takes various forms and as it informs various practices and processes across the disciplines, including my own art practice and process, its texts, textiles and textures. This is a study of innovation, of invention, of the inventing of invention, of the conceptualising of concepts. The title ‘Vivid Mutations’ encapsulates for me the vitality and movement intrinsic to creativity, whatever the form and practice, be it in art, science, or philosophy, its ability to transform individuals, societies, cultures, nations, worlds.

The project would have several interwoven elements. It would draw upon and interlace aspects of my more recent projects to elaborate them further, animate new projects and extend them into new media as well as new media documentation of them. And it would entail a theoretical reflection on becomings and bringing-into-being in terms of creative practice, including my own, composing the written part of the doctoral project. Its underlying assumption is that all creating, including art, is a form of becoming, and that my practice is exemplary in that regard. Instead of treating a work of art as a static object whose meaning is fixed for all viewers for all time, becoming for me signifies that art is a living, mobile, metamorphosing process with multiple and mutable meanings that are differential for different viewers, cultural constituencies and contexts,
etc. To say ‘form of becoming’ is to invoke the key work for my project of France’s
great thinkers of becoming, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, especially their last book
*What Is Philosophy?* that treats philosophy as the creating of concepts, art as the
creating of sensations and science as the creating of functions, through all of which
thinking is thought, and which establish a rich tissue of correspondences between and
among them.

In terms of my practice, becoming is not only overriding figure, it is theme, form and
material process. Such a multiform notion of becoming is at work in my *The Origin of
Ideas* project, an interdisciplinary notebook project which shows how ideas originate,
take shape, are animated and animating, how art can animate science, and vice versa. As
well, it shows how disciplines are always already interwoven in a web of
interdisciplinary relations that animate and re-animate each other and how innovation
animates a culture and a nation. (See below, as well as *Dockworks* DVD and *Photofile*
article attached.) Such a notion of becoming is likewise at work in my Boronia Garden
project, which demonstrates how gardens are animate and animated and re-animate
lives, including those of their gardeners as well as those who live with them.

The Doctorate is an extension of that focus on becomings that is at the heart of my 1997
Masters paper, *Iridescent Webs*, tracing the rhizomatics (the irregular, in-between,
transversal, multiplicitous, heterogeneous, nomadic movements characteristic of the
rhizome as form/process of becoming, of metamorphosis) that Deleuze and Guattari
place at the heart of creativity, rhizomatics that figure actualised in my interdisciplinary
installation practice. This paper traced the trajectories as well as processes of my
practice, defining several projects completed during my Masters program as well as
heralding my work since. Its title referred to a figure that has now lasted 20 years in my
work and that is most recently embodied in the web, knitted of baby’s wool, in my *For
Matthew and Others: A Journey into Schizophrenia* project begun at Campbelltown Art
Museum in September of this year. This project literalises the iridescent web as giant
spider's web, creating a web of relationships of terror and pathos, including within and among those speakers who appear on the video that forms a part of the work, etc., as well as a web of relationships among these and the other of my projects past (the white line projects), present and future. In each case, we find that not only the artist animates the art but the art the artist, as well as the viewer.

I want to use that figure of web as a model for the several outcomes that together would make up my Doctoral project. In accord with that, I would note here that I typically work on a number of related projects at the one time, and they all cross-fertilize each other.

OUTCOMES

The practical part of my doctorate will take off from my installation of *The Origin of Ideas* project at the Hobart Festival Dockworks event (December 2005), which will serve as a sketch for further developments. Produced on a minimal budget in three weeks, that site-specific installation consisted of three projections of notebook documentation of the creative processes of significant practitioners of art and science based in the Hobart docks area. What was initiated here lends itself to much more extensive practical development as well as theoretical interrogation. The mapping of the visual notes of the participants revealed important connections of an interdisciplinary character that I would like to elaborate in the thesis. (See below.)

In terms of the practical development, the Hobart version could be extended or transposed to a Western Sydney context. An understanding and address of my own creative output will inevitably inform the project. My practice as a visual artist comes
out of writing, and frequently uses text that produces textiles. I have 25 years of my own notebooks upon which to draw.

In any case, the practical development would take the following forms:

1. Installation/exhibition. This will show to the Western Sydney community the working processes of 5 art/science hybrid practitioners and how that illustrates key thematics of the research. I would be seeking support from Nick Tsoutas, Director of Casula Powerhouse, who has given this work support previously.

2. Website. To be produced in collaboration with the Banff Centre for the Arts in Canada, where I was resident in 2000. I am very interested in fostering a link with this institution, which is exemplary in its dynamic interdisciplinary approach. The website will allow global dissemination of my research.

3. A fiction project. I will expand upon and fictionalise the feminist, historical, institutional and migrant cultural thematics that I tried to address in a much more theoretical mode in my MFA. I plan to develop a character with my own sideways take on things, a character who is a *vivid mutant*, i.e. artist, inventor, creator. An image from Gustave Doré’s illustrations of Dante’s *The Divine Comedy* touches upon the entirety of this cluster of projects. It shows Dante and Virgil observing the hybrid figure of ‘poor mad Arachne’, in the process of becoming-spider ‘for rashly taking on the goddess Minerva in a contest of weaving skills’. (See image.) My recent work at Campbelltown explicitly uses the image of the spider’s web.
4. Film/TV series. I will develop a film/TV pilot or even a series illustrating key practitioners, concepts and considerations of my research. I already have expertise in filmmaking, having produced several films as part of installed works: Notes on the Castle (Tin Sheds Gallery, University of Sydney), Notebooks (Seven Beauties show, Tin Sheds and Dockworks. Hobart) and recently for my work in For Matthew and Others (Campbelltown Art Museum).

The Origins project arose from introspective reflections on my own often baffling creative processes. I have both literary and visual interests in these works of mine as “short stories” that are deeply derived from an appreciation of abstraction and the vernacular meanings of process. My ability to make vivid imagery is something I would like to bring into the written aspects of this project.

As for the written part of the doctoral project, the dissertation will comprise an academic and scholarly investigation of the material emerging from the practical creative project, even as that investigation will inform that project. It will examine the thought processes of seminal Australian thinkers across the arts, sciences, technology and politics to investigate the intimate reality of the generation and cross-pollination of ideas. The project is thus an interdisciplinary examination of the origins of ideas: discovery, invention and the creative process.

Some possibilities here include several people whose work I have started to research: Dr Shirley Jeffrey (marine biologist/musician, CSIRO), Dr Charles Lineweaver (astrophysicist, UNSW), Dr Jane Quon (interdisciplinary artist, Tasmanian School of Art), Rick Le Plastrier (architect) and Dr Graeme Laver (virologist). (See extended list Appendix 5).
Psychoanalytic aspects of creativity, including affect theory, will be explored and the emotional dimensions of creativity in relation to participants in this project will be studied. (See Appendix 4)

In sum, *The Origin of Ideas* seeks not only to demonstrate the visionary, innovative nature of thinking by Australians in and by means of visual materials—materials themselves richly visual individually and collectively—it seeks to be itself visionary and innovative, originating ideas in itself as well as by educating and stimulating those who see, experience, discover and engage with it through the various means listed above. 1

![Image from the Origin of Ideas project (2000-2005)](image)

**Figure 1:** Image from the *Origin of Ideas* project (2000-2005) that documented processes of inquiry of individuals whose creative practices crossed the arts and sciences. These are sequences of notebook pages showing the mutation of an idea in the working drawings of a range of practitioners. The insertion of this image is to give an indication of a broader context of the concept of the migrant and mutation.

---

2. What the Confirmation of Candidature changed

---

1 This project did not occur during the Doctoral program. However, I regard the work done during this project as grounding for further evolutions of the *Origins of Ideas Project.*
After looking at the body of works presented at the Candidature meeting in 2008, I began writing about migration as a lived autobiography that had clearly impacted on my work as a visual artist. I also began looking to the field of Migration Studies. I had not until that time acknowledged the role of migration as a theme in my practice, including curatorial, as in *The Origin of Ideas*. The following document was presented shortly after the Confirmation of Candidature meeting.

**Confirmation of Candidature Document, Revised Version 2008**

1. **RESEARCH CASE**

My thesis is, that mutation is a central process at work in art generally, and in my art practice in particular. It is therefore the central figure for this thesis, as metaphor, practice, process, practice, performance, medium and milieu of my art. The term mutation has applications not only in art but also in the natural sciences, and that bridge between them is something that my art not only cultivates but foregrounds.

The thesis also is that mutation links with another key process at work in my art and practice: migration. The language of migration—of uprooting, transplanting, transmutations, cultivations and hybridisation—is especially relevant for the thinking of my work and practice. I will elaborate the relevance of migration to my installation work. The figure of migration finds to date a form in my grass ‘carpet’ works, the hydroponic systems, and the ‘cast’ grass writing.

Central to the outcome of my thesis is that my evolving understandings of mutations will coalesce in a poetry of process and handmade productions pertinent to a site.
I am myself a migrant, a transplant. My work figures it, and it figures how migration effects a mutation, how migration and mutation go together. I will bring autobiographical material, as well as other narratives of migration, including from my frequent work with migrants, into the art project for this degree, as well as elucidate in the written part how they function in my work.

When my family migrated to Tasmania in the 1960s, we faced a typically difficult period of adjustment. We became the first hydroponic farmers in Tasmania, the first to operate this scientific system of agriculture. I have used this conjunction of nature and culture in my art practice as the figure of our migration and mutation. Such migration and mutation were for us necessary survival mechanisms, as they can be. In any case, mutation is inevitable with migration, and one must mutate to survive, to adapt, to adjust to being a transplant, in our case to Australia. The established plant metaphor will be extended and applied.

I am not a performance artist, but insofar as my works embody and enact process, they are themselves performances, performances of mutation and migration. I shall develop this claim in the thesis.

I will also argue that there are correlations to my own practice in the image of the earth in general and Robert Smithson’s use of earth as material in his sculpture in particular. I will develop the idea that, through a fundamental relationship with Minimalism, his and my art practice figure both ancient and contemporary ‘layers’ of culture (including the effects of industrialization), ‘speak’ to both art and science and have special relevance to the migratory context of Australia. In a way, and this is something I will explain, both our practices foreground the need for embracing of the past.
Since my work draws upon autobiographical material, I will enlist the work of artist Eva Hesse and writer Alice Munroe in the project and writing, especially as their work has special relevance to mine.

*Keywords: mutation, transplant, migration, seeds, uproot, hybrid, cultivate, transmutation, invention, process, particles, becomings, estrangement, stranger*

2. **KEY ISSUES**

1. That mutation in and between art and the natural sciences is a rich metaphor to research in relation to migration. Also, my art practice is part of a contemporary field of enquiry of interdisciplinary exchanges between art and science.

Notions of change and becomings are central in Deleuze and Guattari’s interdisciplinary philosophical writings and invented terminology of flows, particles, intensities, qualities of spaces in relation to power structures, assemblages. These will be a backdrop of references. Their language will provide structure in this association I am making between the work of Eva Hesse, Robert Smithson and my own.

The image of mutation begins to be suggested in work that I have already done. For example, *The Destiny of Objects* (1995) **Figure 1**, is made of a conglomeration of objects from a wide range of cultures resident around Casula Powerhouse. Viewed from above the main floor area, the work could be seen as a ‘painting’ consisting of objects or particles in motion; seeds or crystals of becomings whose role it is to trigger movements; and de-territorialisations of the majorities, to illustrate my connection to the terminology of Deleuze and Guattari.

If not specifically mutations, there are allusions in Smithson’s work to particle physics and its relationship to social systems. Smithson used amplifications of the microscopic structures of crystals as the basis for some of his earlier Minimalist sculptures, which are
re-iterated in his later use of salt crystals in the *Spiral Jetty*. Connections can be drawn between the two modes of his work, as well as with that of Deleuze and Guattari. I use this example here to indicate how imagery derived from molecular chemistry or genetic studies may be inserted, implied and/or performed in the artwork.

Perhaps the best examples of my argument of a relationship between mutation and migration were the hydroponics systems used in *View from the Sixty Third Floor* works (2000 - 2001). These were a successful synthesizing for me of my personal experience of migration and its connection to a public system of flows in that they fused functionally with water supplies and electricity circuits of the gallery.

Likewise *Mesh* (2007) a plastic coloured mesh used for temporary fencing during suburban alterations and woven with found materials, is beginning to suggest the profusely diverse gene pools of the suburban population. After working with a group of migrant women last year I made *Collaboration with an Unknown Artist from Uraquay*, where a purchased embroidery was embedded into the plastic mesh. In this example there is a suggestion of my identification with migration.

2. In the study of the mutation, I want to look further into the art/science origins of Minimalism (in part through the critical writing of George Kubler between the arts and sciences, *The Shape of Time.*)\(^1\) Kubler believed the distinction to be no longer applicable. He was a formative influence on sixties Minimalism and especially on the development of the site-specific work of Robert Smithson. Other studies such as *The Molecular Gaze*\(^2\) review work done by artists using perception of new developments in microbiology.

---


Smithson and Hesse’s work has manifest many mutations in their contributions to devising new forms in their work in ways that I will be elaborating upon as they are discussed in the Case Studies chapter especially in relation to mutation/art/science.

3. The third strand of my research will relate migration to the question of what it is to be a stranger. As emigrants and nomads we do not bring the past with us, but neither do we leave it behind. Perhaps the moment of disembarkation for the emigrant is only an illusory arrival. One never ceases to be arriving. The transformation implicit in migration can been seen metaphorically as a mutation.

Anna Smith’s book Kristeva: Exile and Estrangement provides the literary image of the Female Traveller who is at home in the uncanny, the unheimlich, unhomely. This definition of myself as a visual author may be useful. In View from the Sixty Third Floor 1997-2010 I used the earth, I attempted to define an image that played between a sense of complete displacement and complete certainty: the home that is not a home. The mutation describes the possibility of adaptation. The traveller for Kristeva figures a positive condition of necessity to re-make language in response to newness. The migrant needs to be continually responding to newness.

The active role of the traveller who absorbs newness and is open to possibilities afforded by new circumstances seems an appropriate one, as I also want to draw on my work with migrant experience, and to reflect on the gaps and perhaps impossibilities of relating to cultures different to my own.

4. I see a need to define a language, which moves between the written word and visual processes of materiality and production and which has a relationship to visceral

---

bodily presence, has been established in my practice and is a fundamental starting point for this study.

My reference to the work of Eva Hesse will be applicable to this section of the study in that her processes and synthesising of ideas and processes are affect driven. Manifestation of mutation through handmade process will be discussed. The processes of making and creating are integral to what could be described as a wound or lesion caused by migration. My own relationship with Otherness will be written about.

5. The need to define my role in the production of this work, as an active performative participant and storyteller. I am immersed in the process of emigration, and it is also beyond and around me. For *The Lucky Country* (2007-08) I made a film from old super 8 clips from a film made by my father of where we had grown up in England. This had been converted to VHS, and then to DVD, the layers in media shift describing the distance of the memory. The title of the work is memory of a secret self on the other side of the world. Unlike many Australians, I am not bi-lingual, though I know the distance from my mother tongue—broad Lancashire as spoken by my parents. The grass imprinted material that I have previously made, can be devised to ‘speak’ of these secret selves, though sound recordings might also be used.

3. SOURCES FOR RESEARCH

1. An important source of my art and practice is working from autobiography and from knowledge of what a profoundly affecting experience dislocation of culture can be. As source material for my research, stories found in literary fiction as well as through my experience with migrants will be invaluable. I will argue that autobiography and direct experience play a powerful role in the work of Hesse, for instance, and the writer Alice Munro, who creates fictitious stories based on personal experience.
2. As a European whose ancient history is not embedded here in this country, I feel a loss and a dislocation. The grass carpets are barely a skim on a vast history of the land on which they sit. I began making the grass imprinted work a few years ago as a way of thinking about place, memory and loss. The second series of printed roots I began to make partly in response to working with migrant women on a project at Dillwynia Women’s Centre. It was a landscape project I developed with women from various cultural groups; and again at Hazelhurst last year. Many of the women I worked with were Aboriginal. Though these women were also clearly dislocated, their relationship to the land was quite different to the migrant women. Totem animals potently affected them, for instance. The project, which also involved their working with an Aboriginal elder, encouraged them to research local Aboriginal history.

Looking back to my own ancient past in European pre-scientific tradition, to animistic, pre-Socratic thought, with its ideas about the earth and its place as the source for all creation, might be useful. Reading Ovid’s *Metamorphoses,* early myths of creation and change reveals pre- and early scientific studies of nature, the “mud” that produced all life. Marina Warner writes a commentary about creative metamorphoses, the protean plasmatic quality of clay, how the world was animated, and mutated into life forms. She uses transformative metaphors of hatching, splitting, doubling, and mutating to describe metamorphic processes and manifests their fecundity to explain cultural and aesthetic shifts. The earth as a substance, creative diversity acted on by a shifting spirit, is relevant to my work here. I will seek to suggest a search to understand my current past (now transplanted in Australia).

The use of the grass and other plants as a medium seems appropriate to these considerations. The idea of the earth (as well as its literal presence) comes into my own works as clearly as it does Robert Smithson’s, though very different kinds of processes are implied. There is, at the same time, a connection in both to questions of

---

industrialisation. English visionary poet William Blake wrote about the industrial revolution’s destruction of ‘green and pleasant lands’. Australia as a migrant, transplanted colony in the 19th century and into the present is implied in carpet works of *View from the Sixty Third Floor* series. The idea of the earth as a tangible sculptural material, an impressionable ‘skin’ of transplanted language, remains rich and a useful metaphor to continue working through in relation to thinking about migration and also expressions of concern for the environment. Of the Earth, the series made over the last two years, sets off in this direction, and I will be seeking to extend the possibilities of these works. For instance, I started casting the names of early Greek philosophers, notably Xenophanes, a philosopher of the earth. I was attempting to re-connect with thinkers of the earth from my own culture. This and other directions embarked are only provisional at this point of the Doctorate. There are many sculptural possibilities inherent in the cultivation, modeling, shaping of the grass material.

Michael Pollan elaborates the consideration of plants as cultural manifestations on in *The Botany of Desire, A Plant’s Eye View of the World*.\(^5\) He suggests a plant sensitive vision that they have thrived, been displaced, manipulated not only because they satisfy basic human desires but also because they needed to survive. For example, the desire for sweetness as manifested in the apple imported to the United States and spread by ‘Dionysian nature/culture boundary breaker’ Johnny Appleseed is now threatened by an ever increasing market supply of sugary snacks, calling for the need for turning up the sweet genome in genetic productions. The artifice of these new mutations seem loaded with potential in the scope of imagery to explore in relation to massively diverse new migrant populations now living in the West of Sydney. (Liverpool now has around language groups). Even as an Anglo migrant I have experienced what uprooting means and can barely imagine the disorientation for those from vastly different cultures might bring along with the hope of a better life.

---

Migrant plants and genome images could be considered in relation to population shifts in Australia. I want to continue to research plant imagery and processes of plant production. This book by Pollan gives the reader some insights into the importation of plants into the United States during its European colonization; there might be similar histories of the Australian context.

3. Smithson’s work embodies processes that are applicable to my own thinking of the mutation as defined as a bridge between art and science.

His referencing ancient history will be studied further in the Case Studies chapter. One aspect of his work that I find very engaging is the dialectic his work sets up with contemporary processes on the landscape and his recognition of the ancient layers of history (including geological). His work is profound in its use of process as a vital and integrated component of its production. He reveals social, cultural, historical and scientific understandings that are embedded in the conceptual production of works and their creative, administrative and aesthetic processes. The film of *Spiral Jetty*, for instance, is integral to the final work. Film and documentation, along with the voiceover of his own text enable the viewer greater participation and appreciation in the intellectual scope of the work.

Smithson’s process gravitates much around the use of actual earth in its production. In an interview with Paul Cummings for the Archives of American Art/Smithsonian Institute, Smithson probes the idea of re-cycling waste, for instance, and suggests that contrary to conservationists’ pleas to return to a pre-industrial Garden of Eden a recognition of the effects of entropy would be to work in a way that he sees as creative with what has already occurred. There is open-ended speculation in Smithson’s use of process that is pertinent to my work. He could be called a landscape artist though writes disparagingly about landscape painters because they fail to engage actual issues (mining for instance) which operate on the landscape.
4. FOCUS OF PRODUCTION

The focus of the exegesis will be on the development of the processes and production of imagery for the final exhibition in 2010. Though the project at Casula involving work with community groups may inform this central project, it will be peripheral. Likewise the film I proposed to make, as a study of art/science links of contemporaries will be put on hold until after this Doctorate. The extended study that will be enabled by the exegesis may contribute to this possibility, as it will entail development of a process journal elaborating my own understandings of the mutation in relation to science, my own practice and writing on migration and to creativity in general.

The subject of migration in Australia is vast and though I am aware that specific sociological, psychological and scientific knowledge on this subject are available, my sources in research will be my own experience and empathy through that experience with the stories of others as well as narratives in literature.

Through this I have identified a gap.

I am not aware of any other artists working with the materials and processes that I have been developing in relation to this thesis, especially the grass and plant imagery there could be perceived as a ‘gap.’ A migrant aesthetic has always existed from the first paintings and drawings done by early colonial artists. In Aboriginal art there is a profound sense of place and connectedness to this country. I agree with Smithson and many that painting (of landscapes by migrants) does not bring into play processes at work in the environment, and exists only in its own domain. There are many artists who have worked with site specificity and connections to Australian history. I am not aware of artists who are addressing a migrant position in the way that I will be, which seeks both a connection to the land recognizing a dichotomy in terms of our ancient roots (we do not come from here); as well as giving recognition to existing processes inherent in the
suburban landscape which is industrialized, technological and populated with newcomers.

Obviously insofar as I am positioning my work in relation to Robert Smithson, I am situating it in terms of the literature on his work. This literature is vast and I have read a substantial amount of it including Smithson’s own writing. This allows me to say provisionally that though I think the work of Smithson, which was in my research so far, it appears that no one has published what I will be arguing that it has particular relevance to thinking about an Australian context. I will be elaborating on its influence on my practice and there lies its significance.

This thesis questions whether the image of mutation is a central process at work in art generally and my art and practice of it in particular, and whether it is an appropriate image for migration.

In looking to the histories of how art and science have been influencing one another (Bijvoet\textsuperscript{6} and Shlain) I am seeking to place my practice in a clearer relationship to these developments. That a mutation has already occurred and continues to proliferate hybridizations of art and science is the contemporary context is a fact, which offers unlimited potential to me as an artist. By exposing myself more to ideas in microbiology and genetics I wish to inform the consideration of migration and its mutations.

How ideas transform into materiality was the subject of my study for the Notebooks Project. In this instance for the Creative Arts Doctorate the mutation will be finally manifest in the production of mostly handmade objects, which embody the idea of a mutation, which is the result of my research. The success of my project will largely be dependent on my production of images that synthesize this poetry of process.

