Title
Dig a bit deeper – connection and contemporary landscape art

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Abstract

This paper examines how memory, knowledge and connection are imbued in place. Considering how place can inhabit self and self can inhabit place. This proposition is reinforced by looking at many models and cross cultural examples as well as the work of theorists such as Casey, Relph and Blowby.

The proposition that we are strongly related to our geographical locations, and by considering the similarities in make up of the earth to our bodies, a case is made that we are biologically and chemically part of the land. This becomes so by acknowledging that what we eat is of the land and hence there is a strong correlation between the two. It is then considered that since we are part of the land the land in turn becomes part of us.

The off campus performance work On becoming a Witch provided a very powerful link between the exegesis and the studio work. It examined yet another way in which one is able to relate to country by the use of ritual, myth and symbolism in a specific bush setting. It brought together skills related to theatre, opera, costume design and music. This has been fully documented as part of the exegesis.

The studio component of this thesis examines how one can closely relate one’s paintings and drawings to a sense of place and country by the use of materials such as ochres and the use of strong simple abstract forms. The use of a dominant symbol, the ziggurat, has been explained as well as the processes used with the result being a series of strong paintings and drawings. These act as a tangible link between self and a sense of place.
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4) The inclusion of these images in the research thesis adds significantly to its raison d’être because the images and their historical significance are the subject of discussion in the thesis.
Introduction  Dig a bit deeper – connection and contemporary landscape art

The research project ‘Dig a bit deeper – connection and contemporary landscape art examines how the physicality of the natural environment affects who we are and our responses to our environment: how place exists in us, how we exist in place and how this impacts on our presence in place.

In order to understand the notion of belonging as a non-indigenous person, of connection to place, a sense of the sacred, and identity - I will look at the links starting with the familiar and moving to the fleeting and ephemeral and back again.

One cannot begin to contemplate country without acknowledging that the original inhabitants lived and died for tens, perhaps hundreds of thousands of years in this ancient land. They sang and danced and told stories in all of the places that I have lived.

In chapter 1 I have investigated how memory, knowledge and connection are imbued in place. How the place can inhabit self and self can inhabit place. In order to reinforce my proposition I have looked at many models and cross-cultural examples in this chapter.

In Chapter 2 I have discussed the mapping of the places where I have lived and their geological properties and whether they have influenced my activities. By considering the similarities in makeup of the earth to our bodies, how, as the food partakes the qualities of where it is grown so too do the inhabitants. We biologically and chemically become part of the land and the land becomes part of us.

In Chapter 3 I have briefly examined the work of Colin McCahon and Hossein Valamanesh along with Rosalie Gascoigne, Rover Thomas, Judy Watson, Kimio Tsuchiya and Shigeo Toya and how they interpret the language of abstraction as a part of a broader conversation about defining the world in a poetic and simple form. Drawing on essential elements to create sensitive, powerful works that depict a connection to the world around us.

Chapter 4 is a description of the making of a site specific performance work that was held in the Central Tablelands in 2011. On becoming a witch was presented in the high cold country where I now live at Yetholme NSW. The script was entirely poetry. The images, sounds, sets, costumes and music were developed during the process of this research. Images of my artwork were projected during the performance; some of this was videoed and photographed. This involved me working with the local community and Arts OutWest, Charles Sturt University, Yetholme Progress Assn, local and interstate artists and the Local Stages Program of Bathurst Memorial Entertainment Centre. I was responsible for writing and directing the show as well as making sets and costumes. The performance, and the people
made a gentle impression on the landscape and the high country of Yetholme made an impression on all of those involved.

My work and my process are discussed in Chapter 5. I have used ochres and soil, sticks and charcoal. One of the main aims has been to relate the work to place. The cycles of life and death are a constant theme, as well as dark and light.

Researching belonging as a non-indigenous person, I have come to the understanding that the land claims us, indigenises us, relative to how long we spend in a place, whether it is four years or 40,000 years. We are born and we eat the food from where we are, taking the nutrients from the soil and water. The earth’s crust contains most of the mineral nutrients our body needs, and the chemical composition of a rock, such as granite, is similar to the composition of the human body. Through my artwork I am attempting to articulate the tangible and intangible relationship I have to country.

My studio work has been informed by visiting and mapping places where I have lived during my life and, by the taking of photographs I have also worked on drawings, paintings, poetry and sculpture. The use of earth elements was in part to immerse myself in the physicality of the places that I have inhabited.

During the course of my research I visited Goolagong cemetery in Central western NSW and discovered four generations of my mothers’ ancestors buried there. This was a pivotal point in my work, which led to further investigation of stories, symbols and myths related to the earth and the mother. The pentagon and the ziggurat were recurring themes in the performance work On becoming a witch. The pentagon originated from linking places of significance for me on a map in my local area. This linking formed the shape a pentagon. The Ziggurat was the base of the gravestones found at Goolagong. The Babylonian ‘Mountain of Heaven’ represents the point of contact between heaven and earth.1 Much of this material has informed the studio component of my work. From this research in the past four and a half years I have developed strong body of paintings and drawings.

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1 Barbara G Walker. *Womens Encyclopaedia of Myths and Secrets* Harper Collins NY p.1101
Prologue  Recollections

I have moved about all my life so my attachment to place comes from feelings, experiences, memory and recollections plus those little bits of country that get inside and don’t leave.

Yetholme is new to me, yet there is a history here, a familiarity, three generations of my partner’s family have lived here. The history of the region, even of white settlement goes much further back. The molybdenite mines, the gold diggings, the coalmines, the soldier settlers who struggled after the Second World War with families on small plots attempting to scratch a living from the land are all part of this history. The fields where the Waradjuri people, led by the warrior Windradyne, were slaughtered are not that far away.

Many of the species that were around when indigenous inhabitants lived in the area are extinct. There were koalas, quolls, bandicoots and many other small marsupials. The loss of habitat, cats, dogs, pigs, foxes and humans ensured they are here no longer. In a local newspaper clipping from the 1944 there is a photograph of a fungi called Blackfellas Bread so called because Indigenous locals used to bake it. The bread resembled a large potato with a taste of boiled rice, which was found when farmers were ploughing virgin soil at Yetholme. Indigenous and non-indigenous people I have spoken to have no recollection of the fungi now.

There seems to be so little real bush left in the Central Tablelands region. There are areas of remnant bush, of regenerated bushland, some open fields where we have to struggle to keep the weeds down and there are problems with feral pigs, rabbits and foxes. The rare and endangered Purple Copper Wing butterfly, resides in the Bassaria bushes just outside our back door. The butterfly has a symbiotic relationship with a small ant that lives at the foot of the bush. The butterfly lays its eggs on the bush and when they hatch, the ant takes the larvae down to their nest at the base of the bush. There they secrete a liquid, which is eaten by the ants. At night the ants carry the larvae back up the bush to eat the new leaves. A symbiosis where each party could not exist without the other.

I am sixth generation Australian. What does that mean? My mother’s father was from Goolagong and my mother was born in Nyngan, her mother at Peera Bore between Bourke and Broken Hill. On a visit to Goolagong in 2010 I discovered at the local cemetery a whole area put aside for the Irish Catholic, and four generations my mother’s people dating back to 1822 were buried there. This was a revelation, as I had no real understanding of my connection to this place west of the mountains. The graves of my ancestors lay not very far from where I now live and I had no idea of this connection.
when I moved here. Many of the graves consisted of a stone ziggurat\(^2\) with a cross sprouting from the last of the four steps.

I have not felt any particular attachment to these people, that their bones lay in the soil of the central tablelands and that they had a relationship with the area is something new to consider. Is it possible that some of the experience they had of the living in the area are imbued in my very cells? The food they ate, the life they lived could well be a part of my very makeup and the country they lived may also have their imprint.

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\(^2\) Ziggurat- Babylonian “Mountain of Heaven” the pyramid that served as temple and palace in Mesopotamian towns. At its summit, the king consummated his sacred marriage to the Goddess, this being the point of contact between heaven and earth

Chapter one  Territories of the voice

To contemplate country is to gaze in a special way upon the self.

In this chapter I will investigate how memory, knowledge and connection are imbued in place. How the place can inhabit self and self can inhabit place. In order to reinforce my proposition I have looked at many models and cross-cultural examples.

My interest in memory and connection to place really came from a sense of rootlessness, this lack of a place to call home. This has been a common thread in my artwork for many years, but it was not until I actually stopped moving that I was able to reflect on where I have been and to see where I am.

I have always had a fascination for rocks, stones and their properties. It is strange that this fascination has led me to look at landscape and country as something inner rather than outer. Using these properties to develop artwork was something new to contemplate.

My first instinct was to visit Google Earth and view some of these locations etched in my memory and written in my body. Edward Relph, the geographer suggests that maps help to form our perceptual knowledge, which in turn may colour our day–to-day spatial encounters as we move through real-world places.

These spatial encounters were recognised in classical times by a memorising technique called the Method of Loci. With this method, a person memorises the layout of a familiar building or street, or a series of houses, or some other area that is familiar. By creating a series of smaller rooms within this space the person mentally walks through the area and places an item that can be remembered in the separate smaller rooms with the mental scene. The method involves the placing of transient items of memory in the more secure memorial context of a real place. This process was literalised in the Renaissance era, when Neoplatonic mystics and magicians followed and adapted ideas put forward in the first century BC by the Roman architect Vitruvius. Houses were designed and embellished to facilitate memory using astrological schemes and magical principles involving proportion and shape.

