**Plexus:** an investigation of site in relation to form

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An exegesis submitted in support of an exhibition of works of art for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The University of Newcastle, August 2013.
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Signed: S. Burgess

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Dedication

for my teacher Scott Gregory with gratitude
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Research Question

Current ecological discourse in the arts often refers to general states of the environment rather than specific sites. My focus is, however, on a particular place. The issue then becomes how do I use art to demonstrate the interconnectedness and layering of time over this land?

I will explore, using multi-layered historical, socio-cultural, scientific, land and environmental lenses, the interconnectedness of people and land. Through this study I hope to show how greater understanding of these layers, seen through art, can engender more ethical management of our often abused and neglected environment.

Through this unique case study of a place to which I feel intimately connected, a methodology will be developed which provides a model for similar investigations into place.

The damage that the notion of ‘nature as an inanimate resource’ has done to the earth and its people is evident. Art can be used to reveal a view of nature that is more cognizant of the fragility, beauty and sacredness of the natural world; one that demonstrates the interconnectedness between all of life and the need to sustain it.
Abstract

This exegesis is titled *Plexus*, which means matting or plaiting, to emphasize the concept of interconnection. The history of a place, memories, the journeys to and from it, the connections to the environment and each other shape our experience of it. Looking closely at a particular place gives an awareness of the way that history, natural surroundings and society combine to produce a distinctive location.

Applying the model of the rhizome developed by Deleuze and Guattari, and the Buddhist philosophy regarding interconnection, this project explores the interconnectedness of geological/topographical configurations, and social and material history of Hanging Rock, near Nundle NSW, and the region surrounding it.

After examining the impact of colonialism on the Aboriginal people of the region and the differences between the ways in which both groups perceive the environment, it is apparent that the subsequent degradation of Hanging Rock, once an unspoiled wilderness, was a direct result of these differences.

The microscopic organisms, the less noticeable or seemingly unimportant plant life and the layering of other plant material in the environment are investigated and given equal status with the more noticeable so as to make clear the need to value each entity equally, all play a part in the health of the environment.

In this particular case study of Hanging Rock I will explore how art can critique the human domination of nature. I will do this through an auto - ethnographic framework, along with theories of place, and with reference to the ideas promoted in ecofeminism, the possibility of an ethical commitment to the environment.

The role of collecting, both in the methodology I have adopted and that of other artists, plays a part in the investigation of Hanging Rock.

During this study I will produce artworks which will highlight the concerns I have in relation to the impact of human intervention on the Hanging Rock environment; in doing so I intend to communicate the fragility of this beautiful and changing place to a wider audience through a visual interpretation.