\textsuperscript{6} Bijvoet, Marga, Processes of Inquiry: Art, science and technology, 1997.
3. **What the working practice revealed and changed since the revised CoC.**

The dominant narrative of this thesis came to be as a result of the writing in Chapter One about ‘discontinued narratives’. It emerged, in particular, from my own family’s narratives, especially the focus on the life denied my maternal grandmother in an institution on the other side of the world from me. I did not want to write about this for a number of reasons (largely the reluctance of my mother who still wears the shame). Yet I found that I was unable to write this thesis without giving recognition to my grandmother and her voice in some way. The purport of this story has been made most explicit in *The Black*.

Affective writing gives an opportunity—as does, in my case, making sculpture through a variety of means, including gardening—to speak to the emotional and physical, bodily experience of a narrative around the axis of the thesis’ key words, including: *mutation, transplant, migration, seeds, uproot, hybrid, cultivate, trans-mutation, invention, process, particles, becomings, estrangement, stranger*. In these words I sought to acknowledge my full recognition of my experience as a migrant from Britain in the 1960s.

Thanks to my supervisor Dr Anna Gibbs, I have been introduced to ficto-criticism and her writing on mimesis. Ficto-criticism defines generically transgressive writing that blurs the defining lines between creative and critical texts. As Helen Flavell writes, ‘Elements can be combined within this genre without clear rules to aid identification’. It is a useful category for my own project because my project links Smithson with the equally speculative field of Migration Studies, then to Julia Kristeva, and back to my own practice—all this within a framework which articulates a criticism of dominant language.

---

7 Gibbs, Anna, *Fictocriticism, Affect, Mimesis: Engendering Differences*, University of Western Sydney web archive, 2005.

8 Flavell, Helen, Murdoch University PhD Abstract, 2004.
and legal systems. My own ‘wound’ might be understood to be folded into Chapter Three’s discussion of *Mirror Travels in the Yucatan.*

Thanks to the shift in orientation towards the inclusion of migration as a key coordinate of this thesis, I discovered a way to bring affect into my writing practice (as it had already been present in my installation and administrative work). This allowed me to develop a style that includes architectural space, and affect. This discovery of writing as a medium and a new component of my own art practice has so far culminated in the production of the ‘short story’ segments in Chapter One. These works also incorporate photo images, often referencing the visual works I have made. In response to the post-confirmation of candidature document (above), in this collection of fragments, which are both deeply personal and historical, I have been able to demonstrate more depth and clarity in my understanding and articulation of the transformations and mobilities affected by migration. The Chapter One stories overlap and accrete.

The reorientation of my project to a deeply felt engagement with migration, Migration Studies, Affect Theory and ficto-criticism has had three profound effects on my work. First, my writing has itself undergone a mutation and migration, becoming a part of my own art practice, and vice versa. Second, my art practice has mutated as a result of this engagement. And third, though my writing is still in need of development, I have started to publish it. In other words, the very process of reorientation of my thesis, mutating, migrating, and transplanting it, is illustrative and performative of the very thesis of my thesis!

---

*Migratory Words/Migratory Worlds* (see Appendix) is about to appear in *Crossings: A Journal of Migration and Culture*, Lancaster University U.K. and Liverpool/Liverpool (Chapter One) was recently accepted by *Southerly*, which is produced from the English Department at the University of Sydney. Both will appear this year. I will be trying to publish the full set of stories on completion of this Doctorate.
My writing in Chapter One is an experiment (autobiography, art criticism) in examining the affects of migration and ways that one might bring lived and formative experience together with formal disciplines of production. Twice a migrant, I am immersed in the process of emigration, a process that not only surrounds me but inhabits me. Migration Studies is a new ‘science’, a field of enquiry relating to the movements of populations and their dynamics. It is an interdisciplinary practice recognising the value of what Mieke Bal describes as ‘Travelling Concepts’. The work of Robert Smithson is exemplary of productive, high level creativity across disciplines and forms.

As a result of the reorientation of the thesis, its subject matter shifted towards a zone of abjection. What I might have wished to avoid became unavoidable. Julia Kristeva’s defining of the abject as that which is excluded, not clean and proper, provides an image of the border of what is acceptable. I have my own direct experience of this border. The prison (and the asylum), and hence frequently the law that has created such injustices for Aboriginal people in Australia. I write about the Boronia Project in Chapter Four partly as an occasion to think about my own connection to such an institution in England, and end up through my accidental meeting with many Aboriginal women, in thinking the border that

---

12 In the Confirmation of Candidature statement I reference Alice Munroe’s View from Castle Rock. There are accounts in this book of her extensive research into family archives in remote parts of Canada and Scotland. She considers shifts and reactions to circumstances of each generation, particularly as spread over.
Chapter Six

Background and approximate contexts for the research, and themes that emerged.

The last chapter provided some of the processes and objectives that have lead to the production of the work for the Doctorate. The themes are given additional focus below. I wanted here to give an account of some kind that ties these themes together. I have separated them for analytical purposes but recognise in fact that they are all inextricably entangled with each other. The process of art making is the expression of this entanglement. It makes this entanglement at the level of feeling/affect. In this form it conveys via the senses much faster than language or analysis can do. It can do this more effectively because it works affectively.

Around what I have described as the axis of migration, some of the themes that have been furthered by these ‘travels’ literal and and research into some of their approximate contexts include:
1. Minimalism and the Grid

2. Ficto-criticism and performance

3. Interdisciplinary practice and hybridity and the field

4. Migration and discontinued narratives.

5. The ground and re-enactment, performance

6. Mutations, hierarchies and administration.

7. Urban renewal

1. Minimalism and the Grid.

Robert Smithson’s practice forms an important keystone in my own speculations on mutation and migration. At the time when he began making his Site/Nonsite works, there was a sense that painting had reached the end of its possibilities. Smithson’s work extended painting, and his work, as lived gestures, thus enriched painting. Smithson’s work
has been called Post-Minimalist. He emerged in a New York art scene when Donald Judd, Carl Andre, Dan Flavin, Sol Lewitt and Robert Morris were regarded as leading figures. Other practitioners associated with the movement were sculptors Larry Bell, Eva Hesse, John McCracken, Robert Smithson and Anne Truitt. Eva Hesse’s highly articulate and electrically present sculptures also mark a point in this consideration of discussion of migration/mutation and Minimalism. Her work enacts a transition or transportation from one emotional state to another — another migration. Both Smithson and Hesse have practices that emerged from painting. They devised processes, in a sense performed the production of their works, in ways that enlivened and extended painting beyond studio and gallery practice. Hesse’s work established the language of an autonomous female subject and the jokey but seriously liberated, and at its time extremely innovative, use of hardware, as found in her imagery. Smithson’s practice decentred the modernist subject. Hesse’s language is one richly defining of affect — and trauma. Presence is a term from Clement Greenberg referenced in Michael Fried’s article that describes the life of the work, its essence, fullness of being, spirit and soul. Blindfolded standing next to one of Hesse’s works, the viewer may well experience its phenomenology.

Most of the work I have produced has a relationship to what is called earth art, because it is made of this material, and because much of the early forms of this categorisation of production grew out of interdisciplinary processes of inquiry across art and science and a growing concern for the environment. I explore both in Chapter Four in the

---


2 *Eva Hesse: A Retrospective* organised by Helen A. Cooper (1992) Yale University. Eva Hesse’s work articulates among many things her diasporic condition. Members of her family had been killed in the German concentration camps of World War 2 something she visited Germany in ...to investigate. She worked in Germany, a section of her life and work that is described in an article called has written about this in an essay called *The Wound and the Self: Eva Hesse’s Breakthrough in Germany* by Maria Kreutzer.


4 Robert Smithson’s work has been classified as earth art, but this is a very reductive description of his cross-disciplinary practice, which included painting, sculpture, collages, Site and Nonsite works, film and photography. I think that the works I have produced out of earth during this
commentaries on the works produced, and here in *themes*, my relationship to this genre and indicate its relationship to science and the idea of a *mutation*. The reference to mutation is partly drawn from Rosalind Krauss’ article on the very fertile image of the grid. This omnipresent motif of Modernity started to occur in the late nineteenth century. Krauss was able to demonstrate a Post-Darwinian transition from faith to science via the grid in the late nineteenth century. Very diverse ideas have been able to be aesthetically speculated upon using this structured, variable image and its versatility and mutability continue into digital realms. The grid enabled, after Cézanne, the understanding that the visible world is an extension of ourselves and that each one of us constitutes a centre. The grid, likewise, has been an expression of thought, affect, song and presence in twentieth century art. It describes therein *presence*, or, as Michael Fried has styled it, a *state of grace*. The production of works that have developed out of post-sixties and seventies performance might also find a base in such considerations.

**The Grid**

doctorate have a relationship to this category, though I would not define what I do as ‘earth art’. Smithson’s aerial vision of the earth was used with a sense of parody born of his interest in sci-fi fiction. It served to imply three categories: cosmological and Palaeolithic and geological time and space. Gyorgy Kepes’ writing that crossed art and science influenced Smithson and his contemporaries.

Migration as a mutation has a few sources, but the connection came first out of making the grass “carpets”. Later, I read Ovid’s *Metamorphosis* on as a template for the transformation of nature into art, the blurring between art and nature, as in the imagery of wax moulding that is used to convey migrating forms of life. As I print (this process of making an impression from one form to another surface can be thought of as a print). Texts made from plaster casts were used in the production of the writing of four poets (in my casting the texts of four poets into plaster in the *Liverpool/Liverpool* work, I find a connection with that transformation. There is a connection, in this reinscribing of words from other creative writers. In the image of the mud that takes on all forms, there is much fecundity, as there is in the idea of a *mutation*. Metamorphosis, says Marina Warner, is the ‘principle of organic vitality that flows through a work of art’. In Dante, she claims, the image of change is quite sinister—evil. Heaven for Dante is peaceful and not prone to change and mutation. I have also included a definition of *mutation* from the Biological Encyclopaedia in Appendix 5. Dante was an exile from Florence.

Berger, John, *The Look of Things*, p. 192, referenced by Nikos Papastergiadis in *Modernity as Exile*, p. 21. The development of abstraction has enabled the grid’s use to be extended into endless conceptual applications. My knitted works (and grass), for instance, imply a recognition of this ‘craft’ and all the implications of having it as part of the vernacular of ‘high art’.

The minimalist gridded image that I established using grasses and other materials was developed to encompass recognition of Aboriginal history (as well as a European ancient past) via the surface of the actual earth. The ‘grid’ in fact destroyed much Aboriginal history —if the evolution of the Grid can be regarded as a concurrent to Modernism and migratory acceleration. Smithson’s commentator Gary Shapiro writes about the Heideggerian idea of the artwork as that of a clearing, a point of revelation. Through the production of an artwork the artist creates an earth or an opening —a point at which something new starts to occur.

What is the Grid’s relationship to the mutation?

In *Grids, You Say (Format and Image)*, Krauss offers a brief introduction on the development and raison d’etre of Minimalism in the history of twentieth century art. She starts her discussion with what is for me a pertinent ekphrasic comparison between the grid and a page. More importantly here, I look to Krauss’s establishment of a profound scientific basis for the emergence of the grid: ‘If the split between spirit and matter that was presided over by nineteenth century science is what became the legitimate heritage of twentieth century schoolchildren, it is no less the heritage of twentieth century art. And the grid is the emblematic form’. 

Krauss quotes Nietzsche to make this clearer: ‘We wished to awaken the feeling of man’s sovereignty by showing his divine birth: this path is now forbidden, since a monkey stands at the entrance’. He is referring to the religious crisis that occurred as a result of Darwin’s discovery of evolution.

---


11 Ibid, p. iii
Krauss explains that in the ‘increasingly secularised space of the nineteenth century, art became the refuge for religious emotion; it became a secular form of religion. Although this condition could be discussed openly in the late nineteenth century, it is inadmissible in the twentieth, so that by now we find it embarrassing to mention ‘art’ and ‘spirit’ in the same sentence’. She sees the peculiar power of the grid, ‘its extraordinary long life in the specialised space of modern art, arising from its potential to unmask this shame; to mask it and reveal it at the same time.’ The grid serves as an emblem but also a myth...’its mythic power is that it makes us able to think we are dealing with materialism, logic or science while at the same time releasing us into belief.’

Krauss’ illuminating essay on grids of the twentieth century continues in a way that is also helpful in thinking about how contradictory ideas might be worked upon through a warp and weft of a structured surface. ‘In suggesting that the grid is connected to its structure as myth’, she says, ‘I may be accused of stretching a point beyond the limits of common sense, since myths are stories and like narratives they unravel through time...and grids are visual...’ But the notion of grid that I am using here’, she continues, ‘depends on a structuralist analysis, by which features of a story are re-arranged to form a spatial organisation.’

This process originated with structuralists who wished to understand the way myths function as the cultural attempt to deal with contradiction. Thus, by analysing a variety of creation myths, Levi-Strauss found a conflict between earlier notions of man’s origins as a process of autochthony (man born from the earth like plants) and later ones involving sexual relations. The function of the myth is to allow both stories to exist in para-logical suspension.

12 Ibid. p. iii
13 Ibid. p. iii
14 Ibid., p. iii
Krauss writes: ‘Although the grid is not a story, it is a structure, and one, moreover that allows a contradiction between the values of science and those of belief to maintain themselves within the unconscious of modernism as something repressed’.\footnote{Ibid., p. iii} Mieke Bal has also focussed on the subjective narratives inherent in contemporary art practice.

For Krauss, the grid declares the space of art to be at once autonomous and autotelic. The grid is ubiquitous in the art, architecture and design of the twentieth century, which now includes the digital. The grid appeared nowhere in the art of the nineteenth century. By ‘discovering’ the grid, Krauss asserts, Cubism, De Stijl, Mondrian, Malevich landed in a place that was out of reach of everything that went before...which is to say they landed in the present’.\footnote{Ibid., p. iii} Krauss is describing the power and versatility of the grid and its varied applications that continue even now to extend. The grid, like science and myth, allow for tentative searchings of knowledge or consciousness. The grid can also include fabric and textiles.

Artists such as Barnett Newman, whose rectilinear work, derived from a study of the Cabbala, is an extension of what Cézanne set out to do in defining structures in nature. Mondrian’s work also sought mathematical purity in its gridded rectangular divisions on the canvas. Hesse brought her own presence, sensuality and trauma into this reduced form, she produced many drawings with ink, circles on a grid, which ripple with affect. Caro’s “gestural” abstractions for Meyer were at once \textit{optical} and \textit{phenomenological}, a melding of Greenberg’s aesthetics and Merleau Ponty’s philosophy of the body.\footnote{Meyer, James, \textit{Minimalism and Polemic of the Sixties}, 2001, p. 236.} I only touch on some of the tremendous variations on the form of the grid.

\footnote{Ibid., p. iii} \footnote{Ibid., p. iii} \footnote{Meyer, James, \textit{Minimalism and Polemic of the Sixties}, 2001, p. 236.}
Smithson extended Minimalism into the environment beyond the gallery spaces he saw as limiting it creating its limitation. His practice allowed for a considerable shift in the interpretation of our relationship to space, which I am demonstrating is useful in the thinking about migration. The diversity of Smithson’s practice, including his “printed matter”, is perceived by Jack Flam in the Introduction to Robert Smithson’s Writings as further attempts by Smithson to engage with the grid, even as Smithson paradoxically speaks of his desire to demolish the grid. Smithson’s practice is, useful to me in its articulation of rhizomatic versatility across forms and disciplines. Papastergiadis claims Migration Studies is significant in its recognition of the accelerating movements of migration and therefore he proposes there is the need for new recognition of the complex new clusters. Clusters refers to unexpected configurations and hybrids likely to occur in an age of turbulence. Smithson’s work models such profound new refigurings, and opened up spaces for future similar interventions.

Michaell Fried, in his famous essay ‘Art and Objecthood’, describes Tony Smith’s drive through the unfinished New Jersey Turnpike as the significant moment when this end of painting seemed nigh. To Smith, the experience of that drive offered a lot more than most of the gallery art at the time. This moment signified the end of the dominance of the pictorial and illustrated how 60s art was exploring an ever expanding site. The Minimalist artists conceived this expansion as a broadening of art’s formal and experiential potential, and Meyer claims that it confirmed Greenberg’s view of Minimal Art as non-art.

---


19 For another definition of the rhizome also see Brian Massumi, 1996 A user’s guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia; Swerve Edition, MIT Press, MA.


21 Fried, Michael, Art and Objecthood p. 117.
Returning to the grid, I assert that it continues to be an important research image for speculative ideas. To think about mutations I reference the art/science origins of Minimalism. Mieke Bal’s book *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A rough guide* discusses ways to write about subjective narratives and gendered presences in contemporary interdisciplinary art practices. Bal uses the term *cultural analysis* to think about ideas, which wander across disciplines. She also privileges the reading of artworks, emphasising affect. She looks at subjective narratives in the abstract qualities of an artwork, such as that of Caravaggio’s homosexuality, expressed in the folds of the fabric he paints.22

Below there is selection of artists whose work demonstrates a kind of performance of narratives. Smithson identified with history (saying that he thought art should bring a confrontation with ‘the abyss of history’) in a way that would back my claim that all the forms that he used in his interdisciplinary practice were a kind of performance. Likewise the group of artists that I reference identifies with historical processes. In this brief section I am defining a use of process that could have a relationship to performance in its interpretation of affect in some tangible form.

The work of Cy Twombly (another American artist of the sixties) was instructive at the beginning of writing my Doctoral text. This was because his writing/painting/sculpture, founded on the idea of creating a playful re-writing of ancient Greek and Roman mythologies that are at the bedrock of Western thinking, had made a deep impression when I went, thanks to an Australia Council Grant, to New York in 1993. The idea that an artist could seek to reveal through gesture, some layer of history is a profound and important one to me. I was able to study Twombly’s work first hand, as well as many

works by Hesse and some by Smithson at the Philadelphia Art Museum. Through looking at the work of such exemplary artists, I understood the importance of materials and processes. In Twombly’s drawing there is palpable affect that transmits his meanings that are informed by his knowledge of the ancient world as the bedrock of the contemporary one.

I have stated the significance of various post 70s Feminist Australian artists who opened up a space for women such as myself, who started exhibiting slightly later. Kinesthetic drawing was the main part of my practice in the 1980s when I entered the Sydney art world—a migrant from Tasmania at that time. In this work, writing and drawing came together. Subsequent work of mine has come out of that physical activity of making art. High modernist abstraction that I knew in my early twenties as a mainstream form was used mimetically from within and inverted into what I could call a visual ficto-criticism.

Abstraction had been an earlier influence which was how Hesse’s work, a combination of making, performance and painting, looked very relevant in an eighties feminist context. Miriam Kahn’s charcoal drawings were in a similar vein, performative, as were the kinaesthetic drawn/painted series by Twombly, 50 Days at Iliam (1976-77). This work is a re-enactment, an anti-war dance through the Peloponnesian Wars. As I say, I am making a list of several artists whose work has enacted a conceptualised drama or narrative. Ana Mendieta’s work also develops a relationship between herself and the earth with her Silueta Series of the late seventies, with her use of sculpted figures made

23  www. PhiladelphiaMuseum.com. The grass work with its imprinted text and consideration of an ancient past probably began taking shape at that time or rather I wanted to find a way to include writing as image.

24 Kinesthetic drawing is a drawing performance as distinct from observational drawing.


26 Miriam Cahn is a Swiss artist whose work was shown in the Sydney Biennale in 1989. Her work can be viewed at http://www.galeriewolff.com/content/us_artists/MC_bio.pdf
out of substances such as ice, flowers, sand or stones. ‘Mendieta’, proposes Amanda Boetzkes, ‘like Smithson’s Spiral Jetty suggests the body’s return to the earth’. Mendieta elaborates for Boetzkes ‘the sensorial experience through the exploration of bodily and earthly surfaces, which challenge the equation with nature with primordial formlessness’. 27

My own work uses earth to define a connection to earth in a different way, though there is a suggestion of death, migration and chaos, as well as recognition of the earth as a fundamental, in my cast roots. My own work directly uses the written word ‘printed’ from a plaster cast onto grass roots as they grow around the details of the writing’s form. I have used the writing of other writers, partly as a quest to know who they are –the ‘strangers’. The process of collaboration with writers who were re-translating themselves fed into my own image of a ‘carpet’ on the surface of an ancient continent.

I am trying to define the connections here of process and text that need, as was the case with Hesse and Twombly, to be ‘married’, as it were, in meanings, not simply graphic renditions. Hesse’s striving for her own sense of being involved in a language of at times angst —she entwined things tightly with string, for instance. She did not use text as letters, her ‘writing’ is the handcrafting of materials. She found a means to build a work that expressed a state of mind into a systematic and formally disciplined practice. Twombly’s series, based around the names of ancient Greek poets such as Ovid, was scrawly —and searching through time to know —a faltering childlike Ovid. These artists identify with certain processes of history beyond and also of them, as did Smithson.

The production of the grass works does have common ground with the works made by a number of Australian artists who reference history and language. For me, there is an

intensely subjective reclaiming of lost (and deeply personal) language. I list below in a
section on the use of the ground, some of the recent Australian artists who have
developed a use of this plane as a surface of production.

2. Ficto-criticism and performance —making it happen

Performance?

Mieke Bal writes interdisciplinary narratology, that is the study of narratives by which we
make sense of the world. I have touched on a number of fields in this text: Minimalism,
Robert Smithson, migration, literature and to a small degree philosophy. Feminist ficto-
criticism has enabled the intermingling of various fields that come together in some kind
of wilful unity to live.

The work made during the Doctorate is to a degree, narrations about an experience that,
like Smithson’s loss of his brother, left a mark from which I try to make sense. I have in
common with Smithson that someone I never met haunts me. The image of a prison is a
literal and metaphorical one. In the use of this image I find the challenge of having to
create a meaningful narrative for myself, a replay of my grandmother perhaps, which is in
a life not submerged. The prison is also an image that implies the need for creative lines
of flight against what I see as destructive hierarchies. My artwork images this process and
my Bruny Island studio sets up a way that I can be glocally integrated in a network of
people who are engaged in interdisciplinary ‘travel.’ I want my own use of the much-
used term performativity to embrace all that.