1 Barry Hill. Broken Song- TGH Strehlow and Aboriginal Possession Random House Sydney 2002 p.42
3 Paul Devereau, The sacred Place—the ancient origin of holy and mystical sites Cassell & Co London 2000 p. 14
Not only ‘memory rooms, but memory theatres’ were built to complex schemes where mystic glyphs and symbols were emblazoned on separate areas or cells. 6

The Neoplatonic principles of magic are not readily accepted today although it remains the case that places can, in effect, ‘store’ memories. It is one of the most vital powers of place. Scholar Edward Casey talks of places having a “gathering action”, filling themselves with memories that belong as much to the place as to my brain or body”. He calls to mind that a place “securely holds memories” for people and releases them when the person is present.

Exploring place in this way it is useful to look at the many ways these places of stored memory are referred to across cultures.

In the Buddhist tradition, the word *terma* literally means hidden treasure. This transmission of teachings can be a physical object such as a text or ritual implement that is buried in the ground hidden in a rock or crystal, secreted in a herb, or a tree, hidden in water, or even in the sky. Sometimes the teachings associated should be understood as being “concealed within the mind of the guru” and are known as mind *termas,* 9

...*termas are not always made public right away. The conditions may not be right; people may not yet be ready for them; and further instructions may need to be revealed to clarify their meaning. Often, the tertön (discoverer of ancient texts) himself has to practice them for many years.* 10

The ancient Irish Celts chronicled legends and lore associated with a wide variety of places. The tradition or lore of places were called *dindsenchas.* Such ‘territories of the voice’ as they have been called can reach great sophistication. There were poems, stories or myths associated with just about every old tree spring, rocky outcrop, river bend, pool and hill in their country. These *dindsenchas* are known today mainly from their written sources, they are a product of the pre-literary tradition and are structured so as to be a mnemonic aid as well as a form of entertainment. 12

7 E. Casey, ‘How to get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time: Phenomenological Prolegomena’. in Feld and Basso, op cit., 1996
8 ibid
10 ibid..
11 Paul Devereau, *The sacred Place–the ancient origin of holy and mystical sites* Cassell & Co London 2000  p.15
Paul Devereau, *The sacred Place–the ancient origin of holy and mystical sites*
The English poet Wordsworth in *Tables Turned* so eloquently relates this understanding:

> One impulse from the vernal wood
> May teach you more of man,
> Of moral evil and of good,
> than all the sages can

> Sweet is the law which nature brings;
> Our meddling intellect
> Misshapes the beauteous forms of things
> We murder to dissect.

> Enough of Science and of Art;
> Close up those barren leaves;
> Come forth, and bring with you a heart
> That watches and receive

He states so clearly that by trying to dissect we can destroy. Psychologist, John Blowby in his theory of attachment explains that “to have a deep attachment for a person (place or thing) is to have taken them as the terminating object of our instinctual responses” \(^{14}\) Wordsworth is saying that we must allow our instinctual responses and receive what nature has to offer. What does this say for the notion of “belonging”? Does this mean that to experience a place fully we must let go of our attachment to it because this attachment can stifle our experience of the place?

Further to this idea of places having a gathering action Relph \(^{15}\) elucidates that if a person feels inside a place, “he or she is here, rather than there, safe rather than threatened, enclosed rather than exposed, at ease rather than stressed”. He suggests that the more profoundly inside a place a person feels, the stronger will be his or her identity with that place: “that a place we are in actually exists in us.” \(^{16}\) The homes in which we have lived, the forests through which we have ambled, the rivers down which we have rowed, the mountains we have climbed, the

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*The Tables Turned* p.130  
\(^{14}\) Inge Bretherton, *The origins of Attachment Theory: John Blowby and Mary Ainsworth Blowby* 1959.  
p. 13 www.psychology.sunysb.edu/attachment/online/inge_origins.pdf  
\(^{15}\) David Seamon, & Jacob Sowers, *Place and Placelessness*, in *Key Texts in Human Geography*  
\(^{16}\) . Paul Devereux *The sacred Place –the ancient origin of holy and mystical sites*  
ancient temples we have explored, the streets we have walked\textsuperscript{17} - all these exist within us. Paul Devereaux refers to the notion of “there not being an external fixed entity called a place in which we simply exist”. That this place is inside us, our minds and bodies. I would agree with American scholar Eugene Walter who has observed that

\begin{quote}
while human experience makes a place, \\
place locates experience in people\textsuperscript{18}
\end{quote}

Carole Crumley, the anthropologist, suggests that “these places are considered liminal, tucked between the mundane and the spirit world. That they are embellished with culturally distinct symbols and are an entry points to another consciousness.”\textsuperscript{19}

Australian Indigenous people use country as a mnemonic, an aid to memory, where they can lodge their law, myths, culture and social and moral concepts. \textsuperscript{20}

\textit{Country in Aboriginal English is not only a common noun but also a proper noun. People talk about country in the same way they would talk about a person: they speak to country, sing to country, worry about country, feel sorry for country, and long for country. People say that country knows, hears, smells, takes notice, takes care, is sorry or happy.} Rather country is a living entity with a yesterday, today and tomorrow, with a consciousness, and a will toward life. Because of this richness, country is home, and peace; nourishment for body, mind and spirit; heart’s ease. \textsuperscript{21}

Country is multi dimensional. It consists of people, animals, plants, Dreamings; underground, earth, soils, minerals and waters, surface water, and air. There is sea country, land country and sky country. Country has origins and a future; it exists both in and through time. “Country sustains us and everything else which exists”.\textsuperscript{22}

This attitude to country applied to many other traditional indigenous cultures as anthropologist Miriam Kahn has noted that for the Wamira of southeast Papua New Guinea.

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{17} ibid. p 14 \\
\textsuperscript{18} ibid.p16 \\
\textsuperscript{19} C. Crumley., \textit{Sacred Landscapes: Constructed and Conceptualized}. In Ashmore and Knapp,op.cit 1999 \\
\textsuperscript{20} Paul Devereux \textit{The sacred Place} p14 \\
\textsuperscript{21} Deborah Bird Rose , \textit{A Nourishing Terrain}. p.1 \\
\textsuperscript{22} ibid p2
\end{flushleft}
The landscape resounds... with narratives of collective history and personal experiences. It provides tangible forms for the mooring of memory... Meaning attached to landscape unfolds in language, names, stories, myths and rituals. 23

The following poetry in *Songs of Central Australia* is of the Aranda (Arrernte) people of the Western Desert, and was translated by T. H. Strehlow, who remarked that for the Aranda, “(t)he whole countryside is his living age-old family tree....with roots in the blooded earth, branches in the night sky and trunk in the clear light of day” 24.

*I am red like burning fire*
*I am gleaming red, glistening with ochre*

*I am red like burning fire*
*Red is the hollow in which I am lying*

*A tjurunga is standing upon my head*
*Red is the hollow in which I am lying* 25

Although I am unaware of the full meaning I believe that a *tjurunga* is a highly sacred object that few people are actually allowed to see. *Tjurunga* are oval or pointed oval and circular slabs of wood or stone with complex patterns applied. They are slightly flattened or slightly convex and covered in red ochre. Their main function in the totemic and religious life of the tribes is that of an abode of the spirit of their owner; or of the spirit of his or her totem. 26

This poem/song is multi layered, deeply embedded in the earth and culture. These poems were translated by T. H. Strehlow who was schooled in German, although having grown up with his Lutheran father at Hermansberg Mission in the central western desert of Australia he was well versed in Aranda (Arrente) language and custom, so although he would have been influenced by European learning he also had an indepth understanding of the form of Aranda poetry.

Further to this, educationalist and linguist, Dr. R. Marika writes that:

23 Paul Devereux  *The sacred Place –the ancient origin of holy and mystical sites*  
25 ibid p14
26 [www.aboriginalartnongali.com/tjurunga](http://www.aboriginalartnongali.com/tjurunga) 9.5.12
Sometimes deep language is linked to country and linked to knowledge that is restricted and deep. Also some of these ideas we use for everyday language. Like for example, we use the concept of gapu, water, for space. In space there’s gapu. The big space that the morning star travels through and the sun travels through and the different constellations. Then we see the literal sea, which is like fresh water and salt water and then we see creatures travelling though that space also; animals.. sea animals ..sea creatures.. and fresh water animals and creatures.  

From this explanation by Dr Marika we can see that there are different levels or layers in the language as there are different layers in the perception of country. In particular places there are also layers of meaning that translate heterogeneously to individuals depending on their ability to perceive the information.

One above the other we are hovering in the air
Both of us are hovering in the air

Off the edge of the mountain bluff we are hovering in the air
Near the jagged mountain we are hovering in the air

It is clear that the poet’s perception of him or herself is one of being the same as the eagle, hovering in the air. As the eagle is hovering therefore he/she is hovering. David Abram describes this phenomenon, this change of perception in *Becoming Animal*, as he is walking with a Sherpa shaman and he believes that he sees him change into a raven. He was unsure as to whether this was a physical change or not. He underwent intense training under the tutelage of the shaman and through this meditative discipline he was able to change his perception of this phenomena and believed that he too became the bird.

He came to recognise that “synaesthetic experience is not just commonplace; it is the very structure of perception.” It is therefore not unreasonable to see how many people are able to identify closely with their environment.

The attitudes and ideas of indigenous peoples have long been thought of as superstition. Generally, as far as we are concerned, we inhabit space that contains objects and places and is not filled with spirits or haunted by the ghosts of our ancestors. Should we hear the trees and rocks speaking to us or the

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27 Dr R.Marika http://livingknowledge.anu.edu.au/learningsites/seacountry/07_worldview_rm.htm 18.9.11
29 David Abrams *Becoming Animal – An Earthly Cosmology* Pantheon Books New York 2010: p236-258
30 ibid p. 252
river singing or mention that we encounter unexplained non-material beings in them we are deemed
delusional and are treated by doctors, can be hospitalised and usually treated with drug therapy. In
many cultures, both ancient and modern, whose world is populated with spiritual presences of
different kinds, it is believed that country that is without these presences is sick.