What I have also called creative administration (while hoping still to come up with
something better), is about working on ways to make new things happen. It is obviously
not the same as presenting oneself in front of an audience, as a performance artist does, or
even as Smithson did as the director of a team. It certainly demands similar courage and self-assertion, though of quite a different and less theatrical character. I am calling the Boronia project creative administration. (See also Chapter One for A Point on a Network essay.) I bring together a number of projects and exhibitions that stand against a tide of current tendencies that are contrary to interdisciplinary travels and in favour of an institutional shift that would see a much more expanded place for the unexpected. I hope that the overall content embodied by the variety of projects that I have accomplished embody many elements of surprise. ‘Ficto-criticism’, asserts Anna Gibbs, ‘resists the peremptory dictation of the institutional superego or the policing of the academic discipline in order to listen more attentively to the range of tones and styles...to the precise and specific modes of the maintenance of authority that was not, after all, monolithic’.28

Chapter Two formed a backdrop of understanding in thinking about what the relationship between artistic production and migration might be. I list some major figures of the twentieth century whose work has erupted out of a need for synthesis. In association with Kristeva’s writing on the stranger and the Female Traveller,29 I have made a connection to artists who Henry M. Sayre describes as ‘opening up of a space for their own being’, such as performance artists Laurie Anderson, Eleanor Antin and Carolee Schneemann. There was a subsequent generation of female artists of the 80s, 90s, 00s who define what Deleuze and Guattari called nomad thought. Nomadism, says Sayre, produces work that exists outside the instruments of codification that define society proper.30 Ficto-criticism, derived originally from Helene Cixous’ writing, is likewise a way of speaking and being that expands meaning. It is another form of nomadism.31

29 Smith, Anna, Julia Kristeva: Readings of Exile and Estrangement, 1996.
My work is clearly indebted to these developments and in particular to what Sayre
describes as a *new persona* that feminism heralded. Bal has referred performance as ‘an
intentioned iteration or a meaningful gesture.’\(^{32}\) Amongst many other examples, the
following are representative of what Sayre described as an expanded space. In Australia,
artists such as Joan Grounds, Bonita Ely, Noeline Lucas, Nola Farman, Jill Orr, Fiona
Hall, Jill Scott and Julie Rrap were breaking similar ground. These artists are also users
of adventurous interdisciplinary forms across the arts, sciences and technologies. These
active subjects highlight a tendency in post seventies art for performance to invigorate
visual arts practice through strategies of opposition.

What is the relationship of work produced to art institutions? Sayre also writes about the
expansion of art into the landscape as, to quote his quote of Lyotard, ‘The avant-garde
task is to undo spiritual assumptions regarding time’.\(^{32}\) Taking art outside galleries, such
as we see in *Spiral Jetty*, was an attempt to do this. It was also an attempt to leave art
world elitism behind. Chapter Three expanded on four subsections of the work of Robert
Smithson, whose practice encompassed visual art, writing and ‘creative administration.’
His work is decidedly *ekphrasic* —mutually descriptive and inter-dependent visual and
written forms. The wider understanding of the *Site/Nonsites* resulted from his published
articles, films, interviews and ‘printed matter’. These spaces could be described as hybrid
forms or in between two places.

I have in the course of this writing been influenced by writers —including novelists on
migration, as much as those called visual artists.\(^{33}\) Their words have helped to define the


\(^{33}\) Especially W. G. Sebald’s writing and use of photographic images that are collages or clusters
of information. His writing style is itself a hybrid. He *is* a mutation. His thinking stops and
starts...he wanders off. I can empathise with this dis-associatedness, distractedness. *Austerlitz*
Michael Hulse, New Directions, Harvill Press London.
experience, as I attempt here to work in words rather than materials and processes. John Berger’s entire project—which he thought was about trying to define something about himself that he didn’t understand—related to migration, as I elucidated after Papastergiadis in Chapter Two.34 I can say the same about my art project. For me, migration is an open-ended, brave, risk-taking adventure.

In writing about migration, and its many layers of metaphor, I am including ideas related to Mieke Bal (and Julia Kristeva) sense of the word travelling. Travelling and interdisciplinary movements have been a constant thread. Smithson was an interdisciplinary traveller. How are Smithson’s produced images, text, administrated projects and re-defined visual language useful to this thesis on migration and the transplant? They reside at the heart of this thesis, a magical carpet transporting me into unknown territory. What is the relationship between presence, the grid and my attempt here to define the experience of migration?35 What is the relationship of my earth and grass works to this question? These questions are largely answered in The Black in Chapter One. As stated in Chapter Five, the writings in Chapter One are experiments in my study of migration and mutation, which will continue to need and be given expression beyond this thesis. They are sketched out precursors to fiction writing. I had not anticipated writing becoming my central form, despite a necessity I feel about writing. This necessity is in a need to know. I find meanings in the act of writing, and my collaged ‘stories’ that are descriptions of processes and autobiography, between and around my visual practice are starting to work. Experiences that I am beginning to uncover with words, need to be distanced, described and images need to become more vividly specific. This process occurs for me during the evolution of visual work that sometimes does take years of production. Themes need to be discovered.


35 These questions are most clearly resolved in my grass carpet series and also the use of the hydroponic system (see Artspace images Figures).
I continue in the vein of ficto-criticism and my collection of stories, which have begun to group also around institutions, mainly those to do with the law. I ask, what is the relationship of a subjective understanding of discontinued narratives of migration and overlay of colonialism and institutions that imposed themselves on the Australian landscape? How does one devise poetry of the written and handmade applicable to these concerns? My handmade objects are speech in another form. What is the relationship to landscape of one’s place of origin? What is the inter-relationship of the written, visual and administrative work of Smithson? What can be described as working performatively? I specify above the grid as a site of ‘performance’ but my definition extends, after Smithson further into the idea of the production of events in time and space, such that they might have an historical impact. The questions that I ask are beginning to be answered in my art and writing and in the combining of the two. The illustrated essay holds much potential.

What is my role as an artist in constructing the non-strange (a life I can live easily) in a highly bureaucratised world? Artists should be at odds with institutions, though most of us are obliged to be complicit. These further question leads to a discussion of the initiation and implementation of the idea of a fluid network inherent in the Frances Lane Project. My future role might be one of creating contexts that I see as lacking, in allowing the fullest potential of migratory creativity to flourish. Writing and art-making, as my model Smithson revealed in his practice, produce a vision. Processes of producing some effect through even administrative procedures can be, I claim, called ‘art’ in the Robert Smithson sense of the word.

In her book, Travelling Concepts, Bal uses the travelling metaphor to define her research into how we might navigate ourselves in ‘the large unmanageable field called culture.’ Bal makes some important suggestions about the problems facing universities (and

---

artists) in a time of economic cutbacks, when interdisciplinary travelling across the arts and sciences is threatened and the hierarchies which cultural studies has worked hard to undermine seem to be returning. In Australia, at the university of Western Sydney, ‘streamlining’ of the interdisciplinary has led to a whole interdisciplinary art school being disbanded. I wonder where I will go as a result of this work that probably has served to understand my own difficult situation more clearly. In Appendix 9, p. 330. I include a letter to the Director of the Australia Council, Kon Gouriotis proposing some consideration of an institution similar to Banff Centre for the Arts in Canada.

3. Travelling Theory and Hybridity/ Being transported by an artwork — mutating fields of knowledge

_Yucatan_, the name of the peninsular in the title of Smithson’s Mirror Travels means according to Henry M. Sayre and Jennifer L. Roberts, ‘I don’t know where I am’ or ‘What is that that you said?’ In the acknowledgement of the least certainty, Smithson finds something essential about himself and about the world. He mutates between the arts and the sciences in this process. Likewise, Julia Kristeva’s book that I selected to highlight in Chapter One, Strangers to Ourselves, is a history of the not knowing and coming to know of the stranger within. In Mieke Bal’s work _Nothing is Missing_, the stranger is accessed through the recognition of the maternal line, across generations. In the projects discussed here, there is a similar endeavour. In an online article Bal discusses the sense she has of her own life being part of an ongoing web, through which connections live. Her concern for the ‘disappeared’ migrants comes from her own concern as a mother for her connections to her children. I amongst other women of my generation opted to be ‘mothers’ of culture, their art and their friends rather than add more children to the world. The recovery of the base I feel through the maternal line needed to be addressed, repair work was necessary.

37  www.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.111/j.1467
Being transported and mutating

Smithson’s ‘displacements’ his *Mirror Travels in the Yucatan* find a ‘state of grace’ in the *Nine Displacements*, the temporary installations, even as these take him into its confronting realisations. If an artwork succeeds, it could be characterised as *transporting*, causing a migration (and a mutation) of the artist and viewer. These questions in Smithson’s famous work encompass not only post-colonial, ecological, biological, geological and art historical considerations but also a deeply personal trauma of presence and absence, considerations I share. This section shows such a transporting, a migrating, in the ways in which the research into both Smithson and Migration Studies has informed my thinking and production of works during this research and how these not previouslyoverlayed fields have resulted in something new during this study.

I reference elsewhere, a metaphorical interest in the biological transformation known as a mutation, wherein DNA takes a new form. This metaphor does describe migration but it also describes the making of an artwork, a making that can be understood as an evolutionary shift, as a range of subject ‘fields’ are travelled in and through, causing a new focus to occur, even as the making of the work causes a transformation, a metamorphosis, of the materials worked upon.

I consider in the *Boronia* works, and the implicit marginality of that inaccessible space, the possible meanings of the prison on the Australian landscape in relation to Smithson’s *Site/Nonsite* conceptualisings, treating it as a *Site* that I bring to bear in the *View* series and the *Liverpool/Liverpool*, as well as in the *Boronia* works. The past for me held/holds many fears. *The Black* describes a pit-like place, which isn’t just a coal-mine in Lancashire where I grew up. I hope to encompass in this series, many facets of the issues raised by mobility and its representation in this era of heightening transience. *Boronia*, though an actual garden is treated here as a figment of my own unconscious. Appadurai’s writing about impacts of migration and movements on economically precarious populations was useful in broadening my grasp of what is happening globally, as well as
the impacts of migration on prisons and refugee camps—the general predicament of these and other margins.

In this study of the mutation that has some crossings over with the hybrid, I referenced the art/science origins of Minimalism. Bal’s *Travelling Concepts*, discusses ways to write about subjective narratives and gendered presences in contemporary interdisciplinary art practices, many of which encompass science. Bal uses the term *cultural analysis* to think about ideas, which wander across disciplines. She also privileges the reading of artworks, emphasising affect.\(^{39}\) She looks at subjective narratives in the abstract qualities of an artwork, such as that of Caravaggio’s homosexuality, expressed in the folds of the fabric he paints,\(^ {40}\) bridging centuries to a contemporary artist, David Reed #275, (1989) Though I am drawn personally to abstraction and the depiction of affect through my choice of sculptural materials, in Bal’s writing one sees how figuration/abstraction are not distinct in the way subjective presence is revealed in a work of art through the affect of the marks painted. I am stressing, as Bal does, the integrating force of subjectivity in an artwork.

4. **Migration and discontinued narratives.**

What are the affects of accelerating movements of populations? What are the ways of seeing migration in relation to my practice? What is the relationship of migrants to Australia’s ancient past? There are specifics of being a British migrant—people from all places must reflect on their relationship to two histories. The British transition however, was barely recognised as one at all. If the migratory is being re-thought as a mobile energised state, how can this preconception be redressed? It was presumed easy for us compared to other ethnic groups who had to learn another language and culture. How do we think about the discontinued narratives of migration? What insights have Migration Studies to offer and how does the spatial work of Smithson add to this? I make a


\(^{40}\) Bal, Mieke, (1999) *Quoting Caravaggio*. Also see www.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.111/j.1467
conceptual connection between Robert Smithson’s use of the journey (or short trip) and the space in between his *Sites* and *Nonsites* and the acknowledgment of the need to recognise the idea of a journey as an entirety or as an entity with substance rather than a negligible to be forgotten on arrival. Space as something other than a vacancy is necessary to acknowledge the life of the migrant. Also significant is the idea of migration being a metaphor for creative transitions. (See reference to John Berger’s writing).42

How does one work with representations of this experience of what could be referred to as ghosts on the other side of the world? What are existing contexts in Australian art and is there a way to converse with what is now our history in this ancient country?

What is the relationship of a European migrant to Australia’s ancient past?

Can we as migrants learn from Aboriginal culture about that culture’s traditional respect and integration with the land? I use the image of the prison on the land as a junction of the cultures, and via the maternal connection try to show how my own recovery of language is possibly commensurate with reclamation of strength in the margins represented by this space.

In the sixties Western art went off the walls at the same time that Aboriginal art went onto the walls of galleries. What is the relationship of the image of the prison to the abstract gridded carpet images? Some of my imagery is derived from this conceptual space. I ask with these images—in line with the grid’s tradition, how to be—in this country. What sensations does the ground here arouse? What is my relationship to Dante and Kristeva’s interpretation of Dante as an *Exile*? ‘Hell’ is a fecund space of mutating

41 Castles, Stephen, is one of the leading voices in Migration Studies, Stephen Castles writes about the variance in a migrant’s beginnings and endings. That is to say there is a theory about pushed or pulled...whether migrants left of their own volition or were forced to leave due to circumstances such as war or famine that drove them away.

42 Papastergiadis Nikos, *The Turbulence of Migration*, see earlier reference to John Berger’s claim that metaphor comes from a word ‘porter,’ there is a shuttling, a movement of meaning implicit between the inside and the outside.
life forms as revealed in Bosch’s *Garden of Earthly Delights*. The garden of exiles at *Boronia* is likewise fecund in possibilities. What was Smithson’s reading and application in his imagery of Dante. Wounds are like force fields. Smithson confronts his brother’s death but also the forces of *entropy*. *Mirror Travels* is a work about being lost in history, but also reconfiguring and re-writing it. In line with the Dante text, Smithson feels, I think, a moral imperative in his productions that probe deeply into post-industrial greed and environmental damage.

**How does one to think about the massive global movements known as migration in terms of a practice using earth?**

The translation of my understandings in Migration Studies and the work of Smithson has resulted primarily in an extension of my established visual forms, as well as the conjoint address of migration, for me a jarring experience, that continues in surprising and unpredictable ways to have an impact on not only myself but my art. The space of the journey is acknowledged, as is space as a major component of an artwork’s conceptual existence. According to my research in Chapter Two, artists (including writers) are fecundly mutating life forms animated by uncertainty, frequently as a result of mobilities. The Chapter Two strand of my research relates to migration and the question of what it is to be a stranger. As emigrants and nomads, we do not bring the past with us, but neither do we leave it behind. The moment of disembarkation for the emigrant is only an illusory arrival. The transformation implicit in migration can be understood metaphorically as a mutation. The transitions of life from A to B are the substance of my text—all is a process, an unravelling, but an unravelling that is at the same time a ravelling, and vice versa.

**Scanning some thinkers on migration in Australia.**

---

Within the context of writing a brief mapping of the migration theme and its applications in contemporary Australian practices, I reference amongst others, the work of Paul Carter, but this could in itself be the subject for a Doctorate. My research here is sparse. *The Road to Botany: a Spatial History of Australia* is a study of historical linguistic overlays on the Australian continent since the arrival of newcomers. It examines the way places were named by early explorers and how subsequent histories have been shaped. Aboriginal site names were commonly eradicated as explorers and settlers moved through tracts of land in Australia. In a similar Post-Colonial vein to Smithson, Carter questions what it was that intruders into the landscape put in place as they refused to acknowledge what existed on the land. The land’s surface is thus worked upon by the written word. Ian McLean criticizes Paul Carter’s *migrantology*, saying that his mapping of the structure of early migrant texts in books such as *A Spatial History of Australia* needs to be fine-tuned. Paul Carter saw the historical moments of European intervention into the indigenous language as wrought by the frequently nineteenth centuries scientific nomenclature (e. g. Botany Bay) on the bush as needing to be addressed to enable Reconciliation. Colonials according to McLean were an extreme type of migrant. Maybe our current migrants simply do not have to go to the same lengths to survive. Carter he refers to as a *flaneur* of the bush, but like many Australians their home is not here. In the summation of his book, McLean is not optimistic of reconciliation between indigenous populations and the migrants. Paul Taylor, the editor of *Art and Text* during the eighties, rejected the idea of a convergence between Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal artists for reasons that promoted global and not local agendas. I have read attempting to find a niche for my own project that uses the prison, the institution as a connector of the two cultures amongst these debates relating to global and local relevant, and they are ideas around which some of my own questions have formed.

---


45 Ibid. p.166

244
Imants Tillers is a notable ‘migrant’ artist from Latvia. His work was preoccupied with the representation of art history as it was transmitted to this continent. Tillers was disparaging, says McLean, of the ‘attempts of some artists and curators to blend the exoticism of Aboriginal culture with certain manifestations of contemporary art.’ He thought that ‘cultural convergence is attractive because it offers a painless way to expiate guilt while simultaneously suggesting an easy solution to more mundane but pressing problem of finding a uniquely Australian content to our art in the international climate sympathetic to a notion of ‘regional art’. Tillers and other artists at that time, including Juan Davila, were forming a new notion of subjectivity in the global village with no centre and no periphery.

In Chapter Five I have asked, what is the relationship of a subjective understanding of discontinued narratives of migration and overlay of colonialism and institutions that imposed themselves on the Australian landscape? What is the relationship of this to Kristeva’s definition of the abject? How does one devise a poetry of the written and handmade applicable to these concerns? All the works represented after Figure 46 in Chapter Four are part of these ‘handmade narratives.’ The knitted works including *Fragility of Goodness* works, *Everything is Connected to Everything Else*, and the more recent work involving knitted hats (as well as the *Boronia* site and non-site works, *Drawing of the Map of the Boronia Garden*) are all works that can be thought of coming from a knowledge of stories not told, experience of women’s lives lived in institutions and the shame surrounding this experience. The same could be said of another series, *Cosmos* series, Figures 61 and 62 p. 191 and *The Assorted Spat Out Ones*, Figure 66, p. 201, the chewing gum paintings.

---

46 Ibid., p. 116.

47 Kristeva, Julia, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* especially chapters 1, 2 and 11.
In connection to both the possibility of Reconciliation and also the protection of Australia’s ecology, how does one think about migration? In the course of reading commentators on Smithson and subsequent earth artists, I find Heidegger’s writing is frequently referenced. He demonstrates how the planet has been used as a ‘standing reserve’ for human resources. Western metaphysics, culminating in contemporary technology, damages the environment. Words like ‘ecosystem’ ‘earth’, ‘elemental’ and ‘land’ upset this view. Is there any way that western people can connect with the Aboriginal past via a reading of pre-Socratic philosophers of the earth, such as Xenophanes? In the beginning of Ovid’s Metamorphosis all life emerges from the earth, mud that was amorphous and mimetically capable of taking any shape. As a surface, it is a meeting place of what is living and what has gone before. What is the relevance (if any) for the movement of reconciliation in trying to think through a way of understanding the earth as the Ancient Greeks also believed to be a fundamental source of life. Among other materials I am using earth literally as an art or craft material, a material upon which language and actions are recorded. It has cultural neutrality. Roots imprinted with text can speak of the experience of migration, as well as other technological or natural processes.

Earth can be regarded as a receptacle and a material that defies representation. It is a material that for me has unfathomable depth. My mother’s generations were farmers and stonemasons probably back to the sixteenth century, even earlier. If one looks at the body of my work produced over the last twelve years that has framed the earth in its use of that material, it would be an oversight to not register a visceral connection through this lineage. Other works should be read, I think, in this same register. Yet I look to the earth in the excluded place of a prison as Site.

49 Heidegger, Martin, The Origins of a Work of Art in poetry language and thought. 1971
I used earth and a process of casting roots to provoke thinking of the earth in terms of continuation and discontinuation, something that imprints time. The wads of roots formed in the plastic pipes of my parent’s hydroponic system were the symbol of both the way we survived as migrants. The life away from a ‘natural’ connection to the earth plugged in literally to the new city’s electricity and water supply. In a hydroponic system roots float in water absorbing nutrients.

**Migrant artists**

A list of prominent Australian migrant artists whose work has been at times foregrounded their migrant identities would include Jacky Redgate, Hilary Mais, Maria Cruz, Dominico de Clario, Hossein Valemesh, Hani Armanious, Mona Hartoum, Cherine Fahd, Anne Graham, Joan Grounds, Paul Carter, Maria Fernadez Cordosa, Justin Trendall, Lisa Andrew, Mirielle Astore, Paul Howard, Imants Tillers, Shirley Diamond, Eugenia Raskopoulous, Khaled Sabsasi, and many more. Some of this list may have not even been born in this country. Various studies have been made. A list encompassing all non-Indigenous Australian artists could be made making specifics difficult. Many artists would not foreground the fact of there being migrants. Some, such as Hossein Valameneh make work directly based around the duality of the migrant situation. Hossein is from Iran. The ancient sensibility of this culture’s traditions are clearly part of his work as is the condition of migrant in Australia. Imants Tillers used appropriation partly as a way of dealing with the distance we as Australians continually run into as a barrier between ourselves and our (in the case of Europeans) previous, and far away culture. Maria Fernanda Cordosa’s *Emuwear* from the 2007 show *Emigrants Like Us*, are significant attempts to embrace earlier Australian traditions, to become an Australian.

---

51 I recognize that many Aboriginal artists are ‘migrant’ from their place of birth.

Jacky Redgate’s survey exhibition, 1967, *Selected Works from the Collection*, 2005 at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney was accompanied by another exhibition that she curated from the collection that are representative of the 1960s, the period during which her family arrived in Australia, from Britain, Nick Tsoutas’s *We are Australians Too* show at Casula surveyed some recent issues arising in the West of Sydney. *Edge of Nowhere* recently curated by Glenn Barkely at Campbelltown Regional Gallery. Cherine Fahd’s *Working from Exile* is another example in this brief survey. This brief list only suggests the significance of a study of discontinued narratives and their prevailing influences.

A few of the writings specifically on migrant artists that I have been able to find include the following list: (Though my own interests are more specifically based in the use of the earth or the ground as the site where a new dialogue can emerge).

*Cultural difference and the role of émigré artists in Australia*;\(^{53}\) *Perspectives on visual arts*;\(^{54}\) *Migration memories: a journey through painting, poetry, sculpture and textile*;\(^{55}\) *Julia’s diary: an immigrant’s story; Lebanese Australians*\(^{56}\) *The force of forgetting*\(^{57}\) was

\(^{53}\) Dutkiewicz, Adam, *Cultural difference and the role of émigré artists in Australia* Adelaide, South Australia, University of South Australia, 2002.

\(^{54}\) Compiled and written by Belinda Vaughan, from a series of interviews with the artists, (1987). *Perspectives on visual arts* The Australia Council. Using interviews with various artists, the author presents an overview of the visual arts scene in Australia with respect to migrant practitioners. Its contents include: Introduction (*Living art. Living and art / Le Van Tai. Room to breathe / Barbara Sikora.*) -- *Diversity in visual arts* (Luigi Michelutti, Sigrid Lankau-Kubit, Lukas Ardonon, Mariette Perrinjaujet, Enver Camdal, Waldemar Buczynski, Klara Donath, Alice Blanch Chehovski, Luis Geraldes, Eric Quah, Kentro Tehnis, Footscray Community Arts Centre.)

Artists interviewed in the study include: Le Van Tai, Barbara Sikora, Luigi Michelutti, Sigrid Lankau-Kubit, Lukas Ardonon, Mariette Perrinjaujet, Enver Camdal, Waldemar Buczynski, Klara Donath, Alice Blanch Chehovski, Luis Geraldes, Eric Quah, Nikos Kypraios, and Frixos Ioannides.

\(^{55}\) *Migration memories: a journey through painting, poetry, sculpture and textile*, was published in 1999 at the Melbourne Immigration Museum for the Schiavello Access Gallery, Immigration Museum.


5. The Ground and Re-Enactment

Recent uses of the floor and ground in Australian art.

This section develops the theme of the earth and its uses and is a sketch of an idea that has been developing during the course of my Doctorate for a curated exhibition recognising the uses of the floor or ground by a number of significant artists over the last 20-30 years in Australia. The floor began to be used by a group of American Minimalist artists working in New York during the Sixties, including notable works by Robert Morris, Carl Andre and Donald Judd.58 I am interested in investigating further the relationship of that sculptural development to Australian artists whose spatial projects have developed post–colonial, even reconciliatory thematic, though artists will be given the possibility of working with the theme in their own ways.

57 Ali, Khadim, curator, (2011) The Force of Forgetting was produced for an exhibition by that name involving: Ali Baba Aworang, Sher Ali Hussainy, Sahraa Karimi and Khadim Ali, at the Lismore Regional Gallery, The summary of this exhibition states "As Hazaras, the artists in all belong to a minority group, and their ethnic, linguistic, religious and cultural persuasions have brought continual persecution by majority groups in Afghanistan over thousands of years. Despite this history of discrimination, the artists uphold an enduring love for Afghanistan. Poetic and emotionally charged, the works in this exhibition draw on Afghanistan's rich cultural heritage and tell a Hazara story of this war-torn country.

‘The floor or ground, ever acquiring smoothness, suppleness and consistency, makes of the earth and of horizontality’, says Elizabeth Grosz, ‘a resource for the unleashing of new and more sensations.’

The floor or rather the earth has played a major role in my own works made during and before the Doctorate. In the following section, I will list other people also working with the ground as a field of sensation and position my practice in relation to theirs. Through the nineties up to 2000 was a period of extensive funding prior Olympics in Sydney. During this period, there were many works produced using various urban terrains, such as the pavement, park sites coastal walks and so on.

These works, built into the architecture of cities’ laneways, parks, paths and buildings, sometimes reminded us of earlier incarnations of a site and of the history beneath us. There is often a more overt politics than the pure Abstraction of the New York originators of the uses of the floor.

I earlier made a reference to Paul Carter who has been a major figure in ideas often centre on reconciliation and the translation of language and culture. Carter, sometimes in collaboration with Ruark Lewis, has produced public commissions in Sydney, Homebush at the Olympic Stadium and Federation Square in Melbourne. Lewis’s work RAFT was a major installed work at the Art Gallery of New South Wales. The ground recurs in these productions as a way of re-territorialising and recognising itself as the space of the territorialised.

---


60 Carter, Paul, RAFT catalogue notes (1995) Art Gallery of New South Wales. For more description of these works go to www.agnsw.archive
Other artists whose work has occupied the ground’s surface as a site include Nicole Ellis’ *Site Works Series*, (1996) which were made out of layers of paint cast from the surfaces of floors, Noelene Lucas’s *Moon Watching* (1991), Lynne Roberts-Goodwin’s tracing with an optic cable illumination of the Tank Stream under the streets of Sydney for the *City of Sydney Sculpture Walk*61 (2000) also for this event was Anne Graham’s *Passage* in Martin Place, which had been the floor of a laundry. Nola Farman’s *The Subterranean Listening Device, The Wind Tree* (1998) and another work *Flashpoint* (2008) at Casula Powerhouse 62 are further examples. I will continue to collect.

A possible exhibition would look also to the changed use of the ground by Aboriginal artists, post-seventies and consider what is occurring in that change. What processes are built into the shift from desert painting to the concrete mosaics in some public and community works made by contemporary Aboriginal artists such as Judy Watson’s floor I am interested in the space that is occurring between the two migrant tendencies — Aboriginal and migrants from elsewhere. As well as public sited works, Anne Ferran’s photographic work, *Lost to Worlds* images earth in the form of unmarked graves of female convicts in Tasmania, reminding us of unspoken histories of women and children who migrated early in our colony’s history.63 Joan Grounds’ *Quiver* involved the planted violets outside the Art Gallery of New South Wales for the Perspecta exhibition of 1989. These are a few of the productions that have a relationship with the ground.

**The ground and the abject**

---

61 [www.cityofsydneysculpturewalk.com](http://www.cityofsydneysculpturewalk.com)

62 [www.casulapowerhouse.archives.com](http://www.casulapowerhouse.archives.com), NolaFarman.com

I have raised Paul Carter’s question of what would Australia’s history be if it had been written by convicts? Carter believed that the convicts and the Aboriginals in the early colony constituted that which had to be contained and tamed by the British. So what might they have said about the history of the colony that differed from that we were left with, had they been given a voice at that time?

I want the projects that I describe of my own to be understood as recognising history that has been silenced and unrecognised. My research has taken me by chance to St George’s Hall, a bastion of Queen Victoria’s Empire, where many “criminals” often only guilty of poverty were sent to Australia. Carter’s research, to my knowledge, does not specifically address the abject realm of legal institutions, though the legalities of ownership of the land are explicit in naming as well as in thinking about Reconciliation.

In trying to briefly situate my own research, I want with reference again to the Boronia project (Site) to develop a discussion via the Nonsite works. These could include the Drawing of the Map work, Figure the chewing gum series Cosmos I, II, III and IV, the Assorted Spat Out Ones; and the knitted baby wool works, especially Matthew and Others, and The Fragility of Goodness. All these works do have a dialogue with the Boronia site, and therefore, somewhat indirectly, with the ground. The Boronia site represents to me as I expand upon elsewhere, the possibilities of the liminal or the in between space. Like the floor implicit in the chewing gum works, I am recognising in what I produce, the discontinued narratives, a marginal and unclean space, framing it, as it were, and re-presenting it. One way or another, including through writing here, I am making the marginal and unclean space more accessible.

---


65 Though I have had experience working in this “zone” and this has certainly informed my knowledge of these sites, it is also on a symbolic level that I hope to image these places in the production of works such as *The Assorted Spat Out Ones*. See Figures 46-49.
My own work as with some of the above examples is impermanent and uses actual earth—soil—and processes of earth, literally growth. As with most of my own materials, in another list of influences I would include movements such as Fluxus and Artes Povera, as well as Minimalism via Hesse’s breakthrough in the introduction of the hardware store as a source of art materials. Smithson is in the same vein of ‘non-art.’ My own use of actual grass roots made into casts was inspired by the discovery of a grass ‘print’ on an electricity manhole cover. The words spelled ELECT, as I recount in *The Black*.

My own history and the connection to the land in the North of England is necessarily implicit, and generally imperceptible. Smithson’s mining imagery, such as in the *Bingham Copper Mine Project* and *Asphalt Rundown*, for instance, reveals these industrial wastelands of entropy and their historical stratifications. The history of painting is also embedded within these works, requiring an answer to the question of what it is to make art. The giant ‘rundown’ of asphalt was happening at the time of Pollock’s drips. Possibly even more now, than at that time the future of painting has more weight stacked against it. I do recognise my works including the chewing gum works as part of a history of painting.

Further significant examples of ground surfaces in Australia are Judy Watson’s Koori floor at in collaboration with local Aboriginal groups likewise asserts the history of the ground making us step into the knowledge inherent there, where the Powerhouse interloped in 1935.67 The collaborative, Janet Lawrence and Fiona Foley work at the Museum of Sydney titled *Forrest of Signs* (1999) is a response to the history of the location prior to settlement. There are dozens more. This is a work produced in a spirit of Reconciliation. The land is implicit and explicit in this work’s constructed ‘trees’ that stand outside the Museum, made from an orchestrated selection of natural materials such as wood, shells, sand are built into (encased) in columns of glass, steel and hewn wooden surfaces. This is a beautiful work, and evocative of stories of the location. I am concerned

---

67 Judy Watson participated in the production of The Koori Floor at Casula Powerhouse.
however, that the abject is neglected in these works in the name of design over art. Materials are tasteful and architectural and there is not for me recognition of the ghastly cultural insensitivity that occurred. To me such works gloss over too much, they enter the realm that Miwan Kwon critiqued in relation to Public Art as gentrified. 68 Kwon’s One Place After Another provides some very useful attempts to historicise developments in site-specific and Public art post Robert Smithson. In her introduction she discusses developments such as Regeneration UK in the light of similar criticism, asking what happened to the values inherent in less permanent work? The artists who instigated the early processes of site-specificity were committed to transience. Repeating a show was frowned upon as a defilement of the strength of the moment of expression. We have come to take the pressures of economic necessity for granted. Occupational Health and Safety measures need now to be built in to aesthetic decisions. Kwon rightly signals the changes that there are implicit in these shifts.

An aspect of the Liverpool/Liverpool work and the Boronia Garden work that I would like to be understood which is distinct from these produced architectural works is that through the act of connecting to the ground, via the lengthy process of gardening, another quality occurs. The casting of the roots took about four months to create an accumulation of letters that formed the text. If one takes performance as a model, this period of commitment is significant to the content of the work. I think that this hand-making can be recognised as a different kind of investment. 69

It has been remarked that the wads of grass roots that I have produced over the cast writing are almost like animal skins. They are membrane-like and weird revelations of what inhabits the darkness under the earth. Chaos seeps into these matted fabrics from the ground. The flattened tendrils in their search for water bulge over the edge of the plaster

68 Kwon, Miwan, One Place After Another: Site Specific Art and Locational Identity Introduction p. 5.
casts in dag-like strands. The roots form their chaotic patterns as they take the mirrored form of letters and words that I have formed in plaster (See Figure 30). I peel these things back amazed by what I am discovering.

Recent research after Darwin’s hypothesis of the root brain suggests that plants can travel miles in search of ‘parents’ and places suitable for continuing their lives. There is so much more to know about the roots of plants. I like that these works are ‘of the earth’ and quite dissociated from style or anything of a consumerised society. They are daggy and unfortunately in some ways, not very easily commodified.

Mendieta works with literally a body – a human form, sculpted on and of the earth (out of materials such as salt, sand, earth) that allows, in the instance of the work done on a beach, the tides to wash through and around it.

In this detail below of the grass roots and with other works I have produced, I create a circumstance for this expression of wild underground life. The scale of Casula Powerhouse determined the size of the work where I needed it to be part of that vast architecture in order to have a presence there. If Charles Darwin’s proposition about roots being the brain of a plant is true, (as contemporary my chorizonologists are now investigating the mind and memory are present in the unfurled ‘textiles’ of earth and roots (see Appendix 8). The rolls of cast grasses that I produced, (See Figure 18) mature after a period of about three to four months. Plaster pieces become embedded during this process, in the matting like old memories. The imperfections of this process which occur often due to its improvised nature, become an integral part of its meaning.

---

70 Darwin, Charles, The Root Brain, see brief notes in Appendix 4.

71 Boetzkes, Amanda, The Ethics of Earth Art, p. 160.
The Law Is Not Always Just is like an old mat — that tired old law!\footnote{Thanks again to Loma Bridge.} It is ancient and through it I speak in defiance to my judicial ancestry. Writing and gardening seem to have much in common. In her text on Fictocriticsm, Affect, Mimesis: Engendering Differences, Anna Gibbs has claimed that ficto-criticsm as devised by feminists from the eighties onwards works from within disciplines, such as the writing of Luce Irigaray who was able to re-read the work of Freud and other philosophers in order to undo it from inside.\footnote{Gibbs, Anna, (2005) Fictocriticsm, Affect, Mimesis: Engendering Differences p. 4 of this online article in TEXT Vol 9 No 1}

One of my concerns with artistic production as well as the Boronia Project was to avoid hierarchical modes. In her book, One Place After Another, Miwan Kwon suggests that Public Art in the United States has shifted its emphasis away from permanency to temporary, to what she calls ‘new genre public art.’\footnote{Kwon Miwan, One place After Another: Site Specific Art and Locational Identity, p. 6- 8} These projects engage with audiences, especially those considered marginalised. I am not sure that this shift has occurred in Australia, though public art does seem to have become less evidently proliferating at present. Kwon wonders whether such projects re-marginalise the marginal, and mystify the artistic process and ‘finally the separation of art and life.’\footnote{Ibid. p. 6} Though possible to define it in this new genre idiom, the Boronia Garden project fortunately to a large extent, avoided this downside. Participation at any level in gardening is easy and accessible, enjoyable especially if there are no other distractions. Any other implications that might have been part of my own more art educated thought processes were irrelevant at the point in the project that involved the women. I am pleased to say that the project did facilitate community however, as it was embraced and continues to be part of the groups who transit that place, now seven years on. It serves the margins and could be seen as a blueprint that anybody could use and adapt. I think that if

\footnote{72 Thanks again to Loma Bridge.}  
\footnote{73 Gibbs, Anna, (2005) Fictocriticsm, Affect, Mimesis: Engendering Differences p. 4 of this online article in TEXT Vol 9 No 1}  
\footnote{74 Kwon Miwan, One place After Another: Site Specific Art and Locational Identity, p. 6- 8}  
\footnote{75 Ibid. p. 6}
one is hoping to serve the margins, it is important to make sure that it is doing that, rather than alienating in one's own interests. I was given permission by the women involved and also Corrections, to show the film of their garden.76

Miwan Kwon’s book One Place After Another reviews developments in site-specific practice since the seventies. In the first chapter of her book, she proposes three paradigms of site-specificity: phenomenological or experiential; social/institutional; and discursive, involving written anchoring of works. These categories are only intended as outlines, which might overlap.77 The second chapter of Kwon’s book discusses the ‘aesthetics of administration’. Artists she proposes are becoming ‘service providers’ rather than producers of aesthetic objects. There is a risk, if I were only producing garden works, of falling into the service provider category. Yet, one asks, why make more commodities? Art is more. By the annexing of the Site/Nonsite spatial continuation, I want not only to introduce, via the “discursive” space of this thesis, neglected spaces to more mainstream scrutiny but also to implicate my own ontological position. In consequence, the conceptual meaning of the grass works is expanded.

6. Mutations, hierarchies and administration.

76 Regarding works involving the marginalised, I was critical of the series of Anne Ferran’s INSULA images in her Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery exhibition, On the Ground in the Air. (Tasmanian Mueum and Art Gallery). Her position (including the use of white gloves for one of the works in which one enters a sectioned space to handle a photographic book of images of the women from Rozelle Hospital) seemed to me to be distanced from these women—even colonising them. The women from the Rozelle Hospital approximately fifty years ago had clearly not wanted to have their photographs taken in the first place. In their pudding bowl haircuts they cowered from the observational camera. I thought that the use of the photographs, after Susan Sontag, (Regarding the Pain of Others), colonised disability. I wrote this paper with thanks to Anne to try to analyse some strong responses I had had at the time to the work. This response indicated I think, my own identification with disability (via my family) and the motto of disability groups “nothing about us without us.” I am grateful to Anne Ferran for asking me to speak to her project at the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery in 2008 at the Hearing Voices Conference. The paper I gave is in Appendix 9. I have found it necessary to acknowledge my own relationship to questions of Mental Health. Though I began this paper hoping to make a diversion away from the abject, disability, and any other pain and misery, my ‘discontinued narratives’ got the upper hand.

77 Kwon, Miwan, One place After Another: site-specific art and locational identity, p. 5.
Moving particles

My art practice is part of a contemporary field of enquiry of interdisciplinary exchanges between art and science. Though the work has developed more emphasis on migration during the course of my research, the Migration Studies is implicitly interdisciplinary — involving science. Smithson’s practice emerged from the early art/science writing of Gyorgy Kepes and others. Notions of change and *becomings* are also central in Deleuze and Guattari’s interdisciplinary philosophical writings and invented terminology of flows, particles, intensities, qualities of spaces in relation to power structures, assemblages.77 These are a backdrop of references. (How to live fluidly amidst the demands and restraints of institutions is an abiding question for many artists and writers.) A language of particles, movements, intensities is appropriate in a consideration of migration and its convolutions of power and the margins, which are seemingly inevitable aspects of population shifts. Deleuze and Guattari are present in my text, but backgrounded.

In the Smithson chapter, I reference the imagery, which occurred around his knowledge of crystallography. Deleuze and Guattari after Bergson use the image of the crystal to describe the shift between the real and virtual.78 They use it in relation to film criticism. Smithson’s fascination with the fractures and fissures of crystals that result in growththrough time are beautiful subtle images, I think by which he described how individuals might intervene in history. A moment when what is imagined becomes inserted into the flow of time as it were. With a similar appeal to the poetry of the idea, I draw on the biological idea of a mutation. Narratives of migration allow for a space of recognition of complex molecular, biological and cultural transformations. Current proliferation of research in the medical sciences, as evidenced at the 2009 Medical Imaging Conference79 that I attended, fed my instinct to work with the imagery of


79 Medical Imaging Conference held at Hawkesbury Campus, U.W.S. in 2008.
mutations. The work in Migration Studies, as well as my own introspective writings, has also nurtured an inclination in furthering work relating to migration.

Approximate interdisciplinary contexts

I began researching the literature on Smithson by reading Margot Bijvoet’s *Processes of Inquiry: Art, Science and Technology, Toward New Collaborations Between Art, Science and Technology*, and Leonard Shlain’s 1991 *Art and Physics: Parallel Visions in Space, Time and Light*. These texts discuss equivalences in discovery and innovation within the arts and sciences over the last two centuries. Both fields of endeavour have frequently moved in tandem. I also read more contemporary works such as Dr Jill Scott’s edited *2005 Artists-in-labs: Processes of Inquiry*. In relation to this reading, I initially thought that the work of this Doctoral project would revolve around the image of mutation, even hybridity, in a more biological sense than what has resulted. The *mutation* of migration became more closely aligned to a transitional state, the transformational experience of migration and an understanding of the origins of the migrant hybrid, which Homi Bhabha, amongst others, has found ways to present in a positive light. The colonial ‘master’ race would formerly have imposed disparaging implications on those described as *mulatto*, for instance. There is a concurrence between shifts in perceptions of such racially discriminating terms with shifts in the definition and conceptualising of space. This has also influenced artistic practice. Space since Smithson’s era has become a tangible element in an artwork.

80 A list of background reading on early developments in interdisciplinary practice is provided in the Bibliography. Marga Bijvoet’s book *Processes of Inquiry: Art, Science and Technology* contextualises Smithson’s practice amongst the thinking of his contemporaries.

81 Papastergiadis Nikos, *Discontinued Narratives of Migration* p. 4

82 Ibid p. 4
The concept of space has in recent decades received greater theoretical significance rather than being a vacant or neutral category in narratives of migration. Departures and returns are seldom final and therefore various theorists of migration have emphasised this space of transformation as a dynamic field. The *mutation in darkness*, the sub-title of *The Black*, is a zone of subterranean revelation wherein a change might occur. In a biological mutation, the DNA configuration actually changes, sometimes with a positive beneficial result for the organism, but sometimes as destructive, as in the case of the development of cancerous cells.

**Another kind of migration**

Chapter Three expanded on four subsections of the work of Robert Smithson, whose practice encompassed visual art, writing and ‘creative administration’. His work is decidedly *ekphrasic* —mutually descriptive and inter-dependent visual and written forms. The wider understanding of the *Site/Nonsites* resulted from his published articles, films, interviews and ‘printed matter’. These spaces could be described as hybrid forms or in between two places. Smithson’s work is important because it mobilised aspects of interdisciplinary, spatial, installation practice that have transplanted and propagated work from the gallery context into a number of different locations in which we now find contemporary art. The *Site* and *Nonsite* works can easily be read as having a relationship to the *stranger*, who forever embodies at once near and far, is spatially at once here and there. Smithson, like Duchamp, created art forms, which transplanted, removed the focus of art making from the production of an object to interdisciplinary practice in the expanded field.

7. **Urban renewal and High Art.**

---

83 Ibid p. 6
Travel to the North of England, to Manchester and Liverpool, coming into contact with the paradigm shifting Regeneration UK (different kinds of interdisciplinary applications of the arts —and should I say, to my mind superior) to what Australia has to offer brings with it some dissatisfaction. I still ask myself, should I return there? The alternative for this migrant ‘sand in the oyster’ is to try to re-create what is missed. Like the green grass of home that burgeoned in the early colonies, recreating the lost seems to be an inevitability. What would that mean? It would mean the much greater recognition and empowerment of artists in Australia to bring about transformative processes.

**Creative Administration and Performance.**

In the case of Smithson’s use of the *Site/Nonsite* (and many subsequent artists’ shifts between forms, places, technologies, disciplines), there is an illumination of meaning and enhanced artistic impact through the synergy of the various forms and their interactions, (i.e. *Spiral Jetty*, is extended and enhanced by the films and writings). I consider in the Boronia works, the space and the possible meanings of the prison on the Australian landscape in relation to Smithson’s *Site/Nonsite* conceptualisings, treating it as a *Site*. I have privileged the discussion of *Mirror Travels in the Yucatan* because it is a work that creates massive temporal and spatial bearings on the questions ‘*Who am I*?’ and ‘*What am I doing in this place*?’ These questions in Smithson’s famous work encompass not only post-colonial, ecological, biological, geological and art historical considerations but also a deeply personal trauma of presence and absence, considerations I share. And which I bring to bear in the *View* series and the *Liverpool/Liverpool*, as well as in the *Boronia* works, in which I hope to encompass many facets of the issues raised by mobility and its representation in this era of heightening transience.

---

84 The prison image merges into an historical reflection on post-Colonial migration and serves at the same time as a place of incarceration within myself. The past for me held many fears. *The Black* describes a pit-like place, which isn’t just a coal mine in Lancashire where I grew up.
I state earlier in my text that Cezanne heralded the recognition of the individual as a centre of re-configuring the world. Since the early twentieth century avant-garde artists have inhabited their work, creating possible alternative histories. Many contemporary artists now move freely around any medium they choose which, though not performance explicitly, involve installed works which create multi-sensory affects that are viewed or experienced. One enters a stream of an artist’s activity and process, which is often cumulative over several shows. The post-Smithson non-privileging of site over sight has moved into an acceptance of space and its multiplicities of sensory and conceptual experience.

Public art and the earth

Urban Development

Also informing and elaborating my themes and processes of production is an intersection with the maternal connection, exemplified by the administrated Boronia Project and other garden projects. The consideration of the earth in these instances informs the rectangular gridded ‘carpet’ images both inside and outside gallery spaces. I extrapolate a connection to Smithson’s Site/Nonsite continuity. Through this folded continuity I embrace the here and there dichotomies of my own ‘fractures and fissures’. And through a reading of Foucault and his feminist commentators, the image of the British institution as superimposed on the Australian landscape implicates, that is, enfolds, all institutions, including the asylum.