It is worthwhile to remember that ancient and traditional people experience country at a walking pace
and tended to register views, places and landforms slowly. Today we tend to move quickly, often
preoccupied with thoughts other than where we are and have demythologised our surroundings. In
our digital world life moves more quickly than our minds can comprehend often bombarding us with
so much information that it is impossible to actually understand much of what we are seeing and
hearing. The notion of experiencing and having a deep knowledge of a particular object or place is
replaced with a drive through the landscape viewing from the comfortable bubble of the automobile.
The experience of flying from one place to another further disconnects us from the landscape travelled
as we only get a glimpse from the air for a few minutes and then land at our destination without any
comprehension of the changes in terrain, weather, the people or the flora and fauna that exist along
the way. I have heard it said some time ago that when flying, that we physically arrive but it takes
some time for the spirit to catch up.

In this Arrente/Aranda poem the ti-tree bushes and the blossoms are much more than metaphor. In
these couplets as well as the balance of rhythm there is a balance of thought.

Let the little ti-tree bushes intertwine their branch tips
Let the little ti-tree bushes sprout blossom clusters on their branch tips
Let the little ti-tree bushes spread their bushy crested tips
Let the little ti-tree bushes sprout blossom clusters on their branch tips
Let the little ti-tree bushes raise high the foreheads of their branches.
Let the little ti-tree bushes sit fast and avert their faces

After a few lines one senses the interconnection; the landscape is in dialogue with everything else. As
in the eagle poem, previously quoted, an ancestor voice oversees the country and is in total
communion with it. These ti-tree bushes represent the mythical Alknarinja women, who may not
leave their homes, and who must sit fast and always avert their faces from all men.  

31 Barry Hill Broken Song TGH Strehlow and Aboriginal Possession –Random House Melbourne 2002
p.14
32 ibid p.15
As with the Australian indigenous people, “ancient peoples more readily spread out their minds, memories and myths in front of their eyes, in the land. Land was mind, was memory”. 33

“Deeply held beliefs affect how one sees”34 Our perceptions, are moulded by the beliefs, ideas and assumptions we receive from our experiences and society as we grow up. “When we encounter the perceptions of traditional and ancient people, societies still outside the ever-expanding modern mindset, we experience dissonance”. 35

As a white woman living in Australia it has been difficult to allay the guilt and self loathing that I have felt while visiting Indigenous communities in the early 80s. I felt sickened by the restrictions and control exercised by white “advisors”, police, various church missionaries and Governments. I discussed my ‘guilt’ with Aboriginal friends who told me to ‘get over it’. This led to work with Aboriginal Communities and in gaols where the indigenous population is very high also to go back to the central desert much later on to learn more about culture. This needing and wanting to be accepted led me to feel more alienated and isolated in this stolen country. Alienation and a search for belonging are not new topics for discussion in Australia and as I research the idea of connection to place and country I begin to understand Strehlow’s comment that “to contemplate country is to gaze in a special way upon the self”36 This is not about developing an attachment to place but a lifelong process of becoming.

In his Anthology of Process Philosophy, where he investigates the ontology of becoming, Alfred North Whitehead states that nature is that which we observe in perception through the senses. In this sense perception is described as being aware of something “which is not thought and which is self-contained for thought”. It means that nature can be thought of as a closed system whose mutual relations do not require the expression of the fact that they are thought about. This means that in a sense nature is independent of thought. 37 So if a tree falls down in a forest and no one sees it, it still fell down.

Nature may be independent of thought but thought is not independent of nature, and implies that that without nature there is no thought. We are nature!

33 Paul Devereux The sacred Place –the ancient origin of holy and mystical sites Cassell & Co London 2000 p.46
34 ibid.p.16
35 ibid.p.16
36 Barry Hill. Broken Song- TGH Strehlow and Aboriginal Possession Random House Sydney 2002 p.42
In this chapter I have discussed the connection that many cultures have with the living earth and that certain places have a gathering action, a mnemonic that holds and stores knowledge and experience. That we too have a gathering action, and the places we have been, the experiences and memories we have are stored in our bodies.
Chapter two  We are the rocks dancing!

_I like the idea that stones are what the world is made of._

Richard Long

In this chapter I will briefly discuss the mapping of the places where I have lived and their geological properties and whether they have influenced my activities. By considering the similarities in makeup of the earth to our bodies, I show how, as the food partakes the qualities of where it is grown so too do the individuals. I will put forward the idea that we biologically and chemically become part of the land and the land becomes part of us.

The earth is our primary life-support system, supplying all of our basic needs for minerals, water and air. The earth’s crust contains most of the mineral nutrients our body needs, and the chemical composition of a rock, such as granite, is similar to the composition of the human body. Weathering chemically breaks down rocks into other natural materials such as soil, this soil contains minerals, which are dissolved by the acid around roots of plants. These mineral elements are then incorporated into the plant and stored for our consumption or by some other animal that we later consume. The most common chemical element found in rocks and our body is water, approximately 60-80% by weight. When seen from space the earth appears a luminous blue delicately enveloped in evaporated water forming cloud. This is because approximately 70% of the earth’s surface is covered with water.38

It is no longer possible to separate our bodily health from the health of the environment from which we derive our food. Our attitude to this environment is important and affects our health. The links in the food chain are a fact. Everything is interconnected, from the soil to the plants, the animals and their health to the health of the consumers, which in turn extends to the culture around food. Food does not consist of just piles of chemicals.39 It is also comprised of a set of social and ecological relationships, reaching back to the land and outward to other inhabitants.

Generally we now get our food from a variety of sources, mainly supermarkets that source this food from many different countries. Many soils are deficient in particular minerals and nutrients and it is possible to gain some of these deficient nutrients by eating food from other areas. Consumption of

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38 Emory Report September 21, 1998 Volume 51, No. 5
Bill Size is associate professor and director of the Geosciences Program, interim director of the Human and Natural Ecology Program, and chairman of the Senate committee on the environment.

39 Michael Pollan _In Defence of Food_, Allen Lane, Penguin Group Australia. 2008 p.103
food from other places creates a link to that place as the food partakes numerous qualities indigenous
to where it is grown40 or in the words of Gertrude Stein

   After all, anybody is as their land and air is. Anybody is as the sky is low or high, the air heavy or clear and anybody is as there is wind or no wind there.
   It is that which makes them and the arts they make and the work they do and the way they eat and the way they drink and the way they learn and everything.41

In a recent visit to northern New South Wales I was struck by the luminosity of the landscape, the
almost fluorescent green rolling hills, vivid red clay, the dampness of the air and the smell of sweet
blossoms as well as the fullness of the creeks and rivers. The air smelt different to where I live! Even
when we have had rain in the Central Tablelands the air is dry, the scent of eucalyptus wafts by as you
walk through the bush. The flowers are small, subtle and the vegetation calls different animals to
graze and take shelter.

Each place has its own particular presence and awareness, its unique style of intelligence. It is only by
living for a long time in a place that the place can make a claim on the person. 42

   Certain Australian Aborigines assert that one cannot conquer foreign soil, because in it there dwell strange ancestor spirits who re-incarnate themselves in the new born. There is a great psychological truth in this. The foreign land assimilates its conqueror.43

Environmentalist, John Seed argues that we humans investigate and see the world through layers of
anthropocentric self-cherishing and that when we change this attitude a change in consciousness
begins to take place. If we can see that we are not separate and apart from the world we inhabit we
can begin to relate to aspects of ourselves like the minerals that form our bodies and therefore the
rocks that help to form those minerals. He discusses our evolution from these rocks to our present
form and suggests that ‘we are the rocks dancing!’44

41David Abram, Becoming Animal – An Earthly Cosmology –Pantheon Books NY. 2010. - p. 131
   From Gertrude Stein's 1936 lecture “An American and France” Champaign,111.: Dalkey Archive Press, a995 p.xvi.
42Ibid. p.133
44Joanna Macy World as Lover World as self -Beyond Anthropocentrism essay by John Seed
Parallax Press Berkeley, CA 1991, p 33
Dr Marika furthers this argument by giving another example of how one might regard this interconnectedness after having observed the Yolnu people who are the traditional owners of the land in the Northeast Arnhem Land.

*In the Yolŋu worldview there are two moieties. One is Yirritja and the other one is Dhuwa. They are two halves of one whole. So everything in the world is holistic. The knowledge and the worldview are all interconnected. Art is connected through to songs, the songs are connected to the people and the people’s connection is through song lines, stories, from stories to art, art to country and land - through clans, through totems - everything in our world is linked*.

In an attempt to locate myself in the landscape I began mapping the places lived over my life. By revisiting, reinterpreting place through photographs and poetry I began responding to these places by using the soil, ochres and rocks gathered and started with a series of small textural works on paper and canvas. I relied heavily on my intuitive feelings and responses to these places, the relationship to the waterways, but also my research of the geology of the various regions.

Many of the images made at the beginning of this study were maps (fig 1) gathered by divining the underground waterways around where I live now in order to get a sense of the mercurial underpinnings of the immediate landscape. I learned this skill from a local diviner who drilled for water bores.

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36 Dr R. Marika 18.9.11
The Canadian Geographer Edward Relph explains that “cognitive conceptions of space understood through maps may help form our perceptual knowledge, that the unique quality of a place is its power to order and to focus human intentions, experiences, and actions spaceally.” He also argues that “without a thorough understanding of place as it has human significance, one would find it difficult to describe why a particular place is special and impossible to know how to repair existing places in need of mending. Before we can prescribe we must learn to describe”.

Having lived in many different areas, mainly on the east coast of Australia I feel a familiarity and affinity to many places. Around the towering sandstone cliffs of the Hawkesbury River just north of Sydney I feel a sense of pleasure that I do not feel anywhere else. This is not an easy pleasure, but an awesome, seduction into the mystery of the bush, the winding waterways and the colours and textures of the rock faces.