Discontinued narratives…

The prison and its ancient forbear, the castle, featured in Notes on the Castle. This exhibition came from the experience of working in a prison (the descendant of a castle) as well as through curiosity of what we left behind as migrants, which was not only the
country of origin. The institution, prisons, mental institutions or otherwise on the Australian landscape are persistent underbellies of my experience, and as part of a personal discontinued narrative, they continue to re-surface in my work, including the recent “earth” work *The Law is Not Always Just*. These works are imbued with questions about power and its permutations that do have an indirect bearing on this exegesis. My use of the prison image as the meeting of migrant and indigenous culture, (which is also now in many cases migrant) has significantly for me the connection also with the maternal and a necessity for reconciliation and recovery. Insofar as *The Law is Not Always Just* references this earlier work, *Notes on the Castle*, which directly addressed the prison as an image on the colonial land, the latter informs the current work, hence its inclusion.

The dynamics of urban renewal and entrepreneurial creative administration that recur to me throughout the writing of this exegesis (and in the work of Robert Smithson) are, I think, important ways of making new cultural contexts possible against a tide of homogenising bureaucracy. Visiting the North of England where urban renewal is a government structure now in place in such cities as Manchester and Liverpool naturally caused me to reflect on the Australian suburbs and ‘wastelands’ and on the role that artists may have in bringing about some greater cultural dynamism out of the dreary stretches near Liverpool NSW, where I am told 147 language groups live, suggesting in terms of my ‘discontinued narratives’ theme, very great unconscious potential. The prison exists physically and symbolically now as digitalised bureaucracy. The creation of mobile, migratory networks such as, for instance, Resartis are *openings* important in ensuring healthy circulatory systems in migratory, global artistic communities. As well as the re-defining of the feminine which is implicit in recovering my own maternal history by means of Smithson’s *Site/Nonsite* concept —and my own experience in zones which

---

85 From a conversation with Alan Cholodenko.

86 [http://reartis.com](http://reartis.com) is an international artists residency site that provides information regarding studio and funding possibilities for artists all over the world. These kinds of networks provide creative people a way to live that resists settling into socially coded modes of thought and behaviour.
many would regard as abject—I would want to assert the value of recognising the indeterminate, in-between,\textsuperscript{87} hybrid state of the migrant.

\textsuperscript{87} With thanks again to conversations and the writings of Alan Cholodenko on the \textit{in-between} figure in animation
Chapter Seven

Field Research

A brief description of expeditions during the writing of this exegesis and their relevance to the research project.

My travels during the course of this research have been illuminating and to my surprise they took me into a deeper level of thinking about colonial law and the damage it wrought in Australia, as well as my own migrant relationship with what Smithson might call, ‘the abyss of history’. On returning to Lancashire, I travelled not only to my birthplace but also into the field of Migration Studies at Lancaster University. At the same time, my encounter with that field made me realise that I had been a student, as it
were, of migration since I entered ‘the field’ of migration by migrating to Australia.

2007  Trip to West Coast Tasmania

I visited a residency in Queenstown where there are sites, open cut mines similar to those used by Smithson mining and entropic sites The *Bingham Mining Project* is yet another instance of the *Site/Nonsite* dialectic. Queenstown is an old town that has been ravaged by sulphuric pollution emitted from the copper mines. Trees no longer grow on the surrounding hills. They are stark pinks and greens from stark exposed rocks. Right beside this town is the border of the Heritage South West National Park. Ray Arnold who runs the gallery and the Residential Program in Queenstown is hoping to regenerate the historic town which is fading into economic depression. We discussed the possibility of a Smithson Festival in the area.

Hazelhurst Regional Gallery Residency

This opportunity to stay at Hazelhurst enabled the possibility of developing the *Of the Earth* work in the gardens. I was also able to have contact with the Migration Centre there, where I interviewed women who were attending that place regularly. The meetings resulted in the place names produced for that work.²

2008  Western Sydney Medical Digital Imaging Conference

In thinking about correlations between transformative process of migration, I have been looking at microbiological and cellular imagery —literally DNA mutation. I attended this conference that showcased new technology in medical imaging. Though extremely

---

² I went to weekly meetings at the Migrant Centre in Gymea where I met a group of new migrants in Australia from mainly South America, but also Middle Eastern countries and Africa. The city names used in that work were places of origin of these women such as Amman, Sao Paulo, Napoli, Manchester, Tokyo. See *Of the Earth* Figures 15-20 in Chapter Four.
interesting it has not informed my current practice directly. As Jill Scott describes in her writing on art/science collaborations, sometimes apart from looking in awe at the spectacular pictures produced as a result of such technology, there isn’t anywhere else to take it.3 To some extent this applied to the experience of going to the Medical Imaging Conference. Nonetheless, the vivid imagery of diseases proliferating on a cellular or viral level has produced a lingering effect. The transference of ideas between disciplines, the travelling of concepts is not always a direct one. I think images must traverse the body, the nervous system and become infused with affect before anything I could begin to call art, transpires. Some future projects might result.

James Meyer’s idea of a discursive site, describes the process by which other disciplines may be implicated and engaged in a site-specific work.4 There are possible interconnections across all fields and systems of knowledge. In the use of the word mutations, I want to imply an open discourse in operation with scientific developments. During the conference we watched films that showed mutations which created cancers in rats, viewed at a cellular level through state of the art magnifications. It enabled an understanding of the transformations within DNA. Mutations in genes often cause cancer. Sometimes mutations result in qualities that will improve an organism’s chances of survival. There is much more to know. I understand a little basic molecular biochemistry, how atoms, molecules regroup and reorganise into new compound groups and some of the laws that govern these changes. It is the metaphorically language of fecund cellular processes such as splitting, dividing, mutating provided by a reading of Marina Warner as it relates to cultural and mythical dimensions of change that interests me more.5 These thought processes have been feeding what I imagine to be a future project based around the processes of viral disease — some of which are constantly morphing (illusively) in


4 Kwon, Miwan has abbreviated James Meyer’s text on p. 15 of her book, One Place After Another, p.29.

5 Warner, Marina, Fantastic Metamorphosis and Other Worlds, 2002, See chapters 1, 2, 3 and 4.
Figure 1: Two views of regenerated Liverpool. Much of this city had been heavily bombed during W.W. 2 and had remained economically depressed even prior to the Thatcher era.

ways that are perhaps emblematic of our times. I also want to make a study of actual organ transplants.6 An organ transplant literally relocates life from one human environment to another.

There is a popular understanding that there has been an increase in cancer over recent years. Do the accelerations of global movements and removal from origin have a bearing on this instability? What are the physiological impacts? Appadurai’s fractal flows come to mind —chaos is proliferating —though some superficial reading of fractals might imply a greater order within chaos. The microscopic, molecular imaging of diseases and their impact on bodily functioning are sources of imagery and understanding of where science is leading us. The advanced diagnostic equipment that I saw during this conference is being used increasingly for early detection of disease. Amazing coloured animated imagery of how cells are functioning within organisms reveals precisely, points at a cellular level, where the transformations of disease occur. I was lead as a result of attending this conference, to consider further the metaphor of transplanting.

My hydroponic system (2000) as transplant was the beginning of this larger study of my practice’s relationship to migration. I would like to develop imagery in consideration of how soft body tissue reacts to change as it interfaces with the organisms of cities. The

6 During this Doctorate a close friend with cancer experienced a successful liver transplant. The new organ was connected into his body over a period of about 8 hours, allowing life to resume as normal.
work shown in Figure 11, p. 166, showing pipes, wires, tubes, embedded in concrete is a preliminary ‘sketch’ of a possible project. Images emerge gradually in my case, their edges sharpened by information. I think this is something like the process described by Bal as focalisation. During this course I sought initially to set up the possibility of gaining access to work being done in agricultural genetics. I was open to the possibility of working in collaboration with microbiologists and/or genetics scientists. This proved for legal reasons to be impractical.

The form much of the work produced to date has often involved plants (as grasses and also in hydroponic systems) inherently vulnerable art materials. The work has frequently been temporal, in itself indicative of fragility. I have used hydroponics systems as constructed symbols of nature/artifice and hybridity as well my own discontinued narratives of migration. The process of ‘writing’ with grass roots developed out of my use of hydroponics.

2009 Trip to Lancashire, England.

I attended Glocal Imaginaries: Moving Manchester, a major conference and was exposed to a broader understanding as well as major thinkers and practitioners in the field of Migration Studies. The work of Mieke Bal was most relevant for my research as discussed in the introduction and elsewhere, but this conference did enable me to see how Britain has embraced Migration Studies as a process and a practice in urban development; which had a relationship to my thinking on both Smithson’s practice and migration, creative process and the subject of the mutant stranger. I presented Migratory Words/Migratory worlds a paper, which will be published in Crossings 2011. This

---

7 Dr Nicholas Roberts, AgResearch Massey University, Department of Plant Biology, Palmerston North, New Zealand. Dr Roberts (a cousin, as it happens) has found a way to genetically modify grasses in order to reduce methane and greenhouse gas emissions. I had wanted to access some of the seeds to use in a confined environment for casting. To do so would, of course, be illegal.

8 In a journal called Crossings: A Journal of Culture and Migration, early 2011.
edited paper is included in Appendix 2. It draws on my experience as an artist and migrant while also referencing earth art, Smithson and the image of a prison.

I also went to *Urbanisation09* in Kirby, an urban wasteland of poor housing and extensive social problems —extensively a migrant area. The event was held in a school where a group of about 70-80 people were gathered to work on projects and ideas to develop the area through physical and creative intervention. The speakers included installation artists, architects, writers, town planners, a demographer. Though I could only attend for a fairly short period of time (several hours) due to a tight travel schedule, I was very impressed by this creative interdisciplinary work, taking place to re-animate a very dead place as well as gather the community together. It is unusual in Australia for group efforts by creators. We are still apparently still sold on the singular artist system, which requires the application of creativity to the production of marketable artworks. *Urbanisation09* was regarded as a high profile event. The employment of artists is part of the larger Regeneration UK initiative and is now built into the structure of UK urban development.

Sarah Butler’s *UrbanWords*⁹ was an especially memorable presentation. Sarah is a site-specific writer, who develops texts with passers by in various urban locations. These turn into sometimes permanent and sometimes temporary installations. I have included her website. Paul Howard the curator who supported Liverpool/Liverpool at Casula Powerhouse had worked on Regeneration projects, and was surprised that nothing similar existed in Australia. The garden projects that I have done with disadvantaged women would be greatly fostered if they were able to exist in a similar context to Urbanisation09.

---

⁹ [www.urbanwords](http://www.urbanwords)
Speaking about the trip on a more personal level, I experienced parts of Lancashire where farming has for generations, been a family occupation on my mother’s side. Wigan is famous for George Orwell’s *Road to Wigan Pier*,\(^{10}\) and was where unionism and socialism took hold out of necessity during the Nineteenth century’s inequities in the mines and cotton mills of the North. This place was a monument of my childhood where a deep connection to my own and an ancient past was palpable. Wigan Church is on a Roman site, and has layers of history. It survived bombings during WW2, and also an attack by the Roundheads during the War of the Roses — the Civil War of 1600s when it sheltered the King; it houses flags from battalions of WW1 when it sheltered wounded soldiers in retreat from battle, but much more. Various rebuildings incorporated windows from York Minster by the Lancashire Glass Painters, Burne-Jones pre-Raphaelite wings. Every inch was redolent with echoes of profound historical movements and changes.

Figure 2: Two images from the graveyard at UpHolland Moor where the Hodges have been buried for centuries

The *Glocal Imaginaries* conference also gave me an opportunity to look for somewhere to exhibit for the *Liverpool/Liverpool* exhibition. With thanks to curator Paul Howard at Casula Powerhouse, I found St Georges Hall. The trip to the North of England was valuable in the development of my thinking about the link between transplanting and culture in the broadened scope offered by direct access to speakers such as Mieke Bal, but this conference in general, introduced me to the encompassing field of Migration Studies. Mieke Bal’s project *Nothing is Missing* is referenced elsewhere. It became a

significant reference in my thinking about the maternal link as a connector throughout the narrative of my writing. This conference was my debut in the field of Migration Studies and its direct bearing on interdisciplinary thought and practice. It was an opportunity to see Liverpool UK, a city regenerated by contemporary ‘hybrid’ culture.

Critic Miwan Kwon regards Smithson’s work as a genealogical forebear of such urban developments as one sees in Liverpool, Manchester and the subsequent Public Art programs. Public site-specific art and public art that incorporates communities are both categories close to the borders of my own work. A cursory opportunity to observe Regeneration UK by attending the conference and observing the cities was for me, a revelation of the possibilities of this advanced institutionalised inter-disciplinary force. The infrastructures in areas of Western Sydney councils where I experienced a disturbing degree of control over artists’ distributions of their work would have to be vastly different to enable such processes to occur. The Liverpool/Liverpool project provoked comparisons. When I began thinking about the Liverpool/Liverpool work I looked for possible historical links between the two cities (even in regard to naming) and was disappointed to find few: except a possible comparison could be drawn between the slave trade of Liverpool, U.K. and the convict ‘slavery’ that enabled the building of Liverpool in N.S.W. The possible work in collaboration with Casula that I am currently developing in Liverpool NSW may afford further research and involvement. The possibility of developing interdisciplinary teams to “rework” problematic areas as I saw happening in Kirby would mean a quantum leap in progressive arts re-organisation in Australia.

2010 Trip to England

I proposed through the imagery developed during this exegesis, a confluence of projects that can lead to Reconciliation. Work produced could result in a mutation, a new life an evolutionary advancement or even possibly a new elaboration of contemporary art

11 The publicity for the Liverpool/Liverpool: the skin of translation was in fact vetoed by the General Manager of Liverpool Council. I was told which image I could use in publicity such as invitations and on their website. Clearly the role of creative people is not respected in that Municipality.
practice and correctional creativity — a small mutation in the margins. My trips to the UK were informative about my personal history in relation to the above endeavour. I also successfully conducted the Liverpool UK section of the Liverpool/Liverpool: the skin of translation exhibition at St Georges Hall. I flew back to Australia to present Liverpool/Liverpool NSW at Casula Powerhouse and simultaneously in September and October of 2010.

A recording of the late Kath Walker was presented on an ABC radio program about the dreamings of her people through generations. Is not my own sense of the earth where former generations were buried vastly different? Revisiting the country of one’s origins one tries to see patterns of cause and effect, what happened, what could have happened – what if any are the connections to a life which might have been lived. There are places houses that provoke memories, places of childhood, graveyards where the generations lie

Figure 3: Wigan Church is on a Roman site. The windows here to the left are made by thirteenth century glass painters. This was where some weddings, christenings and funerals occurred on my father’s side.

Figure 4: Inside the ballroom at St Georges, the courtroom seating and right, the dock from where one literally “went down” some steps if found guilty. Below are two regenerated views.
those to whom we owe our genes. Looking at photographs one sees likenesses, one knows of tendencies, talents, a hairline, an earlobe, a bone structure. Even forty years later, as happened recently on such a trip, people re-surface. People I had not seen since childhood told me many more accounts of generational stories.

Exhibiting at St George’s brought me into contact with a branch of the family who were also descendants of my great-great-great-grandfather, the illustrious and notorious Judge Day. My own story turned out to be something like a Charles Dickens novel — one of secrets, class and religious divides, breakaways, illegitimacies, and even a misplaced fortune that was ill-gotten gains from the slave trade. I could begin to imagine that these sometime spicy narratives were still being lived out in the odd twists and turns of my own life. I could see a really powerful narrative about morality, the hypocrisy of the church, shameful extremes of the legal system, attachments to art, nature and beauty, my fears about institutions and their dangers, betrayals of sisters, even the shift from religion to science — themes which recur in my art practice, all ‘rooted’ on the other side of the world.

I also made the sad visit to the stark red brick Warrington Hospital where two of my family members had been living for some forty years, pretty much deserted by everyone. Even the relatives with whom I stayed made it clear that they did not want to discuss the life of either Alice or Frank Hodge when I returned from this confronting experience. It was also very saddening to discover that the records of both of my relatives were no longer in existence.

I began this section by writing about Kath Walker’s stories. With envy I look at the traditions of Aboriginal culture. After writing this paper, I think that the telling of migrant stories is extremely important in any art form. As someone who even as a child had a profound sense of history and place, I would wish to find ways to think about the ancient
history of my adopted country, and to understand its ramifications for, and ongoing life, in the present
Chapter Eight

CONCLUSION

I conclude by listing projects that I want to develop from this Doctoral research.

Many of these works are about developing contexts for migrations in many senses of this word:

* The writing in Chapter One involving ‘stories’ which bring together text and images. My interest in writing fiction has expanded, as has my understanding that to transform ‘fact’ into ‘fiction’ requires alchemical processing of affect. These discontinued narratives will converge into a
Development of a curatorial thesis around Ficto-criticism and performance. I named here, in relation to my own practice, a context for the history of performance art, post 60s, as well as Affect Theory. The named Australian artists were exemplary models of how creativity allows presence in the world and within art history. As many of the artists have now become senior artists, and in fact developed their relationships to the written word, philosophical and art historical contexts through writing Doctorates, I see a need to give recognition to their new extensions into language. This exhibition could include such practitioners as Julie Rrap, Eugenia Raskopoulos, Nola Farman, Judith Duquemin, Jacky Redgate, Noeline Lucas, Maria Fernanda Cordosa and others.

Development of the Ground Show.

There is a rather low glass ceiling for many artists in Australia working in interdisciplinary practice,. I will look to the Canadian model, Banff Centre for the Arts, as a pinnacle of organisational achievement. Banff facilitates artists and scientists from many countries to work across disciplines. Australia needs a similar government facility, which like the Canadian one generously provides for an influx of global artists, to work against the localisation of Australian art inevitably arising from its geographical remoteness. Australia is often not able to participate in the ‘glocal’ community, a fact, that is in my opinion holding us up.

Further to extending its glocal possibilities, I will begin to negotiate a Queenstown, Tasmania Robert Smithson Festival. This site is spectacular in that as well as being a disused open-cut mine, it is the gateway to the
South West Wilderness of Tasmanian heritage-listed, untouched landscape. It is also a frontier town where some artists are already looking to the Regeneration UK model to revitalise the town.

• Continue working with roots that will always be literally emblematic for me of the state of being a migrant, as so many of us are (including indigenous Australians who have often migrated from their original locations).

• Completion of Liverpool Garden project and other similar ones. The project that I wrote about in *The Black*, opens doors creatively for underprivileged women. It is a blueprint project that could be applied and adapted in many places where recognition of cultural histories works against the dispersion that can be a result of moving populations. In relation to Appadurai’s writing on globalisation, violence and prisons I will add that my perception of socially neglected environments, is that creative, productive, humane channels such as I worked on with the *Boronia Garden* need to be developed (though rarely are). Appadurai makes another observation that globalisation works frequently against minorities. ‘It enacts a deep anxiety about the national project and its own ambiguous relationship to globalisation. And globalisation, being a force without a face, cannot be the object of ethnocide. But minorities can.’ Mieke Bal’s work *Nothing is Missing* as well as *One Thousand and One Days* (her work done with the help of migrant workers) are ongoing reference points for my own practice and interest, particularly in the marginalisation of women in institutions, and other borders of neglect.

* Putting Bruny Island, Frances Lane Studio on an international inflow/outflow map of artists and writers.
I have set out in this exegesis to show how my art practice is a form of transplanting. I have shown how gallery-based Minimalism prior to Smithson has been transplanted (deterritorialised) into multiple forms in multiple places of site related practice, in part at least, thanks to his mobile migratory practice, which engendered the ensuing of chaotically proliferating lines of flight. I have also shown how Smithson inverted, transplanted and re-radicalised Duchamp’s gallery, making the earth itself a new gallery of art.

My use of the garden via the feminine inverts this once more and/or re-vitalises it. For me the processes of developing a physical and affect driven imagery relating to earth create a connection via the thread to my place of origin. In the use of the institution as a Site I bring into play discontinued narratives of migration. It asserts what was lost for me by migration, that is the language of my maternal line. I have succeeded in finding on the other side of the world, a way of representing my discontinued narratives through the production and generation of language that relates to the earth. I have written in Chapter Two on the position of the migrant and its relationship to creativity. Through research into Smithson and through my own writing and visual output, as well as researching this generalised condition of the migrant I have an expanded understanding of the knowledge folded in, an inherent part of creative endeavour. At the Glocal Imaginaries Conference I saw the relationship of interdisciplinary Migration Studies to broader application in the planning of cities in the UK. In transiting the world various biographic, aesthetic and interdisciplinary paths have crossed, intersected and neatly re-grouped themselves for further investigation. Below I list projects, works that I expect to ensue as a result of this document’s unravelling.

Though the grass work belong amongst a plethora of works that have implied or represented the ground in recent Australian Art history, I can claim to be the only one who has used grass roots —as well as chewing gum! I referenced the abject marginal zone of a prison and its creative potential as an historical site,
and an image of two cultures meeting. The materials and processes that I use are
generated from the same level of affect as is referenced in *The Black* and
*Liverpool/Liverpool*. In these Chapter One writings I have begun to dig into the
vulnerable subjective states of a transplant as well as the sediments of history, in
an act both of recognising my own past and defining a possible future. The *Black*
is possibly something of a dark residue of the shame, pain and abiding damage
of Colonialism that I am trying to step away from. This “black” comes up from
the ground in industrial Lancashire, it is also like some coal residue that I would
want to shake off. Beatrix Campbell’s *Road to Wigan Pier Revisited*¹ describes the
chauvinism deeply embedded in the union movements of the north.

I came across “the black” again in the corridor at St Georges where *The Law is Not
Always Just* was projected. I am defining both through the sequential visual
works and the writing an intuited thread that unravels gradually. These writings
of a person who is primarily a visual artist are gathering around experiences in
peripheral architecture and peripheral living. A character is forming —Melanie,
who is a migrant artist who tries to find a way through. These writings only
begin to sketch in a possible fiction. They are usually drawing from an
experience of abjection, and are therefore painful. I can in fact hardly tell fact
from fiction.