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Fig 1  *maps of life* – ochre and charcoal on canvas

15cm x 15cm each  total 122cm x 50cm  2009 C.Mc.

46 David Seamon & Jacob Sowers *Place and Placelessness, Edward Relph as published as a chapter in Key Texts in Human Geography* P. Hubbard, R.Kitchen, & G Valentine, eds London: Sage p.44
As a child I spent holidays and weekends with my father, uncle and sister, fishing, heading up the Coal and Candle in one of the wooden boats he had made. I have vivid memories of the phosphorescence on the water at night and fires on the beach under the stars; the majesty of the soaring sandstone cliffs, the river and cooking our catch is etched in my psyche. The familiarity of the sedimentary sandstone of the Sydney basin, the porous rock layered in history is a comfort. My early years on the northern beaches of Sydney and later up and down the east coast like the permeable sandstone of these areas these memories have left layers of memory, filtering through my body.

Travelling back to the north coast of NSW, back to the rich, productive volcanic country of the hills around Lismore there is an energy, a life force that is almost tangible. I feel a constant driving force in the country, the town and the people. A place where many of the new inhabitants have created a life that is rich with art and culture and an understanding and respect of the local Aboriginal people and of the importance of connection to country and of taking care of the land. The “new settlers” as they were called in the 70s and 80s are not so new anymore and the old dairy farms and timber mills are long gone and more sustainable ways of living have been integrated into farming practices.

My experience of living in that area from 1983 - 1993 is one of community, learning and being active, of finding like-minded people to work with and an acceptance of difference. There was an atmosphere of support and encouragement to experiment with new creative ventures and ideas. This is basalt country and for me was a rich and productive time, a time for establishing solid friendships and creative collaborations still alive today.

The broad plains near Tamworth offer a breathtaking glimpse into another’s sense of place. The igneous rocks, basalt and gabbro lie across the Tamworth belt. This is rich fertile land and the starting point for my interest and involvement in music and indigenous Australians. When I lived there I had the opportunity to meet and work with many black and white musicians for the first time. Touring with country music shows in an old Dehaviland Dove aircraft to Indigenous settlements and missions all around the country and showing six nights a week, a different place every night for three months at a time was to open my eyes to a different Australia than I had previously known. Before this immersion into the many different aspects Australian culture and country I had little engagement with indigenous Australians.

Visiting the Western Desert communities in 1980 was to briefly experience a different way of living. At that time there were only a couple of buildings and a few dongas there and the people were completely at home outside of buildings. Seeing family groups sitting on the red earth, cooking and sleeping on the red earth no matter what the weather has left a lasting impression. The woodcut (fig 2) below was from a drawing I did of a group of people at Docker River (now called Kaltukatjara) in
the Central Western Desert country. The tall man in the image had just arrived back from a Red Ochre\(^{47}\) ceremony. All of the men and boys had taken part of this and we had to delay the concert for two days to await their arrival back to camp. The use of red and particularly red ochre has been a constant in my artwork since this time.

![Image](image.jpg)

**Fig 2** Docker River       Woodcut       C.Mc. 1984

There can be a feeling of rootlessness when one lives in many places, that everywhere is temporary, or on the way to somewhere else. This has the effect of not feeling there is space for you in a community and not engaging fully with the area. Never putting down roots. There is the feeling of absence or a lack of something. Relph calls this alienation “outsideness,” \(^{48}\) which is often felt by newcomers to a place or by people who have been away from their birthplace for some time and come back to find the place different to how they once knew it.

There is the feeling that this *scattered self* is deeply distracted and may correlate with the ‘disarray of place’ \(^{49}\) There is a yearning for the “existential insideness” \(^{50}\) of deep experience and immersion in place and experience most people know when they are at home in their own region and community.

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\(^{47}\) Victoria Finlay *Colour- Travels through the Paintbox*. Hodder & Stoughton 2002 p 41

Red Ochre has many dreaming stories and most of them seem to hinge on the spilling of blood. Anthropologists have mainly focussed on the symbolism of red as representing men’s blood (meaning death), or women’s menstrual blood (signifying, perhaps the potential for giving birth). The alternative theory to this is that the iron in the red ochre acted as a kind of magnet, to show Ancestors and Aboriginal people the way along sacred paths.

\(^{48}\) David Seamon & Jacob Sowers *Place and Placelessness*, Edward Relph as published as a chapter in *Key Texts in Human Geography*. P. Hubbard, R. Kitchen, & G Valentine, eds London: Sage p 45

\(^{49}\) Edward S Casey *Between Geography and Philosophy: What does it mean to be in the Place-World*? p 2

In this chart are places of residence in Australia over my life so far which are mainly sandstone, shale and basalt areas. The sandstone and shale are both sedimentary rocks. Shale is fine-grained,
composed of mud that is a mix of flakes of clay minerals and tiny fragments whereas most sandstone is composed of quartz and/or feldspar because these are the most common minerals in the Earth’s crust. Fine-grained aquifers, such as sandstones, are more apt to filter out pollutants from the surface than are rocks with cracks and crevices. There are different stages of textural maturity in sandstone from immature, submature, mature, and supermature sandstones. As the sandstone becomes more mature grains become more rounded, and there is less clay that makes up the matrix of the rock. 

Basalt is dark, dense and fine-grained and cools very quickly it can form large four, five and six sided columns. This is a very common product of effusive volcanism, both from “true” volcanoes and from huge fissure eruptions.

What I am suggesting is not that places where the geology is sandstone is in someway ‘less’ than the basalt areas but that they indeed have different properties and are perhaps not as robust and this could lead to feeling and being unsettled. Being unsettled can also mean that a person may be able to adapt more easily to change and learn more about the world at large. This may allow the person to become more sensitive to diversity than a person who stays in one place. We may also consider the eminent geographer Yi-Fu Tuan’s notion that a person could indeed become stronger and more autonomous when they are not tied to one place and that having a stronger link to one place could suggest that the security of home may lead to having no “mind of it’s own”. Philosopher Edward Casey suggests that this may lead us to seek out “thick” or rich places where one’s own personal enrichment can flourish. Having previously established that health of our mind and body are intrinsically linked with our environment, the rich, fertile basalt country of Lismore, Yetholme and Tamworth could indeed have had a strong bearing on the activities of individuals of these areas.

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52 http://giantcrystals.strahlen.org/europe/basalt.htm 18.8.12
53 Edward S Casey Between Geography and Philosophy: What does it mean to be in the Place-World? Yi-Fu Tuan Cosmos and Hearth( 1996) p 3
54 ibid p. 685
55 ibid p. 685
In the Central West of New South Wales we live in an area riddled with mines. The minerals are scraped and dug from the earth 24 hours a day. Within 20 to 100 kilometre’s drive from Yetholme there are coal-mines at Lithgow, Lidsdale, Capertee, Bell, Cullen Bullen and Mudgee. Wallerawang has a coal-fired power station, which spews out mercury, carbon dioxide, sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxide into the atmosphere daily. Sunny Corner, which is close by, still has contaminated areas with arsenic, lead, cyanide and many areas that are unusable due to the mining of silver and gold in the 1800 and 1900s. The Cowal Goldmine is in operation beyond Orange, using cyanide leach mining in high conservation wetlands. Hill End has reopened a gold mine and Walang just down the road has a number of excavation remnants of copper mines. In the past molybdonite was also mined in what is now the Eusdale Reserve. Our property is flanked by the Molybdonite Road; this led to the entrance of the mine.

There is a growing emphasis to eat locally grown and organic plant and animal foods as they are generated from similar soil, water, and air and share the same climatic conditions. This makes them uniquely adapted to support the life of their area’s inhabitants. As a person becomes used to eating this food the daily, seasonal, and climatic influences takes on greater importance. Increasingly we are drinking polluted water and breathing fouled air and the soils where we grow our foods are laden with

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57 Vicki Powys Sunny Corner – A Silver town of the 1880s Crawford House Press Bathurst NSW 1989 p 76-77
chemicals and spoiled by toxins. If the air breathed is also contaminated with carbon monoxide, mercury, sulphur dioxide and other heavy metals coming from coal-burning power plants\textsuperscript{60} it stands to reason that the earth and animals are experiencing the same trauma as we are. If the soil is sick or in someway deficient, so the grasses will be as well as other vegetation grown in that soil, hence the cattle that eat the grasses and the people who drink the milk and eat the meat from them. The maintenance of a good internal environment (homeostasis) is certainly strained by the degradation of the earth's external environment.

Even for those with a strong immune system and well developed respiratory, digestive and circulatory systems, just by breathing this contaminated air they will not feel well.

In the study of epigenetics, literally meaning above genetics and refers to beacons which sit on our DNA and is the ‘study of heritable changes in genome function that occur without a change in DNA sequence’.\textsuperscript{61} These beacons or tags can switch our genes on or off by changing our environment, diet and, or behaviour. Recent research shows epigenetic tags can be caused by any number of environmental influences – these can include smoking, chemicals including pesticide, stress and diet. What this means for us is that the life we are living now, even if we change our behaviour immediately to one of respect and sustainability, has affected our children and many future generations.

Nanikiya Munungiritj is a senior man of the Yarrwidi Gumatj clan, one of the Yolŋu people who are traditional owners of the land in Northeast Arnhem Land – Yolnu Sea Country believes that

\begin{center}
(we are the children of this land. We feel pain for this land when we watch the mining. Sometimes we use the same words to describe the land that we use to describe different parts of our body.\textsuperscript{62}
\end{center}

The link between the health of our mind and bodies with our environment is a fact. What I have discussed in this chapter is how the physical and chemical properties of place can influence our activities and lives in general. By examining the differences between sandstone and basalt country and my activities in these places I have seen a possible correlation between my different activities and the properties of the minerals in these areas and for the attraction to “rich” “thick” places. I also examine that if we eat and live in a particular area then chemically and biologically we become a part of that country and that the longer we live there the more we become a part of it. Therefore the land indigenises us relative to how long we live on the land, be it 5 years or 5,000.

\textsuperscript{61} http://www.abc.net.au/catalyst/stories/s1900723.htm 19.4.07
\textsuperscript{62} DrR.Marika 18.9.11
Chapter 3  On becoming a witch – a performance

the phase of becoming takes place on the level of the sentiments,
while that of being is on a conscious plane.\textsuperscript{63}

\textit{Joseph Campbell}

On becoming a witch was a performance for which I wrote the script, directed, designed the installation sets and costumes and collaborated on the music composition. It took place in April of 2011 among the snow gums at Yetholme, which is in the high country of the Central Tablelands.

My artwork has been informed by stories, pilgrimages, different religious philosophies and symbolism over many years. It has only been during this recent research where I have paid particular attention to places of significance to myself and others. I have questioned why they are significant and the performance was a result and a point of culmination.

Finding the graves of four generations of my mother’s ancestors in one place at Goolagong has been significant for me. My immediate and extended family like many others are scattered around the country and the world. My matrilineal ancestors buried in the ground of the Central West allows me to come to terms with a ‘Mother Earth’ within my own reality and within the paradigms of an overlapping mythical culture of “Mother earth”. My body and the body of my ancestors are written in this land and become part of my mnemonics of country. A conscious development of a ‘holistic’ body of work has become the logical song to this notion. It makes a framework that makes sense of the ‘absence’ or lack previously felt.

I have found that

\small{(p)rocessing information undergoes many stages before reaching awareness and at every stage some of this information is retained while the rest is discarded.\textsuperscript{64}}

\textsuperscript{63} Joseph Campbell \textit{The Masks of God- Primitive Mythology – The lesson of the mask} Pitman Press Ltd/Martin Secker & Warburg Ltd. London WC1 1960 p 23
\textsuperscript{64} Inge Bretherton, \textit{The origins of Attachment Theory: John Blowby and Mary Ainsworth Blowby} 1959. P23 www.psychology.sunsb.edu/attachment/online/inge_origins.pdf cit Dixon, 1971;Erdelyi, 1974
It was after reading Carl Jung where he asks himself “what is this myth I am living” that I began to ask myself the same question.

During this process a collection of writing and poetry was forming, drawn from a number of cultures, particularly the Celtic and European traditions of story telling, as they were more relevant to my Irish heritage, but also influenced by Australian indigenous poetry and philosophy from the Central Western Desert. This fitted into my idea of storytelling; an old story in a contemporary context.

The aim was to bring together a number of creative people to work together for a ceremony using ancient symbols to enliven and acknowledge this land and the people who have inhabited this place.

It became important to stage the performance at Yetholme as this was where I was now living and all of my findings led me back to this place where I am now.

The event was a partnership between the Local Stages Program at BMEC (Bathurst Memorial Entertainment Centre), Arts OutWest and Charles Sturt University Arts and Media Faculty, who agreed to have Theatre and Event Management students work on the project as a part of their courses. Local community organisations also gave their support.

The bush setting at Yetholme was important allowing the story and symbols to resonate with Country and the psyche of all of those involved. Trees represent the Great Mother who is the mother of life but also the death mother. It also represented the journey into the dark forest and being set amongst the large snow gums on site created a beautiful backdrop for the show. The performance was staged over five linking sites each one with a simple sculptural form as the set.

Act I was set in a grove of trees with a single white plank on the ground. This was to be the girl’s bed. Act II had a pentagon of fire and Act III had the oven with the red pentagon door or portal. The oven is a metaphor for the womb, the cave or the cauldron; is not only transformative but also full of potential. Through the oven the unformed is ‘baked’ and is new born. In an old proverb it states “the oven is the mother”. The dual mother who gives birth but also devours and drags her creation to death.

The Pentagon was used in my work after mapping sites that were significant to me in and around my local area. I discovered that on a map these points of reference formed the shape of a pentagon. I also discovered that when volcanic basalt cools it forms long five and six sided columns. 68

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66 In Saxony, even today the tree is seen as the mother it is said that beautiful girls grow under the leaves of trees and the souls of unborn children rustle under the leaves. That is the reason trees stand in the centre of all German, Swiss and Austrian villages. In many cultures, including indigenous Australian people, trees are used as coffins. Marie-Louise von Franz The interpretation of Fairy Tales. revised ed. Shambhala Pub Inc. 1996 p.13
67 Ami Ronnberg, Kathleen Martin The Book of Symbols Taschen 2010 Cologne Germany p. 582
68 A pentagon is a regular polygon of five sides . A Pentagram is a geometric figure derived from this and they symbolize anything to do with the number 5. The history of the Pentagon is rich and varied. In Traditional Chinese medicine and Taoism it is used to represent the 5 elements
Starting at dusk with darkness descending was an important element in the development of the story. Rilke reminds us that

the darkness pulls in everything:

Shapes and fires, animals and myself,

How easily it gathers them!69

There were six main characters in the script. Two lots of three, linking this to the trinity of the virgin, mother, and crone

Vassie - virgin (the name came from Russian Tale Vassalisa the beautiful)

Doll - mother (image of a doll that I made of my own Grandmother)

Witch - crone (Red and White representing blood/life and white/death)

These three have parallels with the wind, oven and the pig

the wind represents the innocent, the curious and ethereal, whereas

the oven represents the womb, the cauldron, and the vessel that appears to be empty but is full of the potential.

the pig, the dark, all devouring mother, the death aspect, of the Goddesses Kali, Hecate, Demeter.

The players and contributors

Kate Holmes, played the character of the Doll or the mother archetype. I had worked with Kate a number of times over the years and she had agreed to be involved in the process from the outset. She made several trips from Sydney to Yetholme to discuss and work on the creative development. Kate is a Drama teacher but my association with her had been through dance as her movement and improvisation skills are outstanding. She had also studied Khatak, which is Indian Classical dance and we hoped to include aspects of this in the performance. In the development process Kate had played

Leonardo DaVinci's famous drawing called the Vetruvian Man shows a human form that links the proportions of circle, square, and pentagram.

In alchemical symbolism the five points signify the interconnection of the four elements (Air, Fire, Water, and Earth) united by the fifth element or "quintessence" that is sometimes called Aether and more often Spirit. This meaning is not a Masonic one, but during the 18th and 19th centuries, if not earlier, Freemasonry was interwoven with Kabbalism, magic, and alchemy as approaches to understanding Nature and Man's place in it.68

69 Rilke's Book of Hours Love Poems to God Translated by Anita Barrow and Joanna Macy

The Book of Monastic Life p 63 and The Book of Pilgrimage p187
the part of the witch and the Doll as at the first creative development stage in 2009 we did not have anyone for the witch.

After much searching I was introduced to Lauren Gemmel, a Theatre Media student at Charles Sturt University, who I had not seen perform but looked perfect for the role. After our first meeting we arranged a reading and from that time on she was totally committed to the role and was perfect for the part of the young girl.

Still we had no Witch, there were a number of possibilities and after the funding we had applied for through the Local Stages Program at BMEC with the Australia Council fell through I was unsure as to how we could proceed. Kylie Shead from Local Stages, who was producing the show, was able to guarantee some renumeration for players so I continued my search and Mary Jones from Katoomba was recommended. Mary had trained in opera and played the clarinet and saxophone, and after meeting her and hearing her interpretation of the script I did little to convince her to take the part as she looked and sounded ideal.

Mariam Makinson, a Jungian therapist and Robbie Goikexeia showed their support by cooking, sewing and anything else that needed doing. Robbie saw that Kate needed extra support in her costume changes in the dark and gave it willingly. She spent days collecting sticks to bundle, beautiful bundles wrapped in red cotton, to add to the setting.

Fig 7 Bundling sticks

Camille Kersley, a fellow artist had visited from Canberra during the making process and had taken away ochres and calico to make Vassie’s blanket for the forest scene. She used charcoal rubbings of woodcuts with images of trees on one side and different squares on the other all dyed with the ochres and soil I had collected.

Fig 8 Vassie’s blanket

I spent several weeks making the props, masks and costumes sometimes with help from Lucy Lowe and Sam Stewart who helped make the impossible leaves, to paint sets and build the fence of sticks.

Fig 9 making impossible leaves
Becky Russell designed the poster and flyers and did all the technical work including the lighting of the trees and the recorded sound effects.

The enthusiastic CSU Arts Media students, Bec Blake, Tod Backhouse, Julia Patey and Erin Taylor worked tirelessly in the leadup to the show. My partner Michael helped construct some sets and cut the saplings for the tunnel. There were so many contributions.

One of the main elements of the night was the music and sound effects created by Keith Manning, Tiffany Mason and Mary Jones. For the storm percussion effects Keith strung large metal saw blades, metal trays, chimes and other objects between two trees in the area of the witch’s house. He chose an instrument to represent each character including the wind and the house. For the Witch he played a water pipe, a rare metal instrument played with a bow. He used a ceramic Udu drum for the last scene at the Ziggurat. The Doll sound was a gong and Vassie had a lament played by Tiffany on the classical guitar. The wind was a whirly, a plastic tube that is whirled around the head making a whistling whirring sound and the house was Latin rhythm played on congas. There were also recorded sound effects included in the storm sequence. Mary Jones played clarinet as the Witch in her pentagon of fire and as the squealing pig in the storm.
Yetholme is known for the fickle nature of the weather and a number of rehearsals and gatherings were cancelled due to bad weather. The first performance had to be moved to have two on the one night due to rain and the bitter cold. One of the reasons for the large fire at the performance entrance was to keep audience members warm while they waited.