The prison image is a bureaucratic filter occasionally permitting innovations, but
mainly locked into the Colonial sandstone past. In this group of writings I
describe some of the distorted affects that I would attribute to being a migrant.
The writing of Chapter One experiments with text and image together. I am
discovering or acknowledging some of the stories that have always been part of
the work’s meaning. Like Smithson’s *Mirror Travels in the Yucatan*, where the

traversal of time and space uncover his own ‘fractures and fissures,’ I have travelled through many of my own fears that intersect, as migrants’ experience does, some realm between the personal and the broader spheres of social, political and aesthetic influences. I left England at a similar time to many British migrants in the ‘60s entering a foreign history —and a confrontation (even for a nine year old) with an understanding of the death of the Tasmanian Aboriginal people. Hobart was our port of arrival. The genocide information was shocking, as was the severance from an extended family and a national history I had already absorbed. One of my major exhibitions of this body of work was Liverpool/Liverpool: the skin of translation, relating to this global spatial transference. The image of this work also leaves me with a completion, a temporary illusion of unity at least. It goes some of the way to defining the space of migration, which needs, I think, along with many Migration theorists, to be recognised more fully as an ongoing mutation in time, rather than as a finite departure and disembarkation.

Migration is used here to describe the state of those who move from one country to another, for whom an abiding schism might appear. It is also used ambiguously together with the idea of travelling in interdisciplinary research across concepts and disciplines and various unknown unchartered terrain where in odd new hybrid knowledges and innovations might arise. I have tried to produce in the inclusion of my own autobiography something of the affect engendered by this experience combined these ideas. Mutation in Darkness, the subtitle of The Black in Chapter One suggests that in the darkness, in those uncomfortable in between states something might grow and mutate —like, (after Charles Darwin’s hypothesis) ‘thinking’ roots —perhaps.

I would like to think that in the carpet works that there is not only my own vulnerability as a migrant expressed. These flat carpet-like works are openings onto the places they are situated. Even in the magnificent Vienna Academy of Fine Arts building, they remind one of the earth, transience and disjunction, that
is a creative state of surprise and intervention. These works were made concurrent to a number of other projects which I generally have running all at the same time. Many Australian artists have to be great at juggling possibilities. One of these projects was a study that I imaged at the beginning of Chapter Five, the Origin of Ideas Project. About fifty artists, scientists, architects, writers allowed me to document the working processes of their projects. Migration and travelling for Mieke Bal coincides I think, as it does for me, with the idea of churning, intellectually and spiritually adventurous seeking and discovering such as occurs in the best contemporary art.

Is there an ancient connection to the land? I would not wish to be writing about the ancient history of Australia in any way other than as a migrant. I want to bring my own amazing ancient history with me. I have looked at some of my origins, such as the thirteenth century Lancashire glass painters, and want to work with something that could be described as authentically spiritual from my own past. It would not surprise me if I found out that Giotto’s early version of expressionism (faces loaded with affect) had inspired medieval Lancastrians. As well as appreciating ones own traditions the ‘travelling’ is also about getting through the ‘baggage’ of familial generations. Culture provides the opportunity for evolution.

Many migrants to Australia, as Ann Finegan points out in the essay she wrote for Of the Earth at the Hazelmhurst Regional Gallery, do come from extreme tragedy, drought, starvation, war ravaged countries, persecution on the basis of religion or whatever: bringing with them, embedded in conscious or unconscious narratives much that if my own experience is anything to go by will be playing itself out for centuries as the future of Australia’s culture unfolds. (See Appendix 3 for Dr Ann Finegan’s essay). I like my use of the elemental substance earth, combined with the text, to think about this potential and will continue to develop it.
What did science have to do with it?

My odd combination of ideas that meander across a range of trajectories (and fields) has led me to the image and the science of mushroom roots. Dr Paul Gamut has proposed that mushroom roots have synapse-like networks, not unlike the way in which neurones in the brain form a protective network. He makes by way of comparison, a protective network around the world, although my ideas have travelled as I have, in strange trajectories and surprising combinations, flash-backs, of part and projections of the future erupting out of darkness _ I find mushroom roots.

Problem areas – not enough research on the huge range of migrant artists working at present, especially those using the ground, and the possibility of a meeting of histories. (The word British has had a bad colonial ring). There are many white Australian artists who have wanted to address reconciliation in their use of landscape in painting, sculpture and performance. I hope that I have gone out of my way to speak as a migrant. I would hate to be accused of false identification with Aboriginality, for all my respect for the cultures that comprise it. The fear and anger still exists on the part of many Aboriginal groups, of opportunistic identification with their culture. This is historically very understandable. Is it a way to reconciliation? I could have researched much more on the Aboriginal /Migrant interface in regard to artistic production. This zone of interface would need a lot more investigation than I have indicated. A new book on this subject is about to be released.

3 www.Ted.com
I have written about the *Boronia Project* where I co-ordinated the garden project which gave rise to some of the thinking here. It inadvertently developed a major role in this Doctorate. It was a long way from my initial intention in writing about *Mutations and Migration*. Through Smithson’s practice I wanted to keep the focus on transitions, the *trans*, which his metamorphing uses of media demonstrate. The relationship of the garden to migration is somewhat oblique and the abject zone of the prison is really intended as a symbolic space. My experience prior to the Doctorate came into play as I speculated on my own history with institutions and their relationship to the idea of a *discontinued narrative*. The grand-maternal thread throughout has unfortunately, been inescapable.

As stated elsewhere, I have researched mainly through Robert Smithson, the roots of interdisciplinary practice that began mainly in the 1960s. This was out of a conviction that the coming together of art and science would produce environmentally sustaining works. At the beginning of Chapter Three I give an account, which relates to my own idiosyncrasies of why as a feminist I chose Smithson. Why not his remarkable wife Nancy Holt who continues to produce spectacular work? There might be something unresolved in this, but there are some specifics in Smithson’s practice that I wanted to use. Rosalind Krauss places Smithson as one of the major twentieth century breakthrough moments. He made his own work very accessible through writing about it as well as that of his contemporaries. This was an important factor in my choice. I have always
been nagged by the idea of wanting to write about my own work and possible contexts that would link my own projects to those of others and he has been a great role model. Much of importance happens in contemporary art that escapes exposure and proper curatorial filtering. I hope to engage more now in the activity of changing that deficiency.

**Positive Outcomes**

A positive outcome in itself has been working in the Department of Writing and Society rather than in a Fine Arts Department. Researching—with writers more than artists—has been an enriching, interdisciplinary exercise. I am very grateful for the opportunity to work around novelists, literary critics, poets and a range of researchers who have caused me to step outside the “art world”, such as it is in Sydney. Undoubtedly, this being for me a new context, has nourished whatever ability I have as a writer. Ficto-criticism has given me an opportunity to personalise the wide range of interests that would be difficult to encapsulate in any other context. This in itself has given my studies a new nucleus that is most importantly, something upon which to build. Curatorial projects—relating to migration in the broadest sense, practices as well as the ongoing development of inclusive works in obscure sites—are being imagined and planned.

Robert Smithson, whose practice sits at the foundation of the work of many of my contemporaries, has been a valuable reference point in thinking about interdisciplinary practice, its origins and current applications, especially in relation to my own work. The opportunity to research and recognise strangeness and its creative force has enabled me to acknowledge the turbulence of migration in myself. In 1990 I made a series of works called *Power is a Fluid Vertical White Line*. (See Figure 50 in Chapter Four). This was one of a series of drawings produced then that were large, done with charcoal using text and image to describe subjective states. They were to quite some extent inspired by Eva Hesse,
but also by reading Irigaray. The opportunity to reconsider my spatial and historical connection to Australia and to remain focussed for three years on transplanting, migration, movement, transporting, translation, and so forth, has created something like the thrill I received by doing those works. It has enabled me to find a point of empowerment amidst the chaos of being a migrant to Australia and also to Sydney. I will continue to think, write, produce and also be informed by the new field of Migration Studies.

If Smithson sought to de-centre his relationship to the making of an artwork through the various means described, I have found continually interesting the focus on his methodology, which comes out of his impassioned sense of Christianity that moved into secularised, scientific and enquiring aesthetically refined Post-Minimalism, a Post-Minimalism that sought to respond to questions as relevant today as they were in the sixties. The garden project is a socially committed and engaged work. Its space and concept inform and relate to the aesthetic of gallery and non-gallery works produced during the Doctorate. As a result of travel, I was able to connect to my own past via the revelation of the 13th century Lancashire Glass Painters. The windows there were removed from York Minster cathedral, whose history goes back to the baptism of an early Anglo-Saxon king. It is easy to understand why I have nostalgia for what could be described as a spiritual and cultural ‘thread’, an Ariadne’s thread of sorts, informing that history, a history threading through my life and manifesting via the European legal and ecclesiastical institutions that appear in my practice. There are some wonderful aspects to memories one has as a migrant from an ancient culture. The glass window paintings showed expressive faces that might have been influenced in their day by Giotto, against bright colours that looked as fresh as a Malevich. I look forward to another visit and enabling these images to

---

4 Again here I am moving from deep water to deep space.

5 The cosmological dimension in Smithson and Nancy Holt’s practices might be somewhere to go next.
inform another new series of works. Australia as a migrant country has only just started to synthesize all its grand collage of cultural, religious, linguistic, aesthetic discontinued narratives. Both Robert Smithson and his wife Nancy Holt were influenced by the grand earthworks of ancient cultures, which embraced the knowledge that the earth is part of a greater universe of movements and rhythms.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Baldassar, L. 2001 *The Visits Home, migration experiences between Italy and Australia*, Melbourne University Press South Carlton Victoria.


______ 2007, *Migration and Social Transformation* Inaugural Lecture for the Migration Studies Unit (MSU) LSE 15 November.


Krauss, Rosalind, Cindy Nemser, Mel Bochner, Briony Fer, Anne M. Wagner, essays and
interviews, 1998, Eva Hesse, OCTOBER FILES 3, YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS.

Kristeva, Julia, 1991, Strangers to Ourselves, Harvester Wheatsheaf, Colombia, University Press.


University Press.


Tufnell, Ben, 2006, *Land Art* Tate Publishing London


**APPENDIX 1**
Horror at St. George’s Hall July – September, Heritage Centre

Horror at St George’s Hall is Shiverpool’s most prestigious tour to date. Come and experience what lies beneath Liverpool’s darker heritage. You will be taken on a guided journey through the dark, eerie cells. In the courtroom, you will meet some of Liverpool’s most infamous criminals. You will follow in the footsteps of the condemned as they face the judge for their final sentence: to hang by the neck until dead. Tours run every Thursday, Friday and Saturday at 7pm and 8.30pm and cost £13.00 per person. Arrangements can be made for group bookings for a minimum of 20 people. To book contact Shiverpool on 0151 709 2030.

Elizabeth Day,
‘Transplantings’ 10th September – 7th November, Dickens Gallery

In conjunction with the Biennial, Elizabeth Day is an Australian/British site specific artist who has worked as a teacher in Corrections, developing garden projects which relate to the history of Australia as, initially a prison for Britain. She has produced pieces of art that have been displayed throughout Australia and Europe. This September she comes to St. George’s Hall with her latest project entitled ‘Transplantings’ which features a film relating to one of these works. She also works with casts of grass roots around the theme of migration and the movement of people from place to place.
The Mayor and Councillors of Liverpool City Council invite you and your guests to celebrate the opening of Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre's Liverpool/ Liverpool: the skin of translation exhibition by Elizabeth Day.

**Liverpool/ Liverpool: the skin of translation**
by Elizabeth Day
SWITCH GALLERY

To be officially opened by
Dr Anna Gibbs
School of Communication Arts,
University of Western Sydney

4.30 for 5pm
Saturday 23 October 2010

Outside on the Lawn,
next to Gordon Hookey's 2001 public artwork, Untitled
Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre
1 Casula Road, Casula NSW

RSVP by 21 October 2010
on 9824 1121 or reception@casulapowerhouse.com

Liverpool/ Liverpool: the skin of translation is an exhibition about translation and the ideas and origins of migration. The artist has created concurrent exhibitions, one in Liverpool United Kingdom, near to where the artist was born, and here, in Liverpool Australia.

Using a process akin to printing, the artist literally casts text out of grass roots. Day uses about 20 grass seed varieties - weaving various organic textures into the text. The text was created by four migrant writers - commissioned by Day to incorporate messages from today's migrants to tell the story of translation as part of this large floor installation. As a migrant, Day also asks the question of how do we connect to the ancient history of this country.

Exhibition starts Thursday 14 October 2010 in The Switch Gallery and continues to Sunday 28 November 2010. Exhibition officially launches on Saturday 23 October 2010. Elizabeth Day will present a floor talk as part of The Garden Day on Saturday 27 November 2010.

CASULA POWERHOUSE ARTS CENTRE
1 Casula Road, Casula NSW 2170
Enquiries: +6 2 9824 1121 and reception@casulapowerhouse.com
www.casulapowerhouse.com

Monday to Sunday 10am - 5pm, exhibition admission is free. Consider catching the train on the South/ Cumberland Line. Casula train station is between Liverpool and Glenfield stations, and is 100m from Casula Powerhouse. For timetable info go to www.131500.info. Free parking.

Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre is a cultural facility of Liverpool City Council. This project has been assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body.
The Mayor of Sutherland Shire, Councillor David Redmond has pleasure inviting you and your guests to the official opening of

Our Lucky Country (difference)

9 December 2006 – 4 February 2007


Curated by George & Ron Adams

With Guest Speaker Paul Livingston (aka Flacko)

At Hazelhurst Regional Gallery & Arts Centre
Friday 8 December at 6pm
Please join us for a Christmas drink and some festive fare!

Rsvp by 6 December 2006 to Hazelhurst Regional Gallery & Arts Centre
782 Kingsway, Gymea
Tel: 8366 5700
Email: hazelhurst@ssc.nsw.gov.au  www.hazelhurst.com.au

---

UTS Gallery
Level 4, 702 Harris St, Ultimo NSW

Opening night 3 July
Exhibition 4 July – 3 August 2007

Gallery hours: Mon-Sat 12-6pm

02 9514 1652

---

image: Davide Haines

Study for Hydrogen Alpha Series
2007, digital image. Courtesy of the artist
120 x 120 cm
ARTSPACE 24/25

Artspace opened the doors of its first gallery premises in Randle St, Surry Hills in 1983. Twenty-five years on, Artspace looks forward to a prosperous future as one of Australia’s leading international studio residency-based contemporary art centres. To mark twenty-five years of operation Artspace presents a set of special projects including a performance night with The Loop Orchestra and Artspace 24/25 – a weekend of one hour exhibitions.

PERFORMANCE  Brut Loops
8pm, Thursday 30 October, Artspace
$12 / $10 concession & members

A night of audio work, readings, film and performance programmed by The Loop Orchestra.

GALLERY  Artspace 24/25
11am–5pm, Saturday 1 & Sunday 2 November

Twenty-four one-hour exhibitions. Twenty-five years of Artspace.

Twenty-four artists present one-hour solo exhibition projects. Accumulatively Artspace 24/25 provides an opportunity to engage with a diversity of contemporary practices – installation, performance, moving image, sculpture, photography, new media and painting. In keeping with twenty-five years of commitment to artistic experimentation, Artspace 24/25 treats the gallery as an active working space, a place in which artists think, intuit, experiment and make.

Saturday 1 November, 11am–5pm

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GALLERY 1</th>
<th>GALLERY 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11 Derek Kreckler</td>
<td>11 Jim Allen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Kathny Cavaliere</td>
<td>12 r e a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Elizabeth Day</td>
<td>1 Denes Beauxois</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Mikala Dwyer</td>
<td>2 Richard Dunn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Julian Dashper</td>
<td>3 Eugenia Raskopoulus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Julie Rrap</td>
<td>4 Domenico de Clario</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sunday 2 November, 11am–5pm

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GALLERY 1</th>
<th>GALLERY 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11 Joan Grounds</td>
<td>11 Jill Scott</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Mark Tilmash</td>
<td>12 Mike Parr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Nuha Saad</td>
<td>1 George Tillianakis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Wade Marynowsky</td>
<td>2 Brook Andrew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Matthis Gerber</td>
<td>3 Mark Brown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 The Kingpins</td>
<td>4 Deej Fabyc</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CONNY DIETZSCHOLD GALLERY  |  SYDNEY  |  COLOGNE  |  cordially invites you and your friends to the exhibition opening ELIZABETH DAY [AUSTRALIA]

OPENING
SATURDAY 22 NOVEMBER, 4 - 6PM EXHIBITION DATES 22 NOVEMBER 20-DECEMBER 08
The artist will be present at the opening

ELIZABETH DAY mesh series, Uruguay 2008, 100 x 100 cm

CONNY DIETZSCHOLD GALLERY  |  SYDNEY  |  COLOGNE  |
2 Danks Street  |  Sydney Waterloo NSW 2017  |  Tel: +61 2 9690 0215  |  Fax: +61 2 9690 0216
Email:
elizabeth day

Port Macquarie Hastings Regional Gallery would like to invite you and a guest to the official opening of

elizabeth day | lisa andrew

An exhibition of two international artists, Elizabeth Day and Lisa Andrew working in the medium of fibre.

Elizabeth Day’s work intertwines between the themes of emigrant/immigrant experience. Wool, muga and plastic are reconfigured to create interesting and unique works.

Lisa Andrew, an installation artist, applies the layering of felt, fibre and mixed media, generating new and distinctive ‘interfaces’.

6pm Thursday 26th March 2009 at Port Macquarie Hastings Regional Gallery

To be opened by

Conny Dietzschold
Director Conny Dietzschold Gallery Sydney / Cologne

Light refreshments to be served

RSVP appreciated (02) 6581888

SPECIAL EVENTS

Artist Talk
9.30am Friday 27th March

Coffee Mornings @ the Gallery

Elizabeth Day and Lisa Andrew will provide an insight into their artistic practice

10 - morning tea provided

Port Macquarie Hastings Regional Gallery
26 March 09 – 17 May 09

lisa andrew

[Image of art work]

Port Macquarie Hastings Regional Gallery
26 March 09 – 17 May 09

CONNY DIETZSCHOLD GALLERY | SYDNEY | COLOGNE |
APPENDIX 2

Article from Crossings: Journal of Culture and Migration U.K. 2011

Migratory words, migratory worlds:
from Liverpool (United Kingdom) to Liverpool (New South Wales), and back again

Elizabeth Day
Currently working on a Creative Arts Doctorate at the School of Writing and Society, University of Western Sydney

In this article derived from my thesis, I propose that mutation is a central process at work in art generally and my art practice in particular. Mutation is the central figure for this essay, serving as metaphor, practice, process, performance, medium and milieu of my art. The term ‘mutation’ has applications not only in art but also in the natural sciences, and that bridge between them is something that my art not only cultivates but foregrounds.

Moreover, mutation links with the other key process at work in my art, and as well writing, practice: migration. The language of migration—of uprooting, transplanting, trans-mutations, cultivations and hybridisation—in-forms my essay, in which I elaborate the relevance of migration to my installation work, especially my grass ‘carpet’ works, the hydroponic systems and the ‘cast’ grass writing.

Key words: art, earth art, hybrid, installation, migration, mutation, migration, Robert Smithson

In this predominantly visual article I return, in a sense, to the place of my birth. My parents migrated from the United Kingdom, UpHolland, near Wigan, in 1963, and went nearly as far away as they could, to the other side of the earth. They went to Hobart, Tasmania, to create a new life there. As a result, the North of England,
once so near to me, turned into and has remained for me a place far away, my antipodes. So, at the age of ten, I became a transplant, uprooted and replanted in the beautiful and historically bizarre land of Tasmania. I became, over the years, an installation artist.

This visual article speaks about my art practice; a practice that sees art itself as intimately caught up in the idea and process of migration and mutation -- the mutation that occurs when one migrates, when one is transplanted. For me, migration is a form of mutation and mutation a form of migration. Each mutates the other, forming a new hybrid, a mutant, from this becoming, this at once deterritorialization and reterritorialization. A journey without end, where each putting down of roots is at the same time an uprooting, and vice versa.

My art practice is intimately related to the earth and to earth, and its powers and processes, its creativity. The works that I document here might also be linked to the trope of the stranger as ‘no owner of soil’. This imagery of earth is for me inescapably related to the uprooting of my family and its putting down roots in Tasmania, becoming ‘Tasmanians’ in the process. And to the special attachment Tasmanians have to the earth and to the preservation of the natural environment.

Much of Tasmania is a wilderness heritage area and is a renowned base for the Australian Green Party.

The two series of works that follow illustrate how the earth predominates in first, a series of post-minimalist gallery or outdoor works and second, a series made with women in a women’s prison, around the theme of ‘community garden’.

**Discontinuous narratives of migration**
My current academic work explores the ‘turbulence of migration’ (Papstergiadis 2000: 9), through key historical and theoretical aspects of my art practice as related to migration and mutation, to transplantation, creativity and re-animation. In this work I foreground the work of the pioneering American post-minimal earth artist Robert Smithson as key influence on my work. I do so for several crucial reasons, including Smithson’s post-minimalist transplanting of art outside the gallery; his treatment of the archaeology of place and space and inclusion of vast expanses of time, of ancient and geological history, in his earth works; and his emphasis on process, a prototype for my own practice of art and process as an artist of transplanting.

In other words, for me installation, and transplantation are synonymous.

There are other key threads that I’m trying to draw out of Smithson’s practice in terms of my own: the significance he grants to interdisciplinary practice and to the inter-relationships of the written and the visual; his incorporation in various works of not only the idea but the experience of the journey; and his cultivation of what he calls ‘low-level vision’, which is a special receptiveness to space. In general, his practice is exemplary of an inter-disciplinary, open-ended and de-centralized way of thinking.

Robert Smithson Site/Nonsite and his use of the spatial construct of the journey form the basis of my research into the migratory experience. Smithson extended the boundaries of his practice into far-flung sites such as Spiral Jetty in Utah, and Mirror Travels in Yucatan. These enabled an expansion of the scope of his oeuvre to a wider domain of ideas across art and science and the environment, as well as challenging notions of the central and the peripheral, here and there, presence and
absence. Understanding migration requires an extension of many of our preconceptions.

There are other influences and many interwoven features in my art practice, notably: post-minimalism, feminism, colonialism and family. These last three are the most potent, palpable issues for a young British girl transported to Australia, and I have explored them, through my community-based work with women, migrants and Aboriginal migrants, in prisons in New South Wales, where I have worked as an art teacher for over twenty years. This work has resulted in two garden projects, one inside a prison, one outside, both bringing prisoners into a contemporary art space, a space informed by my practice.

The following images re-present the two series of work, work which interweave a number of narrative threads, styles and issues emerging from experiences of migration, transplantation, the earth; a discontinuous story of migration.

Series I: Earthworks, hydroponics and grass carpets.

Figure 1: Taking the grass cast away from the plaster mould.
Here you see me working, in my parents' hydroponic glass house in Hobart. What I am doing here is casting grass. The grass roots are grown into plaster, a printing reversal method. When the grass is thick enough, it is removed from its mould, as the image shows.

When we emigrated from the United Kingdom and immigrated to Australia, my parents resolved the family's economic crisis by becoming the first hydroponic farmers in Tasmania. Hydroponic systems are not only an interface of machine and nature, for me they also represent the mutation in and of our lives as transplants.