**The performance**

As the darkness descended, the audience walked up the dirt road lined with candles. They milled around outside a large shed under the stars and drank mulled wine waiting for the show to begin.

Led by ushers into the building audience members passed and through a large curtain and out the other side into the darkness and beyond, and then through a tunnel of saplings, where light was provided by lanterns hanging overhead. Along the tunnel the audience could hear the whispers of the wind....... “Guess who it is!..... A creature strong, Guess who it is!....... Without head without feet”.
As they passed through the tunnel (linking opposite realms of experience and potential\textsuperscript{70}) the audience found themselves in a sheltered grove of trees. From behind a large tree was heard the voice of the Doll and catching a brief glimpse of her when, with the sound of a scraping gong, Vassie appears running into the grove. (She is wearing a red hoodie)\textsuperscript{71} She collapses in tears, she is alone, confused, searching - for what, she does not know and she is pregnant! She cannot go back, back is black. Forward is her only option. She will never be the innocent child she once was. Thrust into the unknown, seduced by the bush as a place of refuge, a hiding place, she goes forth like a lamb to the slaughter, terrified of the darkness, the darkness within.

In this ethereal dark world the girl comes across an odd little doll leaning against a tree. She is instantly transformed back to childhood, that carefree, self-centred state with little responsibility.

We are briefly brought back to the place and present by a small possum jumping across the branches overhead.

Disturbed by the strange murmuring on the wind, but with nowhere else to go, Vassie is overcome by exhaustion. Clinging to the doll, a reminder of the past, she falls asleep with the doll cushioning her head. She dreams of the Doll/mother coming to life embracing her and taking care of her, their interaction is nurturing and beautiful.

This is the mother reimagined; the mother she always wanted, loving and caring, the mother who would always be there for her. The Doll covers her with a blanket and whispers to her that the morning will reveal what is to come.

While Vassie sleeps a scream is heard away from the trees. The Witch is seen in all her magnificence standing behind a burning pentagon of fire\textsuperscript{72}. In her operatic voice she sings of her acknowledgement and her connection to all things, signifying that she is a part of a unified whole: that her breath is the same breath that has been breathed a million times over.

\textsuperscript{70} Ronnberg, A. Martin, K. Ed. The Book of Symbols: Reflections on Archetypal Images. Taschen Cologne. Germany 2010 p.628
\textsuperscript{71} Vassie wears the Red Riding Hoodie, a symbol of a maturing young woman’s sexual awakening. Yet in the story there is no reference to a male partner
\textsuperscript{72} Fire’s disturbing ambiguity applied to the “masters of fire” - the potter, smith, metallurgist, alchemist, shaman and witch, and to the inner as much to the outer fire. In myth as in reality fire can destroy so that from the purified residue or ashy essence a new world may come into being. The symbolism of fire carries our terrors and hope of transmutation. Ami Ronnberg, Kathleen Martin The Book of Symbols Taschen GmbH 2010 Cologne Germany p.84
I have been a multitude of shapes.
   I have been a sword,
   I have been a tear in the air.
   I have been the dullest of stars.
   I have been a word among letters.
   I have been a book in the origin.
   I have been the light of lanterns.
   A year and a half,
   I have been a continuing bridge.
   I have been a course, I have been an eagle.
   I have been a small boat tossed on upon cloudy seas.
   I have been compliant in the banquet73

Declaring that she must now go and play with the skilful women the Witch takes up her clarinet and
plays a style of gypsy music with the other musicians who play darrabukka and guitar as an exotic
dancer appears around the pentagon of fire. The moon appears in the background over the trees and
the mood is festive and exciting.

73 excerpt and adaption from Taliesen The Battle of the Trees 5th Century
The Book of Taliesin VIII.
From The Four Ancient Books of Wales
As the women vanish into the darkness of the bush we hear a gentle lament played on guitar and Vassie is woken from her sleep by the soft enticing musical sounds. She follows the sound and finds a magical world where all is not what it seems. Latin drumming is heard in the distance and a dancing house in the shape of a pentagon appears and beckons her, leading her further into the unknown.

She is charmed by the house and follows it to what appears to be an entrance along a fence made of sticks hung with bones and skulls.

![Fig 14 Puppet of dancing house](image)

A hunched old woman\(^{74}\) appears beckoning to Vassie with a large apple\(^{75}\) enticing her in, promising her food and play. The child that she is laughs and is joyous realising only then that she is hungry.

![Fig 15 Witch beckoning Vassie with an apple to enter her house](image)

Vassie feels happy to eat and play and spend time with this old woman, but the mood changes when she is told to work. She feels angry and defiant when asked to do the menial work of sweeping the leaves on the ground. As the Witch throws the broom to Vassie and demands that she complete her

\(^{74}\) The witch in the fairytale gingerbread house embodies the enticement of maternal sweetness that in its hideous aspect seduces what it will eventually devour. Ed: Ami Ronnberg, Kathleen Martin The Book of Symbols; Reflections on Archetypal Images Taschen Cologne Germany 2010 p702

\(^{75}\) B.G. Walker. Women’s Encyclopaedia of Myths and Secrets Harper San Francisco US. 1983 p.48

The apple representing Eve’s fruit of knowledge used to be the Goddess’s sacred heart of immortality. The Celts called the western paradise Avalon, meaning Appleland where they grew apples as a symbol of eternal life. Avalon was ruled by Morgan, the Queen of the dead. One reason for the extreme reverence paid to the apple is revealed by cutting it transversely, as the gypsies and witches did. Hidden in the apples core was the magic pentacle, a sign of Kore (Core) or Persephone (Greek goddess of Spring and Queen of the Underworld) Just as Core the virgin was hidden in the heart of Mother Earth (Demeter) and represented the world soul, so her pentacle was hidden in the apple. In Christian iconography the apple sign represented the Virgin concealed within the Mother.
task, for an instant Vassie glimpses her darker, powerful side and begrudgingly sweeps the leaves. This is an impossible task, for as soon as the leaves are moved they come back and the broom does not work very well either.

Vassie is unhappy and after much complaining and sweeping the Doll reappears and embraces her reassuringly. They play and dance together with a long white cloth that had been hanging from a tree. Before she realises it Vassie is wrapped tightly and dragged by the Doll toward the oven. She clings to her small doll which is ripped ferociously from her grip as she is thrust into the oven/ Pentagon. This represents deception and betrayal!

While she is in this dark space a storm rips through her consciousness tearing apart all that she has known. The darkness extinguishes all that has gone before. There is a feeling of intense loss, of never escaping the dark. An intense soundscape envelops the space and the voices are carried on the wind.
She hears the threatening presence of a wild pig\(^{76}\) screaming and circling around her. There are images of artwork projected on the trees at this time and as the storm dies down the darkness also evokes the formlessness of a beginning.

Vassie hears a faint voice in the distance and gradually fear is replaced by relief when she recognises the familiar voice of the Witch. She appears to the audience in silhouette glowing red beside the large gum trees. Vassie accepts her situation.

\[
\text{You, darkness, of whom I am born} \\
\text{I love you more than the flame} \\
\text{That limits the world} \\
\text{To the circle it illumines} \\
\text{And exudes all the rest}^{77}
\]

Witch comes forward and gently unwraps Vassie, gently speaking all the while

\[
\text{The poets have scattered you} \\
\text{A storm ripped through the stammering} \\
\text{I want to gather you up} \\
\text{In a vessel that makes you glad}
\]

Vassie gazes at the Witch as she concludes

\[
\text{I am the one who, barely noticed} \\
\text{Like a Shepard,} \\
\text{Comes up from behind...} \\
\text{One who dreams of making you complete,} \\
\text{And in a way completes herself}\^{78}
\]

\(\text{\textsuperscript{76}}\) The pig as an aspect of myth, and a creation of religious origin it is primarily an aspect of the archetypal feminine and of the dark mother capable of both nurturing and devouring it’s own. M Makinson Seeing through the pig: working with the Prima Materia 2006 - unpublished cit

\(\text{\textsuperscript{77}}\) from script, Adapted from Rainer Maria Rilke’s \textit{Book of Hours - Love Poems to God} Translated by Anita Barrow and Joanna Macy, \textit{The Book of Monastic Life} p 63 and \textit{The Book of Pilgrimage} p187

\(\text{\textsuperscript{78}}\) ibid p.117
They walk together through the fence of sticks into the darkness, the white cloth trailing behind. The audience are then led up a dimly lit path past the whispers on the wind where the sound of the scraping gong is heard once again signifying the presence of the Doll who stands beneath a large tree lit from below.

*a wind has blown the rain away and blown
the sky away and all the leaves away,
and the trees stand. I think I too have known
autumn too long*

There is an acceptance and an inevitability in her wistfully spoken words.

*and what have you to say,
wind wind wind –
did you love somebody
and have you the petal of somewhere in your heart
pinched from dumb summer?
O crazy daddy
of death dance cruelly for us to start

the last leaf whirling in the final brain
of air! Let us as we have seen see
doom’s integration.......a

wind has blown the rain
away and the leaves and sky and the
trees stand:

*the trees stand. The trees,
suddenly wait against the moon’s face*

This leads us to the final scene where the Witch stands on top of the ziggurat, her grave. Her time has come, she is ready to move on to her next phase, the girl is now a woman, a mother with child.

79 from On becoming a witch script -E.E.Cummings – *a wind has blown the rain away*
80 ibid. retrieved 2008
She has seen doom’s integration, the trees stand, enveloping, the three and the one as they stand against the moon’s face.

Vassie sings her beautiful song “I am a harmonious one, I am a clear singer, I am the one and the three, I know where I am in the dark.” accompanied by the musicians playing Udu and guitar.

The audience completes the circle and moves back to the fire at the entrance.