Nutrients flow through shallow troughs and create wads of roots, roots that became a feature of the series I have called Of the earth. The roots were for me representative of a migrant state. They could be moulded, re-shaped; they could grow in any climate and soil conditions.

In Figure 2 you see me engaged in a process of art production that I began with a series I called View From the Sixty Third Floor, started in 1998. This series of works is ongoing and will be coming together in a large project called Liverpool/Liverpool in 2010 when I hope to show two installed works simultaneously in the cities in Lancashire and Sydney.
The first of the *View from the Sixty Third Floor* series, which I exhibited in Artspace gallery in Sydney, in 1999 is shown in Figure 3. It was the first of a series of works, of ‘grass carpets’. These are made of washed roots and instant turf used as a base for native grass seeds that come from the area around Woolloomooloo, Sydney. The idea of the migrant as a thin imprint of roots on an ancient country was part of my thinking in making the work. Nature and culture meet in my hybrid, post-minimalist hydroponic system, in which you can see growing coloured hybrid spinach. Nature morphing in these hybrid forms is part of the material and content of this work. I painted, as it were, with coloured vegetables in this system which interfeeds with the city’s water and electricity supplies and can be made to adapt to any location, a transplant.

My family is also obviously, inscribed in the piece.

At the same time that I was starting to work with these root systems, I began a site specific garden project in a nineteenth century prison called ‘Long Bay’ in Sydney. 

Figure 3: *View from Sixty Third Floor, hydroponic system 1999*
In working with Aboriginal people who are something like 10 per cent of the prison population, and less than one per cent of the total population, I recognized the profound damage done by migration. I was also pleased that it was the Aboriginal women who took over the garden project with their designs of totemic animals, and their connection to the land; a connection I could deeply enjoy.

I have often thought while making these works of the image of the prison transposed on the Australian landscape, and the work that I have been engaged in as an educator for twenty years, connects to Britain not only in the aboriginal experience of over 200 years (even to their 60,000 years of existence), but also to my grandmother’s experience. My grandmother’s life was also lived within the walls of an institution -- unjustly. The fact of her existence remained a secret for most of my adult life … a secret easier to keep for her being on the other side of the earth. A secret ghosting my family, including myself. Ghosts don’t go away; we take them with us, as they take us with them.

After the first grass carpet, the internet became suddenly widespread (about 1995). The carpets as a series have become emblematic for me on one level of the world of simultaneity wrought by contemporary tele-communications technology. I wanted these works to be exhibited, transplanted in very diverse places, partly because I was thinking about how these earthbound ‘flying carpets’ might also refer to the experience of the internet.

To take an earthwork into the academy of fine arts in old world Vienna (see Figure 4) is a Duchampian gesture, figuratively turning it into earth, into garden. Taking this work to Vienna involved taking the Australian grass roots (washed of their soil) to that city like a migrant accompanying me, taking it through customs, getting it documented, inspected and sprayed.

To take an earthwork into the academy of fine arts in old world Vienna (see Figure
4) is a Duchampian gesture, figuratively turning it into earth, into garden. Taking this work to Vienna involved taking the Australian grass roots (washed of their soil) to that city like a migrant accompanying me, taking it through customs, getting it documented, inspected and sprayed.

Figure 4: View from Sixty Third Floor, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna 1998.

Figure 5: Bondi, 2005.
Bondi 2002 is an image taken at the coastline of Bondi Beach on the cliffs whose Aboriginal rock carvings have been encroached on by houses and flats. This location is a meeting place of the local, indigenous and the global.

I made the carpet in Figure 6 out of floor covering, astro turf, the washed grass roots, grass (which soon was suffering under the sun); this blend of materials, evoking the western idea of home, created what I hoped to be a question mark about this difficult conjunction of migrant and indigenous cultural sites, of home and homelessness, the home in homeless, and vice versa.

Figure 6: Martin Place, grass and Anne Graham’s fountain and bowls, 2004.

This work, in Martin Place in Sydney in 2004, also connects to an early colonial site, through its synergistic relationship with the artist Anne Graham’s permanent installation work of bronze pots and steam, whose work marks the former location of a laundry in this central district of Sydney. Graham’s steam machine is built into the city plaza where the early laundry building once stood. Its steam rises once every half hour or so, quite surprisingly and humorously, like a ghost of the past. The grass carpets were set inside the house’s outline. Both were ghostly rememberings of the past, its re-animating in the present.
Similar materials were used for Figure 8, installed in a sculpture garden at Werribee Park in Victoria, where its nineteenth-century stately home was set adjacent to an aboriginal corroboree, that is, meeting place site. In the majority of cases of white settlement, there was the inevitable over-riding of indigenous ancient connections to the land. The grave covered with leaves that I incorporated into this work acknowledges the deaths of the native population in the establishment of colonial rule and wealth.

There were several other works in this carpet series that I now am able to regard as post-minimalist meditations on the ideas of belonging and transience. They also
reflect on migratory relationships to the land and recognition of the recentness of my own arrival in relation to the many years of Aboriginal history. I find myself wanting to listen to this ancient past. Coming from a basically sculptural background, I find actual earth as a medium most appropriate to this listening.

So one of the questions of these imprints is about the memories that we bring with us and how do we reconcile this residual quality with our presents. And our relationship to the earth? When working with middle eastern and South American women who had also brought with them difficult memories (my family secret was easier to keep at a distance) we worked with steel and earth.

As award-winning writer Alexis Wright, whose family bloodlines are Chinese, Aboriginal, Irish, said in a *Time* magazine article in 2006: ‘How do the ancestors know where we have gone?’

Figures 9 and 10 are part of a series that I framed with steel and called *Of the earth*. In Figure 9 the over-turned print, is looking quite fragile. Here I experimented with a wide range of varieties of seeds which produce differing root textures. These included local grasses but also imported seeds. Had I been able to procure them genetically modified seeds would have been included. There is debate and dissent in this intermingling of fibres.

Figure 9: Grass root print, 2006.
Series II: Dillwynia Women’s Prison: community garden works

The following images show some of the cross-cultural garden works that I coordinated at the Boronia Women’s Prison outside Sydney. I provided an idea of an aerial view of the prison and encouraged designs from the women, asking them to think about how their ideas would appear from an aerial perspective. The project facilitated their designs.

In 2008 I exhibited a film of the garden to a contemporary art audience.8 Included was another series, Drawing from the Map of the Boronia Garden.9 These knitted lines begin to trace the outlines of the pathways of the prison garden. The pathways were re-iterations of the native animal pathways. I encouraged the women to make their designs as if they might be seen from above (see Figure 11 and Figure 12). This aerial view encompassing the prison boundaries enabled the
possibility of a spatial co-mingling with that site. In the case of the designs of Aboriginal women a re-inscribing of a former history on the land at that place.

Figure 11: Beginnings of the herb garden. Circular, concentric pathways derived from a medieval design, 2007.

Figure 13: Dillwynia Garden poster, 2006.
Borders – physical, cultural, institutional – are, given the accelerating ‘turbulence of migration’, increasingly challenged and require what I would call a migratory sensibility. For example, Smithson saw a need for artists to take their fluid visions into the abject and entropic spaces of our western culture’s wastelands. That need led me into the inhospitable spaces of prisons and detention centres, into an exploration and consideration of colonial British influence in Australia, as well as more community-based work, with women, often Aboriginal and migrant, in prisons in New South Wales.

Thinking about crossing and challenging borders -- both real and imagined and taking up this migratory sensibility -- I want to refer to Smithson’s work *Mirror Travels in Yucatan*, which involved his documenting nine impermanent mirror installations (*Displacements*) in this area of Mexico. Yucatan translates as ‘I don’t understand’. At least one of Smithson’s many commentators has drawn parallels between the nine works and Dante’s *Inferno*, the nine celestial spheres that were traversed by Dante on his journey. Smithson’s mirrors were inserted into the
ground as receivers or perhaps openings. The fleeting images these arrangements mirror-speak of the destruction of the ancient culture and the land in which they are embedded, and reference Dante’s journey into Hell. In so doing they speak of one of Smithson’s most persistent themes, entropy. Reading Smithson’s account of his journey, we find that some of the Displacements were installed around Mayan monuments which a nineteenth-century explorer by the name of John Lloyd Stephens had travelled and collected for American museums. Smithson’s mirrors are like facets of a crystal, facing away from the monuments, undermining the purport of Stephen’s voyage on a number of levels.

Being a British migrant and artist in Australia, I have become profoundly aware of the damage done to indigenous people and the landscape. There are layers of history, which I have had to come to terms with as a migrant, and also layers within myself. The prison for me became an emblem of British migration to the antipodes. The two series of work presented here – the carpet series and the prison garden series -- are reflections through time on a migrant’s relationship to the pre-white ancient history of Australia.

I close this article with a fragment of poetic text written for the Artspace show in 1999. (see above text).


3 I am currently enrolled in a Creative Doctorate programme at the University of Western Sydney. As a component of the degree, I am writing a doctoral paper, one which I have titled Discontinuous Narratives of Migration.

5 I have had a day job as an art teacher there and found it deeply incongruous working with often large groups of Aboriginal students in a building that looked like a medieval English castle, doing dot paintings and having no connection to the Aboriginal history of the site. As you are no doubt aware, Australia was founded by the British government as a prison. The prison in Australia therefore has significance, including as an image, on a number of levels.

6 24/25 Twenty Five Years of Artspace History (2008), Artspace Sydney.
The idea of connecting projects in remote spaces to galleries can be traced back to Robert Smithson’s idea of the *Site/Non-Site* where what he describes as dialectic is set up between the two places here and there.
Elizabeth Day’s ‘Transplantings’, her show at St George’s Hall in Liverpool UK in September of this year, could have easily been titled ‘Liverpool/Liverpool: The Skin of Translation’ in acknowledgement of this sister show in Liverpool, Australia. This fortuitous synchronicity of Liverpool/Liverpool (the shows overlap for a month) consolidates the circuit of sending and return that characterises the colonial relation. Indeed, the journey Day and her family made from Lancashire to Hobart when she was 10 years old is the very same trajectory she retraced for her show at St George’s Hall.

Further, this doubling or twinning of the name, Liverpool, recalls the tendency for the wholesale transplantation of England’s Englishness to its colonies, nomenclature included. From Liverpool to Liverpool, from a great port city of Empire, to an obscure satellite village of the relatively newly established city of Sydney, Australia, and then back again, is, in distance, akin to a journey around the world. Australia, the antipodes, was the farthest flung place in the Empire’s imaginary, and yet, more than a hundred years on from Federation, so many of Australia’s institutions and traditions are forever England.

Day has worked extensively with various cultural transplantings, such as the Victorian medievalist revival evident in the neogothic sandstone architecture of many of Australia’s public buildings, and the more invisible ‘infrastructure’ of its laws and institutions of learning, but the tradition which continues to most mark the cultural connection with Empire is the exportation of the English lawn. Forget the hedgerows which never quite took in a land of vast brown sheep stations in times of drought, and the now feral pests of the rabbit and the fox. The tie to England is sealed in the Australian love of lawn. Synonymous with the idea of Australia as the Lucky Country are suburbs composed of quarter acre blocks and quarter acre lawns.

All over the country botanical gardens, usually Royal Botanical Gardens, are characterised by lavish expanses of green: our colonial heritage, reflective of the motherland, continues to recall England as ‘that green and pleasant land’. For a generation of older Australians who established perfectly flat and regularly rolled lawn bowling clubs in every hamlet large enough to field teams for competition, Sir Frances Drake, calmly finishing his game of lawn bowls, before trouncing the Spanish Armada, lives on in the folklore. If the French parks fence off lawn and fiercely police any
strayings from the inevitably gravel path (many are not possessed by any lawn at all), Australians, like the British, champion their right to lull in the sun, to stretch out and enjoy the public good of a well-trimmed lawn in state-funded public gardens. Indeed, for Day the Englishness of lawn has become a multiple-valenced symbol in a practice invested in post-colonialism and migration. Lawn and grass are fields apart (excuse the pun). In Australia we might have fields of wheat, but never grass. Grass belongs in a paddock and is often the native stuff fenced in. Lawn signifies differently; often composed of imported seed, it signals cultivated society, and, in period films, an unmistakable Englishness. Picnic at Hanging Rock, the film that launched the Australian film industry abroad with accolades at Cannes in 1973, drew a stark contrast between the safe civility of the lawns of an English garden and its English house (complete with swans and geese) and the eerie terrors of the Australian bush. Recently, The Proposition bizarrely set civilisation in an English garden in the midst of a shimmering desertscape.

For more than a decade Day has been installing neat grids of manicured lawn in Australia’s premier cultural institutions. This inevitably registers a certain Surrealist jolt, or in poststructuralist terms, a Derridean invasion of the inside by the outside, metaphorically of the invasion of normative consciousness by a repressed ‘exterior’ or unconscious. Lawn, as doubly coded, as signifying both ‘civilised grass’ and unconscious ‘Nature’, invades in its role of Nature, of what belongs outside, exterior to architecture’s artifice. The shock of lawn staged in the interior provokes a double analysis of its belonging. No longer ordinary, the everyday stuff that is taken for granted and forgotten (in the analogy with unconscious), ‘lawn’ extracted, reified, exhibited in the interior of built space, rather than complementing architecture’s exterior, starts to signify the very civilising of Nature itself. This is more so in Australia, where this staged invasion of the gallery space bears the imprint of British colonisation. ‘Lawn’ signifies a certain rootedness, literally of taking root, anchoring the edifices of colonial architecture and colonial rule. Indeed, more so that the colonial public buildings which now sit, somewhat awkwardly, as historical remainder in modernist glass and steel Australia, a remnant of the colonial past, the humble garden lawn spreads its anti-hierarchical, rhizomatic roots throughout the culture, stubbornly, resistantly English. It has never signalled Empire like the monuments to Queen Victoria which still proudly grace the capitals, but is symbolic rather of Australia’s unconscious relationship to Englishness, part of a set of habits or of protocols, much like Said’s notion of Orientalism.

Until we see it exhibited, unheimlich, made strange or uncanny on art gallery floor, Australians don’t even register its foreignness. Lawn is just lawn, pervasive, everywhere a habit, unconsciously part of our image of ourselves. At the opening ceremony of the Sydney Olympics we proudly choreographed rows of gardeners pushing the iconic Australian invention of the Victor lawn mower. No-one had to roll out the lawn: it was already there, a benign presence, so deep in our national unconscious, as cricket as cricket, that we fail register it, much less its Englishness - unless reminded, as in the practice of Elizabeth Day.
Here, for the Casula show, Day has invited four migrant writers of various origins—Sarah Day (her sister), Nasrin Mathouchi, Catherine Rey and Ouyang Yu—to subvert and further overwrite this Englishness in the very fabric of garden lawn. Using a system of plaster casts, Day has grown turf over the plaster letters of their texts in a process, which is literally a form of underground typesetting.

When the time is ripe, she carefully cuts the turf in a ‘peel’ and unfolds the text inscribed into the tight texture of the impacted roots on the plaster casts on the underside. What emerges is a kind of underground mirror writing of roots, analogous to Freud’s description of the unconscious as a kind of trace left in the wax tablet after the top sheet has been removed on his ‘mystic writing pad’. On the surface the lawn signifies a certain conscious regularity, an average everydayness of ‘idle talk’ (to borrow Heidegger’s terms), of community, of pleasant associations. The lawn is gregarious, part of the street, on display, a zone of contact, of daily greetings and the Aussie barbeque, whereas the underside is what occults, hidden from view, like unconscious thoughts, in this instance the multiple voices of multiculturalism that are now woven through the very roots of the fabric of Australian society.

Day’s text casts encourage us to envision a babble of migrant tongues overwriting the mononculture of English lawn with cultural difference. However, this is only to a depth some centimetres deep - of relative shallowness - given that the 200 years or so of European colonisation amount to little in geological terms or the mythic time of indigenous Dreaming. Installed in the gallery, the lawn castings sit adjacent to the Aboriginal floor, a floor spatially and pictorially symbolic of the traditional owners in Casula Powerhouse, Australia. With the signs of occidental ancient history elsewhere, overseas, Day asks how do we relate to the ancient history 40,000 years old beneath our feet? In a geological timeframe the lawn dwellers increasingly come across as interlopers, their neat grids of subdivisions and town planning a poor substitute for the majesty of ‘country’ and singing the landscape in songlines.

European Lack: Desire for Ancient History

Indeed, Day registers this European lack of connection to the land and a longing for lost ancient ties of the occidental past, which one, as a migrant can not have in Australia. In 2004 Day produced a work called Desire for Ancient History which reflected on the genealogy of colonial prisons in medieval and ancient architecture. Her focus on the prison condensed the inherent brutality in colonial architecture, standing in as synecdoche for the total colonial system. Our 19th century British heritage was not only brutal but profoundly at odds with indigenous life. As a prison educator Day well knows that the damage is perpetuated.

Day’s Liverpool UK work concurrently on exhibition at St Georges Hall, Liverpool UK is titled The Law is Not Always Just continues the contemplation of the transposing of
British law onto Australia. St Georges Hall, formerly a law court and prison from where convicts were sent to Australia, is a large public building, now a museum and function centre.

In her DVD performance, the maxim, 'the law is not always just' was grown into plaster casts on the underside of the strip of lawn, in the very 'roots' of Australian-grown English lawn. In the video we witness the 'peel' as the lawn, symbolic of Englishness for Australia, is pulled back to reveal a text reflexive of the questionable justice of transportation for trivial crimes. Coincidentally Day has a forebear, a judge at St Georges known for his severe punishments. 'Justice' as a term to be interrogated goes back and forth and is symbolically 'returned' to the homeland in DVD form. Further, the text - 'the law is not always just' -- is, in its direct connection with the soil, emblematic of the grave, recalling the many deaths that resulted from deportation to Australia.

The lawn-grown texts in circulation between Liverpool and Liverpool, between the UK and Australia, connect England with the antipodes, the most far-flung reaches of the former empire. In our contemporary times it is only just that England’s just injustices be symbolically returned to England. Reflective of shifts in values in contemporary Australia, the Australian texts celebrate cultural difference as the flipside of former monocultural allegiance. Further, for Day, migration is intimately caught up in not only transplanting but translating, in writing - as translation rather than replication - through which we translate ourselves from one thing into another, into multivalent cultural identities.
This year celebrates the 200th anniversary of the birth of Charles Darwin, best known for his theory of evolution summarized in *On the Origin of Species*. Less well known is that, in the second half of his life, Darwin’s major scientific focus turned towards plants. He wrote several books on plants, the next-to-last of which, *The Power of Movement of Plants*, published together with his son Francis, opened plants to a new view. Here we amplify the final sentence of this book in which the Darwins proposed that: “It is hardly an exaggeration to say that the tip of the radicle thus endowed [with sensitivity] and having the power of directing the movements of the adjoining parts, acts like the brain of one of the lower animals; the brain being seated within the anterior end of the body, receiving impressions from the sense-organs, and directing the several movements.” This sentence conveys two important messages: first, that the root apex may be considered to be a ‘brain-like’ organ endowed with a sensitivity which controls its navigation through soil; second, that the root apex represents the anterior end of the plant body. In this article, we discuss both these statements.
mutation, an alteration in the genetic material (the genome) of a cell of a living organism or of a virus that is more or less permanent and that can be transmitted to the cell’s or the virus’s descendants. (The genomes of organisms are all composed of DNA, whereas viral genomes can be of DNA or RNA; see heredity: The physical basis of heredity.) Mutation in the DNA of a body cell of a multicellular organism (somatic mutation) may be transmitted to descendant cells by DNA replication and hence result in a sector or patch of cells having abnormal function, an example being cancer. Mutations in egg or sperm cells (germinal mutations) may result in an individual offspring all of whose cells carry the mutation, which often confers some serious malfunction, as in the case of a human genetic disease such as cystic fibrosis. Mutations result either from accidents during the normal chemical transactions of DNA, often during replication, or from exposure to high-energy electromagnetic radiation (e.g., ultraviolet light or X-rays) or particle radiation or to highly reactive chemicals in the environment. Because mutations are random changes, they are expected to be mostly deleterious, but some may be beneficial in certain environments. In general, mutation is the main source of genetic variation, which is the raw material for evolution by natural selection.

The genome is composed of one to several long molecules of DNA, and mutation can occur potentially anywhere on these molecules at any time. The most serious changes take place in the functional units of DNA, the genes. A mutated form of a gene is called a mutant allele. A gene is typically composed of a regulatory region, which is responsible for turning the gene’s transcription on and off at the appropriate times during development, and a coding region, which carries the genetic code for the structure of a functional molecule, generally a protein. A protein is a chain of usually several hundred amino acids. Cells make 20 common amino acids, and it is the unique number and sequence of these that give a protein its specific function. Each amino acid is encoded by a unique sequence, or codon, of three of the four possible base pairs in the DNA (A–T, T–A, G–C, and C–G, the individual letters referring to the four nitrogenous bases adenine, thymine, guanine, and cytosine). Hence, a mutation that changes DNA sequence can change amino acid sequence and in this way potentially reduce or inactivate a protein’s function. A change in the DNA sequence of a gene’s regulatory region can adversely affect the timing and availability of the gene’s protein and also lead to serious cellular malfunction. On the other hand, many mutations are silent, showing no obvious effect at the functional level. Some silent mutations are in the DNA between genes, or they are of a type that results in no significant amino acid changes.

Mutations are of several types. Changes within genes are called point mutations. The simplest kinds are changes to single base pairs, called base-pair substitutions. Many of these substitute an incorrect amino acid in the corresponding position in the encoded protein, and of these a large proportion result in altered protein function. Some base-pair substitutions produce a stop
codon. Normally, when a stop codon occurs at the end of a gene, it stops protein synthesis, but, when it occurs in an abnormal position, it can result in a truncated and nonfunctional protein. Another type of simple change, the deletion or insertion of single base pairs, generally has a profound effect on the protein because the protein’s synthesis, which is carried out by the reading of triplet codons in a linear fashion from one end of the gene to the other, is thrown off. This change leads to a frameshift in reading the gene such that all amino acids are incorrect from the mutation onward. More-complex combinations of base substitutions, insertions, and deletions can also be observed in some mutant genes.

**Mutations** that span more than one gene are called chromosomal mutations because they affect the structure, function, and inheritance of whole DNA molecules (microscopically visible in a coiled state as chromosomes). Often these chromosome mutations result from one or more coincident breaks in the DNA molecules of the genome (possibly from exposure to energetic radiation), followed in some cases by faulty rejoining. Some outcomes are large-scale deletions, duplications, inversions, and translocations. In a diploid species (a species, such as human beings, that has a double set of chromosomes in the nucleus of each cell), deletions and duplications alter gene balance and often result in abnormality. Inversions and translocations involve no loss or gain and are functionally normal unless a break occurs within a gene. However, at meiosis (the specialized nuclear divisions that take place during the production of gametes—i.e., eggs and sperm), faulty pairing of an inverted or translocated chromosome set with a normal set can result in gametes and hence progeny with duplications and deletions.

Loss or gain of whole chromosomes results in a condition called aneuploidy. One familiar result of aneuploidy is Down syndrome, a chromosomal disorder in which humans are born with an extra chromosome 21 (and hence bear three copies of that chromosome instead of the usual two). Another type of chromosome mutation is the gain or loss of whole chromosome sets. Gain of sets results in polyploidy—that is, the presence of three, four, or more chromosome sets instead of the usual two. Polyploidy has been a significant force in the evolution of new species of plants and animals. (See also evolution: Polyploidy.) Most genomes contain mobile DNA elements that move from one location to another. The movement of these elements can cause mutation, either because the element arrives in some crucial location, such as within a gene, or because it promotes large-scale chromosome mutations via recombination between pairs of mobile elements in different locations.
APPENDIX 6

Poem by Sarah Day, from Grass Notes, Brandl and Schlesinger, Australian Poetry Series, 2007, p. 71

Émigré

How will it be,
buried in the earth
of this place, so far
from the sleeping grounds
of the ancestors,
from the mossed inscriptions
and luxuriant nettles
where each generation moves over
to make room?
A grave or scattering of ashes,
incontestable proof
that you left, you did not stay;
the first headstone inscribed
with your own name
like a gauntlet thrown down,
a single stone in a dry paddock,
a word or two, by one who
knew you well, or didn’t
APPENDIX 7

Review Sydney Morning Herald of work from Liverpool/Liverpool

What lies beneath

Elizabeth Day’s organic sculptures expose the nation’s roots, writes Andrew Frost.

As part of her study for a creative doctorate at the University of Western Sydney, Elizabeth Day has been researching the work of American artist Robert Smithson. Smithson, who died in a plane crash in 1973, is best known for his monumental sculptures, such as Spiral Jetty (1970), a 456-metre, spiral-shaped rock-and-earth sculpture that extends into a salt lake in Utah.

Like the art of Smithson, Day’s sculptural objects might be termed “earth works” but instead of using massive scale and impressive materials, Day’s art is subtle and understated and made from organic materials that won’t last forever. In her new exhibition at Conny Dietzschold’s gallery, Day presents a sequence of works from 2005 to 2010. The more recent sculptures are made from grass roots mounted on steel frames, such as Of the Earth. By planting grass into sculpted voids, the roots form the shapes of words and, when the turf is extracted and mounted, the viewer is presented with text that appears to be made of felt or matted fur.

In fact, the text in works such as Liverpool (2010) and The Law is not Always Just (2010) is drawn from the poems Emigre, a meditation on the historical and emotional bonds between England and Australia. Day’s work is rich with association and potential meanings for the materials and the texts they form. Non-native grasses and lassos were a colonial imposition on the native Australian landscape, a literal covering of all that was once considered unsightly.

By using evocative metaphors and poetic imagination, Day reveals that which lies beneath our feet.

Of the Earth... one of Elizabeth Day’s evocative sculptures.

ELIZABETH DAY
Until March 9. Tuesday to Saturday, 11am to 5pm, Conny Dietzschold Gallery, 2 Darlins Street, Waverley, 9390 0215.
APPENDIX 8
Email exchange regarding Artspace 24/25

Subject: Fwd: Re: Dillwynia documentation
Date: Wednesday, 29 October 2008 3:35 PM
From: Elizabeth Day <Elizabeth.Day@dcs.nsw.gov.au>
To: <lizday@ozemail.com.au>
Conversation: Dillwynia documentation

>>> Luke Grant 29/10/2008 11:58 am >>>

Hi Liz
Luke has approved your request to show some of the images of the Dillwynia Garden in your presentation at Artspace in November.

Regards
Deb McDonald

>>> Elizabeth Day 16/10/2008 11:13 am >>>

Dear Luke,
hope all is well with you..I had a good day at Casula with Deirdre and think if the project is top move ahead Deirdre would a great person to make a link through..

I'm hoping to hear from her soon..
I'm writing this from DCS system because I sent an email from my home address and sometimes they get zapped..

Sorry if I'm repeating myself.

I wrote to ask your permission to show some of the images of the Dillwynia Garden in a presentation I am doing at Aerospace in November.

This project meant a great deal to me and I would love to share it with colleagues. My role in it would be defined as co-ordinator/enabler...and credits can be given to the Department if you think that to be appropriate.

Please let me know what you think..

best wishes Liz

This transmission is for the intended addressee only. If you have received this transmission in error, please delete it and notify the sender. The contents of this E-Mail are the opinion of the author only and are not necessarily endorsed by the New South Wales Department of Corrective Services
Letter to Kon Gouriotis, Director Visual Arts and Craft, Australia Council

Dear Kon,

I would like to propose this idea to the Visual Arts Board.

The creation of a Banff Centre for the Arts here in Australia.

I think it would be an extraordinary addition to our visual arts scene, one that would significantly enhance Australia’s place on the global stage in the arts.

Let me explain.

In 2000 I was lucky enough to get to go to the Banff Centre in Canada.

It is an amazing place for artists, supporting a whole range of contemporary art practices, as well as the more traditional arts, which often were able to fuse with the new media practices, dance, writing, and so on.

It does so by offering theme residencies, which are of a very sophisticated, stimulating and advanced character and of a duration of two months or so, giving the participants the time, space and supporting facilities to reflect up and develop their practice and get major new work done.

Moreover, unlike the Australia Council’s one way system of providing funding and great residencies for Australian artists to go overseas, the support the Banff Centre provides is not only to Canada’s own artists but extends to offering financial assistance to artists from other nations to come to Banff.
I found that the Centre’s paying for an inflow of artists was very beneficial as a ‘mutual generosity’ developed among the participants, which was just wonderful to experience.

Indeed, Banff Centre did everything possible to make the participants feel that being an artist was something very special.

The upshot is that Banff is a truly international centre of the arts, where talented artists, including the ‘high flyers’, from all over the world can meet and have productive dialogue and interchange, especially of an aesthetic nature, and for a significant duration of time.

I think that Australia has not really gone global yet until such a place as Banff exists here.

And several aspects of the Banff Centre operation showed how savvy they were and such a place could be. I applied for two residences without success and as a result thought that I should abandon the effort. But they then informed me that they had actually ear-marked a particular residency for me, one whose subject was discovery, invention and innovation.

They were right in their choice.

I loved it.

Moreover, the Centre was linked to many U.S. universities, so there were numerous artists with Doctorates and Post-Doctorates participating, meaning that to some extent the levels of the practices were rather finely tuned.

While more and more artists are getting these degrees in Australia, the down side is that there does not seem to be a real ‘next step’ for these people when they finish their degrees.

A Banff Centre in Australia would be IDEAL for such people to go to to not only consolidate but extend their new knowledges and research capacities, even linking up
with science researchers (and researchers in other fields as well) as they do via Banff, and also learn new computer program skills, as they do in Banff.

The possibilities for Australian artists of their practice cross-fertilising with that of artists the world over, the enhancing of the stature of not only Australian artists but the Australia Council and Australia on the world stage,…

It does not take long to see that the benefits are many for this country.

I always thought an amazing thing about Banff, too, is that it interfaces so productively with business via its Business Conference Program, which program actually subsidises the artists’ residencies!

It is such an attractive place that many artists want to visit there, learn new skills, go skiing, dance or go to theatre in the evenings and gaze at the mountain views…

Given the very special nature of the Australian landscape, it too could provide that very special place and experience.

Kon, I would love to talk more with you about my experience at Banff and my strong recommendation such a centre be created here. Moreover, were such a centre to be contemplated by the Australia Council, I would love to be involved in making it become a reality.

All best,
APPENDIX 10

View from the 63rd Floor (2000) Artspce roomnotes

Elizabeth Day

radical, adj. [ME.; LL. radicalis, from L. radix, radicis, a root], 1. of or from the root or roots; going to the centre, foundation, or source of something; fundamental; basic: as, a radical principle. 2. a) favouring fundamental or extreme change; specifically, favouring such change of the social structure; very leftist... 3. in botany, of or coming from the root... n. 1. a) a basic or root part of something. b/ a fundamental. 2. a) a person having radical views...

root n. [...IE. base wrad-, etc., branch, root, stick, as also in L. radix (cf. RADICAL), ...], 1. the part of a plant, usually below the ground, that holds the plant in position, draws water and nourishment from the soil, and stores food. 2. any underground part of a plant, as a rhizome 3. the attached or embedded part of a bodily structure, as of the teeth, hair, nails, etc. 4. the source or origin of an action, quality, etc. 5. a person or family that has many descendants; ancestor 6. a lower or supporting part; base; hence, 7. an essential part; core: as, the root of the matter...

Radical not only brings a multiplicity of clashing notions into view and play, it is itself a multiplicity, an assemblage, a becoming-radical.

* * * * *

I grew up on the first hydroponic farm in Tasmania and have been interested ever since in making a work involving a hydroponic system. My parents emigrated from Lancashire in the 60s; and though they planned to continue as ordinary farmers in Hobart, they found it impossible to re-establish themselves because all the markets in Hobart were ‘sewn up’. To survive, they had to cultivate a new way of farming: hydroponics. In embarking upon this field of mechanised ‘nature’, they effected a kind of mutation of farming. It is a mutation that my work in this show remembers, even as it remarks upon the dislocations of place wrought by distance, migration and technology.

The ‘rhizome’ carpet is strongly connected to my previous ‘white line project’. There the imagery involved an interconnecting system of lines, which these roots present
literally and metaphorically. ‘Molecular’ shifts against prevailing power structures. The circuit of the hydroponic system – the nutrients, the pump, the water, the plants – are necessarily part of the larger circulatory system of the city. A hydroponic system has the advantage of not being dependent on particularities of the local climate. A pre-determined mix of nutrients goes into the water, the suspended roots drink it and flourish. Temperatures and lighting can be maintained at an optimum level. The plants even drink their own condensation that runs down the whitened sun-defying glass walls. Or it diffuses into the atmosphere to be breathed again through the leaves. In winter heat can be introduced and even avocado trees can flourish in a cold climate. The hydroponic plant is an artifice. Like the immigrant, it becomes a hybrid, neither a native nor never completely without a memory of its original soil. It is a mutant, part plant part machine. This stark image also creates a virtual space of emigration. In sum the couch grass rhizome carpet describes a condition of permanent displacement.

Here and there. Talking to you, across miles. Scarcely touching the surface an imprint forms right here and now of the present in this place. The roots don’t need to take hold. The image floats. A temporary carpet. The printed pages roll out onto the floor. This moment maintains me in two places. You had said that you thought these new communication systems had occurred in the world to bring some change about. A need for networks, new links between minds and ideas. The world developed an ether net, a web of thoughts surrounding it. Enveloping itself with increasing density. I visualise the globe with tiny filaments of light darting between countries, cities, streets and into living rooms. I think of a silkworm, fine threads around the cocoon to keep it safe perhaps? Genetic mutations, chromosomes shifting as threads of information flash. Scientific data, weather forecasts, news from grandchildren, banking transactions, pornography, criminal records, chat-lines, personal listings, lover’s tiffs, library data, postcard glimpses of faraway places. In this flowering splendour of disembodied words and numbers, distance need scarcely be a tyranny. Is this an expanding intelligence? These these mini-firework explosions of neurological connections sparking like unused synapses in the grey matter of the brain? Disused lobes where forgotten memories reside revivify with a new message on the screen from an old friend in Kyoto, a place I used to know nothing about. New tracks in old houses. A child sends a message to a prime minister amidst a massive pulsation of instantaneous responses. I was thinking about mutations and now talking to you – participating in this new and strange conjunction of life/flesh and machine – have contemplated its dangers. Who’s to know what drinking milk from cows with four times their usual udder size will do to those five generations away? Sitting on the balcony of a sixty three storey building in a foreign country I look down on some faraway rooftops and my friend points out some small animals roaming on the astro turf. She says these are genetically engineered farm animals and my sense of vertigo multiplies.

When explorers set sail for new worlds mutations were also taking place. Who was to know what they might mean to this country? As the emigrants left the old world they exited a state of grace – of certainty and familiarity, a clear sense of place. When they named the local Tilbury Hotel after a point of exit, London’s Tilbury Dock, was that not an early form of virtual reality; a desire to make real some phantasm? This is one
variety of an emigrant’s response. Re-establish the status quo and continue as you were ‘back home’. Find friends who share the same memories. Other emigrants mimic the lives of their new hosts, abandoning the past. Both might be based on the difficult opposition of here and there. Inheritors of the damage done by colonial attitudes and its power abuses, we find ourselves displaced amongst the displaced.

Movement need not be an awkward interval between two fixed points of arrival and departure, but a mode of being in the world. The question might not be how to arrive but how to move, how to identify convergent and divergent movements, how to reconcile these old mutations. I make here (literally) a rhizome mat of couch grass roots. A temporary home in the present.
Let me begin by thanking Anne for giving me a voice in this forum.

And Alan Cholodenko for his assistance with this paper.

I will briefly introduce myself. I am a Sydney based installation artist, I have for some years worked in a prison (which is often now synonymous with mental hospital) and I have developed creative projects with inmates in NSW. In 2007 I collaborated with women inmates in creating a garden at Dilwynnia women’s prison, and of late I have been negotiating a garden project at Casula Powerhouse involving a group of migrant and Aboriginal women who will again be contributing to the design and execution of the work. I am currently undertaking a Creative Arts Doctorate at the School of Writing and Society at the University of Western Sydney, where I am researching the discontinued narratives of migration.

Before I go any further, let me make two points. First, what I will say today is a series of personal speculations about Anne’s show, posing questions to and of it with no easy answers to offer you, and this seems only fitting given the show’s richness and complexity. And those speculations are accompanied by and based upon a reading, a felt interpretation, of a particular component of the show and are not presented as the definitive truth of it, much less of the whole show.

Second, participation and inclusiveness are the main push of what I have to say, in accord with the motto ‘nothing about us without us’, the catch cry of the disabilities movement. Connections, as opposed to the disconnectedness of many who are institutionalised, seem to me to be vital in this discussion if we are talking about a protest about the silences of history.

Please keep these points in mind.
I want to begin by stating my appreciation of the beauty and depth of this exhibition. Looking at *Lost to Worlds* especially, we are invited to stand amongst ghosts of our convict and more recent past. I love this immersion, this abstraction, this evocation of the ghostly remains of what may have occurred and the reverence implied to what is sacred to the memory in that place of those people. Without names, faces or any specifics, the ethereal waves flicker through the grasses in which we stand. These images speak clearly to me of an other history than patriarchy’s and Anne’s sympathy for and efforts to trace and recover it.

At the same time I must note: I have discussed the work *INSULA* with her for some years, and she is aware that I have objected to the use of the images of women from the Gladesville Hospital in Sydney taken in 1948. For me, when a work presumes to address the lives of others, we are entering the realm of community art, of ‘public art’, involving a making public and for a public museum or gallery. And when that art presumes to address or expose the lives of those institutionalised in prisons and asylums, for me a special care is entrusted of the artist, one Anne herself acknowledges and asserts in her interview in the show’s catalogue when she says she first thought of building ‘a kind of protective enclosure of information’ around these ‘so exposed’ women, then ‘because those women had already been exposed to scrutiny they had no control over…I wanted this encounter to be ameliorating, if that’s possible’.

My question is: why expose these women, why make them public, and *then* try to protect them, try to ameliorate the effects of exposing them, making them public? Why not just *not* make them public to protect them?

Do not such people as these have a right of privacy that the public’s right to know must be weighed against? And even if the weight falls on publicising, that would include how little or how much information and what kinds of information can be released about them as well as how, the contexts in which, this information could be made public?

In *INSULA* the fact ‘many look away from the camera’, as Geoff Batchen notes in his essay in the catalogue, the impression ‘some of them had hated having their photos taken’, as Anne remarks in the catalogue, is a testament for me to their felt wish to not be seen, recorded, made public and recognised in this situation and manner. They are trying to preserve what shred of privacy remains to them or they believe remains to them. Which means for me, by the by, that these
images are not portraits, they are not posed for the camera. If anything, these images portray the wish to avoid the portrait on the part of those photographed.

The work *INSULA* brings us further into the present than the works pertaining to a convict past, which belongs in a distant and mostly forgotten history. With *INSULA*, we are dealing with actual people who were presumably silenced, at least ‘put away’ for a while during a bout of ‘illness’. They may have remained there. But they may have not. Some may still be alive, especially the youngest of the women photographed, as their relations, their families, likely are.

I keep coming back to the question: could ads have been placed in the newspaper to find these people and/or their families, to give them a chance to say ‘No’ to their being put on exhibit, to not experience the doubling of what the Gladesville Hospital already did to them by putting them on the web and that Anne found while searching an image database in the State Library of New South Wales?

My objection to the use of the images in the show is that I was distressed by the possibility of the families of those imaged accidentally stumbling on this exhibition and finding a mother or grandmother or sister or aunt, whose institutionalisation is known or even unknown to them, in it, even finding themselves imaged in the show, or others recognising them in the show, knowing as I do how far reaching into subsequent generations such vanished individuals’ embarrassed silences reach, as well as the pain of loss and the confusion and guilt of those who stand on the sidelines of a vanished life. For me, at its worst, however well intended it may be, there is a kind of ‘outing’ going on, opening the old wounds, ‘informing’ others of the existence of these people as inmates. Initially, when I first saw these works at Sydney College of the Arts in 2003, I could not enter the enclosed room. They still occupy a space of dis-ease for me. They give me a sense of something like reading someone’s diaries without their permission.

My suggestion is this: 1. show these images only after securing the permission of the inmates imaged, or if that cannot be secured, that of their families, or if neither can be secured, only after publishing notification of intent to show the images to try to secure that permission; and 2. show them with the kind of information that can offer sufficient and appropriate content and context so it does not seem gratuitous.
For, in terms of the latter, amidst the aesthetically exquisite, haunting images of Anne’s something is for me missing. What is missing for me is story, in particular the story, better stories, of the women in the Gladesville Hospital. Stories that would give voice to these voiceless, textually unanchored, silent faces. Even ghosts have stories and voices, even if ghostly.

It is as if the pure iconicity and symbolism of Anne’s art images, her aesthetic imaging of victims, is itself victimised by this lack and can perhaps be read as participating in that victimising. One could call that lack story, one could call it history, or better, herstory, that is the documenting of the particularity of these lives individually and collectively, that would give specific and particular content and context to them and to these images that Anne describes as a ‘shadow archive’. Though it is described in the catalogue as ‘a little-known archive of photographs of women psychiatric patients’, it remains for me an archive of what is not known.

Roland Barthes tells us in ‘Rhetoric of the Image’ that images are filled with a multiplicity of meanings and captions anchor those meanings. These images have a caption. It is INSULA. INSULA is a Latin word meaning an island, a block of buildings, in Roman antiquity too a square or space mapped out or divided off. A visit to this island, this separated off, enclosed space of white box, with its enclosed room indexing the visitor’s room of an asylum (and/or the clean room of a laboratory), its attendant-guard at the door, their warning to those who would enter, the permission required of them to enter, there, as the sign next to the door states, informing visitors about the work’s content and admitting them on request, a maximum of three at a time, the white gloves required of the visitor, the extra fold of the white page to hide the already hidden, plays a double contradictory game for me: is this a sacred, pure space, a sanctum sanctorum, whose images must be touched with gloves by the touchers who are themselves impure, for fear they might spread their bacteria to those imaged and these images? Or is this a room where one visits the diseased, the impure, whose taint, whose contagion, is to be fended off by those self-same white gloves, so that the visitor, a kind of Sontagian tourist, retains her purity, her sanitary nature as well as sanity, her lack of dis-ease? In either case, something of the abject is resident here, signalled by the white room and the white gloves.

In either case, too, it is the difference between the visitor and what is visited that is ‘brought home’, an insular difference that seems to argue no connection, no similarity, between visitor and viewed, only a missed meeting.
As far as content is concerned, for me these INSULA images are ironically as well suited to the title ‘Lost to Worlds’ as those of Lost to Worlds are. ‘Lost to Worlds’ is, as Batchen tells us, a title drawn from the fragment of a poem ‘When words are lost to worlds…’. The silence of the Gladesville inmates imaged is doubled and troubled for me by the silence of the images themselves, silent witnesses to what, ‘when words are lost to worlds’, lies beyond testimony.

Given this, how could the attendant, indeed anyone, inform visitors about the work’s content?! Would it not be like informing visitors of the content of those grasses that make up Lost to Worlds?

Let me be clear: Lost to Worlds succeeds beautifully. The provision of information is not at issue in that work, but it is for me in INSULA, as it is In the ground on the air. For me, to pull off the ambivalence that Anne’s work cultivates and that marks its success—its ‘merger of the evidential and the poetic’, as Batchen styles it and that we see in In the ground on the air—that ambivalence cannot be won easily nor automatically but must be earned by providing as much information as possible, by doing as much as possible to get as much information as possible. For it is only through that information that one discovers its impossibility.

I am not saying certain kinds of images, images like these, cannot be shown under any circumstance. I am saying that the more research, the more information, the better, especially to allay the automatic reflex to treat all women so imaged as victims, as ‘powerless’, to use Batchen’s term.

Yet, even as INSULA works to put a distance between the viewer/visitor and the viewed inmates each themselves insula, between us and Anne’s ‘shadow archive’, at the same time it and they are for me too much, too close, too real, for comfort. I speak as someone who has worked with women such as the ones in the Gladesville images. For me, they are too real to have their content and context removed and yet be allowed to remain imaged and on show, public—an imaging that nonetheless does serve the salutary function of reminding us that there is a danger in seeing the Gladesville images as a remembrance, as part of a past which is no longer with us, ignoring its continuation in the present and the need to affect improvements of the situation.

I will speak briefly of two exhibitions that have particularly endeavoured to give a voice to those experiencing mental illness. The For Matthew and Others: Art and
Schizophrenia show at Campbelltown and other galleries in and around Sydney exhibited the art work of consumers as well as non-consumers. It wasn’t an ‘outsider’ art show, it was inclusive, and brought ‘consumers’ into a mainstream gallery. And the exhibition Remembering Goodna, shown at the Brisbane Gallery last year, curated by Jo Beazely and Neal Price. Working with twelve former residents as well as their families, the gallery developed a narrative of the history of this mental hospital.

I’ll close here with the reminder that these words have been my personal speculations concerning one component of a show I find otherwise wonderful. I have no answers to give. The closer one comes to incarceration, the less its appeal. It is at this time intriguing, and even a badge of honour, to find a convict relative, but none of us would happily tell our friends of a living family member who is or has been ‘institutionalised’. It is still, unfortunately, a sad and usually shameful thing when that happens.