For myself the process and production of this event engaged with the high country of Yetholme in ways that could not have happened otherwise.

The story is a rite of passage, a small ceremony that links all of those who participated even in the smallest way to this place. It was a cyclical story of life, loss, transformation, love, death and rebirth.

Working in the bushland with the elements and with the local community we all faced challenges that made the staging much more difficult than if we were working in a theatre. The weather, lack of funding and time constraints did not deter the participants, whose enthusiasm was palpable.

By working with the place we were able to be “inside” it, to feel a part of country. Edward Casey in his theory of place and emplacement conceptualises place as ‘event’, which is constantly changing, and
subject to redefinition. He states that place has a “gathering power” and that “minimally, places gather things in their midst - places also gather experiences and histories, even languages and thoughts”.

The performance was a success because of the people involved and the sense of community, the sharing of creativity, time, food and the connections to each other and to the place. There were many audience members who were locals and others who came long distances to see the show and a few comments sometime afterwards indicated that the people were “engaged with all of their senses”. Audience members were affected by walking into the dark night on the slightly uneven ground, following each other through to the different sites, where at each one there was a new tableau, looking at the stars, listening to the music and the bush sounds, the visuals, the characters and the difficult text making this a rich, challenging and unusual experience.

One of the outcomes of this project was that Marie Makinson who is Jungian Physcotherapist and who participated in the final stages of the making of the event wrote and presented a paper with visuals about this performance at the Jung Institute in Brisbane and Guild of Analytical Psychology and Spirituality in London (G.A.P.S.). She talked of the necessity of having a ‘symbolic life’, the meaning of ceremony and the disruption of a spiritual identity with the land and that these were symptoms of trauma and disconnection. She also spoke of the need for rituals as a way of connecting and a need for a healing of the feminine.

The small book that documents the project is an extension of this ephemeral event. The symbol of the pentagon, the number 5 and particularly the ziggurat are dominant in my artwork at present. The ochres I use in painting are a tangible connection with the earth and the region. Creating a myth (inspired by many tales, eg: Hansel and Gretel, Red Riding Hood, Vassalisa the beautiful, Snow White, the anime films Howl’s Moving Castle, Spirited Away, writing my own poetry and adapting the poetry of Taliesen, Rilke and Cummings) linking my ancestry has allowed me to feel a connection to this country and to those who came before me and to create a sense of place. I have come to the conclusion that we don’t belong to a place, but that we are a part of it. The more I understand this link the more comfortable I feel.

81 E. Casey, ‘How to get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time: Phenomenological Prolegomena’. in Feld and Basso, op cit., 1996
Fig 19  Witch’s costume, linking her to the forest.
Chapter 4 Influences

There are many artists I have been, and continue to be influenced by. The abstraction of landscape and a paring down of images to simple forms is of particular interest to me and with Colin McCahon, Hossien Valamanesh, Judy Watson, Rosalie Gascoigne, Rover Thomas, Kimeo Tsuchiya and Shigeo Toya mentioned in this chapter I see a language I relate to.

Some years ago at a talk at the Art Gallery of NSW, Hossien Valamanesh spoke of the influence of the poet Rumi and how his writing inspired much of his work. This was confirming for me as I have been influenced in my thinking by poetry and literature since I was a young child.

The first time I saw Colin McCahon’s work in Auckland New Zealand I was overcome with emotion. I felt that here was an artist who had an intense relationship with where he lived and was able to portray in his paintings the intricacies and subtleties of relationship to country in an essential and simple form.

I use the word country as it encompasses so much more than ‘land’ or ‘landscape’, (See Ch 1 p 11) which can often only refer to what is seen or viewed. Philosopher Edward Casey suggests that landscape is a “cusp concept” and that there is “no landscape of space, though there is a landscape of place and region”. The word ‘environment’ seems to offer no insight into the subtlety and abstract nature of the relationship of this artist and his work.

The artist Hossien Valamanesh emigrated from Iran to Australia in 1973. In his artwork he deals with the common ground between cultures as well as aspects of displacement and travel. He examines the relationship of people to the natural world by transforming humble objects into a poetic visual language.

Essential to the work of both of these artists is an exploration of spiritual belief, philosophy and the written word. McCahon drew much inspiration from the Christian Bible and poetry of his contemporaries, and Valamanesh from the poetry and traditions of Sufism and in particular the 13th century Persian poet Rumi.

Recently I viewed Valamanesh’s work the lover circles his own heart where I was transfixed by the whirling cone shape. Through this installation, Valamanesh creates a meditative space allowing one to


contemplate the very nature of existence. This work draws its influence from the whirling dervishes and takes its title directly from the work of 13th century Sufi poet Rumi. *The lover circles his own heart*, follows the Sufi tradition of contemplating the complexity of existence and the all-consuming nature of love. In this work he allows a sense of wonder to be revived and explores the myth of creation itself, suspending rationality and reason as he works simply with the notions of love without logic.

```
We came whirling
Out of nothingness
Scattering stars
Like dust
It sunders
All attachments
Every atom
Turns bewildered
Beggars circle tables
Dogs circle carrion

The lover circles his own heart
```

---

Valamanesh’s continuous “use of elemental materials such as fire, clay, air and water inevitably carry associations with place, the fecundity of nature, the materiality of life, death and decay”. He, like McCahon finds an essential form by ridding the work of anything extraneous like the poetry that inspires them.

McCahon wanted his images to undulate in relation to the painting’s surface, and to radiate out so the background functioned like infinity, encompassing a painting as an active force so that the painting could escape the limits of its outer edges.

McCahon’s compartmentalising of the painting surface, and the way he abstracts the landscape and his frequent use of text as an overlay to these surfaces “forces us to view the world differently”.

Fig 21  North Otago landscape no. 2, 1967, by Colin McCahon.

This painting is one of a series of works, North Otago landscapes, which occupied Colin McCahon (1919–87) for most of 1967.

87 Marja Bloem and Martin Browne p 199
On examining North Otago landscape No 2, 1967 one can further appreciate McCahon’ intense response to landscape where

\[
\text{(d)etail has been all but eliminated from this painting and the landscape reduced to horizontal bands (or fields) of colour. These are designed to evoke an emotional and contemplative response. The specifics of locality are less important than the symbolic content embodied by the landscape. North Otago landscape no. 2 bears similarities to the works of Colour Field American abstract expressionists}.\]  

McCahon “spent his life refining his style until a mere line, a change in texture and colour, or the placement of a word could trigger in the viewer a memory of some place, scene or time.”

In his Gate series from the 1960’s the use of light spaces surrounded by dark forms could represent the fathomless depths into which we may all fall and for him as well his struggle with alcohol, there was always the added threat of the obstructions of the atomic bomb and finding a way through his periods of depression. In 2012 we now live with the real threat of global warming and the intense destruction of the natural world. I have a personal understanding of trying to manoeuvre a way through the despair one feels about this destruction on a daily basis.

Fig 22 Gate 15 (first Gate Series) 1961 Colin McCahon

\[88\] \text{http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/media/photo/north-otago-landscape-no-2-colin-mccahon 24.8.12}

\[89\] \text{Marja Bloem and Martin Browne p 199}
In his work *Longing, belonging* Hossien Valamanesh used black velvet for the illusion of charred remains and a fire burns on the Persian carpet, this he placed in the Mallee country of Central Australia forming a comparison between the sophisticated weaving and design of the carpet and Iranian culture to the stark natural surroundings of the Australian outback. This could be seen as a yearning for a life left behind or an acceptance and integration of his new surroundings. He created his place within the wide space of the surrounding country. The fire could be seen as representing the hearth, but as this fire burns it destroys the carpet it is placed upon. The surrounding country will claim the space as the fire burns and the carpet disappears.

Valamanesh’s use of shadow and time has an ephemeral quality that engages the senses and invites us to contemplate our own relationship with self, others and Country.

While his work is vastly different from my own, the similarity lies in that his installations are born from an attempt to find a sense of “insideness” in Australia, with the realisation that humans and the universe are inseparable. Both Valamanesh and McCahon encourage us to reflect on the fragility of life and look internally for universal truths and answers.

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90 Marja Bloem and Martin Browne p 199
In the late 1980’s I saw an exhibition in Brisbane called Japanese Ways Western Means, which included the artist, Kimio Tsuchiya who often used found driftwood to create elegant forms to confront the destruction of the natural environment. He uses three basic elements in his work. The material he gathers is the first, form is the second, and he uses what he calls primal forms. The third is composition, where he regards the principal of composition as the whole, as the collection of the parts. He works with dark and light, life and death.

![Fig 24 Horizon Line](driftwood_270x450x50cm_Kimio_Tsuchiya_1988)

Shigeo Toya paints the wood with ash to give it the appearance ancient fossils. Death and decay in a geologic sense are interconnected themes in his work along with the process of aging and its affects on surfaces. These simple forms, restrained aesthetic and preoccupation with life and death have been a foundational influence on my sculpture and artwork generally.

![Fig 25 Forest](wood_acrylic_ash_220x180x30cm_Shigeo_Toya_1986)
The artwork of Australian artist Judy Watson has a beauty and a sensibility that draws one into her work. Her connection to country is tangible. She says that

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{when you walk in that country} \\
&\text{the earth is beating pulsating heat, blood, heart} \\
&\text{things are hidden} \\
&\text{like the bones of the people who have been there before} \\
&\text{you are walking in their footprints}\end{align*}
\]

Judy Watson, 1990

Her use of ochres and water to create washes on canvas as an ethereal background for her delicate symbolism has influenced some of my past work. The simple aesthetic and deep symbolism of Australian artist Rover Thomas injects an authenticity and a deep knowing of country into his artwork. Depicting modern events in his expansive style, which can differ from many other east Kimberley artists.

Rosalie Gascoigne has said that art is about truth and honesty\(^2\) and that it is useless to assert what the heart does not believe.

![Fig 26 Top of the Morning](image)

| 4 panels: 53 x 130cm (overall size) | R. Gascoigne. 1994 |

In this work (fig 9) Gascoigne uses masonite, found retro-reflective roadsigns and formboard on craftboard to create a series of landscapes not unlike McCahon’s *Landscape theme and variations:* 1963.

This language of abstraction is a part of a broader conversation about defining the world in a poetic and simple form. Drawing on essential elements to create sensitive, powerful works that depict a connection to the world around us are what all of these artists have in common. There is a beauty in that understanding and something I will continue to seek.

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\(^2\) [http://www.abc.net.au/arts/headspace/tv/express/gascoigne/truth.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/arts/headspace/tv/express/gascoigne/truth.htm) 11.10.12
Chapter 5 - My work/ my process

In this chapter I will discuss the processes that I have used to make the paintings and drawings and there will be a brief discussion as to how this work aims to relate the paintings to a sense of “belonging”, to country and place.

During the process of this research I have collected ochres, coloured soils and tree resin and I have experimented with different techniques of making paint, using egg tempera and various other recipes from Maria Bazzi’s book *The Artist’s Methods and Materials*. I found different colours with the different minerals often just didn’t work and were unstable. The most convenient and effective method was to use PVA as a binder and water. See below (fig 27) examples of the range of colours achieved using ochres and the grinding process.

A few years ago I did a pastel-making workshop at the University of Newcastle Colour Lab where I made many coloured pastels, I was given recipes from the class, which I used during this process. The pastels made during that workshop have been used in the making of some of these works. (See fig 1, 3, 4.) These recipes have proved to be useful when integrated with the use of ochres.

All the works in the *On the Bones of my Ancestor* series have been made using mixed media including ground ochres, charcoal and pastels. In some cases these have been worked over a layer of plaster relief as in *On the Bones of my Ancestors I* (fig 29:1).

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These works *On the bones of my ancestor series (Fig 29)* were made after making a number of photographic images of passages and steps at a number of locations. Physically I went deep onto the earth as in image Fig 28:1 & 2. These images were taken inside caves which was for me a tangible way of trying to find a contact point with the rocks and minerals of that place and was like a metaphor for going deep into the mother, inside the womb of the mother. This also references some of the dominant themes of the performance *On becoming a witch*.
The tunnels were a transition point as were the steps, leading down and up. (see Fig 29:5-6) The shadows on the steps and the snow were yet another transition acknowledging the dark and the light.

The painting On the Bones of my Ancestors (Fig 29:1) shows a section of the symbol of the cross from the headstones I discovered at Goolagong NSW and is one of a series of works produced at this time. Following further research I realised just how pivotal the image of the ziggurat had become to my work. Not only does it function symbolically as the mountain, the point of contact between heaven and earth, this motif also denotes the self, and the use of this symbol has brought to my work a sense of place, creating very real connections between myself, my forebears and the place in which we all find ourselves. These ideas have been informed by my current research and bring together the ideas of Casey, Relph and Blowby, which have provided a theoretical underpinning for these works.

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95 M.L. Von Franz The interpretation of Fairy Tales revised ed. Shambhala Boston USA 1993 p. 129
96 Edward S Casey Between Geography and Philosophy: What does it mean to be in the Place-World? Yi-Fu Tuan Cosmos and Hearth( 1996) p 3
Fig 29:1  On the Bones of my Ancestors i.
1200mm x 750mm  mixed media on canvas              C. McC   2010

Fig 29:2  On the Bones of my Ancestors ii
1200mm x 750mm  mixed media on canvas              C. MCC   2010
Fig 29:3  On the Bones of my Ancestors iii
1200mm x 750mm  mixed media on canvas              C. McC   2010

Fig 29:4  On the Bones of my Ancestors iv
1200mm x 750mm  mixed media on canvas              C. McC   2010
I extended the theme by making a small 3D Ziggurat of fine sticks from snow gums found on the property. This was very fragile with many open sections. I saw this as representing the fragility of life, the Ziggurat also being a symbol of death. These were then photographed and using the photographs I drew a series of charcoal images. I then drew the same images with ink and sticks making very fine and fragile lines. These were extended even further by remaking the images from the sticks, these are hung on the wall and create shadows, making a complex series of lines.

Fig 30  Charcoal drawings on Fabriano paper  560mm x 760mm ea  2012

Taking the shadow yet another step I then made a series of charcoal and pastel images of the shadow of the ziggurat. I tried gluing the paper onto canvas and making a wash with ochres to give each one a different ground. The gluing was not very successful and I have now drawn a series of five of these images on Arches paper. (See fig 31)

Fig 31  one foot in the dark  2012
Charcoal and pastel on Arches paper 560 x 760mm
Looking back over the work made throughout the process of this research has been an interesting exercise.
During this period I self-published three books, exhibited two large bodies of work and was involved in several group shows.

The first book, ‘A Life Story’ is a photographic documentation of the process of life and death. Whilst having coffee at a local café I gathered a number of bright red vine leaves and stalks. Later fashioning them into small vessels I placed them beside a window. Over a period of 12 months I watched and documented their decay and final disintegration. The second book ‘Words tumble from the trees’ is a literal depiction of the title with poems I had written on long torn strips of joined paper. I placed these in large snow gums and they cascaded down from the limbs. At this time I was developing the performance work ‘On becoming a witch’ and the trees and the forest were a great inspiration. The third book is a documentation of the performance work and includes text from the script. It is titled ‘On becoming a witch’.

Exhibitions

*Dirtworks*  Japanese Garden Gallery, Cowra 2007  solo

*Small Works*  Brunswick Street Gallery, Melbourne 2008

*Hildegard*  Church of Christ Contemporary Art Space, Gosford 2008

*On becoming a witch*  Bathurst Memorial Entertainment Centre, Bathurst 2009  solo

*Out of the Ordinary*  Bathurst Health Service 2010

*Healing Space*  Bathurst Health Service 2011

*On becoming a witch*  Performance installation Yetholme 2011
Again the main thrust of these works has been the desire to investigate the idea of how one becomes connected to place and to express my understandings of how everything is interconnected. This has been made evident once again by the choice of materials, emphasising abstract simplicity and by using such a strong and symbolically resonate image.

I have made a considerable amount of work over this time that has not been presented in an exhibition and I consider some of my more successful works. These are preliminary works and may be considered “processes in action”, created whilst wandering, in conversation with the earth around me. My work is a constant process, intuitive and unanticipated, but informed by my background research. The process is mainly about working with the materials and unconsciously going forth into the unknown. The creating of the work is where my understandings are realised. Although I often do not fully understand the work until some time after the making process, this can sometimes take months and years. I trust my process.

This has also been a time to pause and reflect, to take the time to play with the materials, to be in the landscape and observe the cycles of life, which are constantly around us everyday. Through the making process I have come to know the soils, the makeup of the rocks around me and the geography of the places I have lived and by allowing my unconscious art making process to develop naturally I realize that they are a part of what makes me who I am. This research paper has been a wonderful opportunity to review the project originally conceived over five years ago and see that I have managed to write about some of the abstract concepts that I first envisaged.
Conclusion

*To contemplate country is to gaze upon the self* \(^{99}\),

Linking myself to place seemed to be a very important task that I set myself. This research examines how the physicality of the natural environment affects who we are and how we respond to this environment. Investigating how place exists in us, we exist in place and how this impacts on our presence in place. I explore the very structure of the soil and how this links to our physical makeup. For example the minerals in the soils contain all of the minerals in our bodies, the soils are mostly weathered rocks and the most common element in our bodies and in the earth is water.

Feelings of rootlessness were made manifest by painting maps with the soils and ochres I found in the many areas I visited and where I now reside. Using this soil and charcoal allowed me to connect to the colours and minerals and country in a very tangible sense. I discuss how the physical and chemical properties can influence our activities and our lives.

Discovering the graves of my mother’s ancestors at Goolagong cemetery during this research was a pivotal point in my work and thinking. The ziggurat has been a recurring theme in my artwork since that time linking my ancestry to feel a sense of connection to this country.

Exploring the notion that place has a gathering action, as explained by Edward Casey,\(^{100}\) that narratives of collective history and personal experiences can often unfold in language, names, stories, myths and rituals. I created a contemporary myth about life and death, drawn from many old stories, fairy tales and different cultures. This manifested in a public performance, On becoming a witch, which was held at Yetholme NSW. This performance allowed for an experiential immersion into country by all of those present. This included the performers, technicians, students and audience, thus relating this work to the Buddhist and Celtic notions of “territories of the voice”.\(^{101}\)

My artwork reflects this journey into the depths; this at times has not been an easy journey. It has taken me to very dark places. Reflecting about ‘belonging’ in this country in which it seems I have always felt an ‘outsider’ has been a struggle but has led to a glimpse of understanding about my place in this country.


\(^{100}\) E. Casey, ‘How to get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time: Phenomenological Prolegomena’. in Feld and Basso, op cit., 1996

\(^{101}\) Paul Devereau, *The sacred Place—the ancient origin of holy and mystical sites* Cassell & Co London 2000 p.15
Examining what it means to feel ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ a place, as cited by E. Casey, and how some places are rich and thick, I have come to the conclusion that the land indigenises us relative to how long we live in an area, be it 5 years or 50,000.

I feel comfortable now with the understanding that we do not ‘belong’ to a place, but that we are a part of all of it. This includes all of the places we have been and all of these places are a part of us, deep in our cells and our psyche – digging a bit deeper.
Fig 34 Ziggurat series 1-5  snow gum sticks, glue

Fig 35 detail Ziggurat 5 sticks  C.Mc 2012
Fig 36 Dig a bit deeper – earth pigments, charcoal on canvas  2008 - 2012
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