ARCHETYPES and LAND: SPIRITUAL BELONGING

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ARCHETYPES and LAND: SPIRITUAL BELONGING

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# Table of Contents

Certificate of authorship.  vii  
Table of figures. viii  
Acknowledgement.  xiii  
Prologue.  xiv  
Abstract.  xv  
**Introduction.**  1.  
Where have I come from?  1.  
Research QUESTIONS and AIMS.  9.  
Significance of the Study.  11.  
**Chapter 1 The Book of Flow.**  13.  
Chapter 1 is on methodology and methods. It outlines the dominant processes and formats that I will be using to interpret my collaboration and dialogue with a site-specific place.  
On Methodology and Methods.  13.  
Methods.  18.  
Site related works.  18.  
Archetypal symbols.  18.  
Text.  18.  
Palimpsest.  18.  
Photographic documentation.  19.  
The use of cloth, stitching and binding.  19.  
The results and processes of printmaking, working in collaboration with the environment.  20.  
**Chapter 2 The Book of Roots and Branches.**  29.  
Chapter 2 outlines a broad range of techniques, process, materials and philosophies that land-based artists have shown in their work. This enable me to locate the context of my own work within a spectrum of contemporary arts practice.  
On Artists, Strategies and Influences.  29.
Aerial and abstracted view/perspective, use of energy lines, textures and movement. 29.

Collaboration of artist and process, artist and environment, active participation with the environment and an engagement that is bodily wearing and internally strenuous. 37.

Asemic writing, patterns and irregularities of shapes and forms. 56.

The mystical and the Spiritual. 58.

Photography and Organic forms. 64.

Conclusion. 69.

**Chapter 3 The Book of Seeds.** 70.

Chapter 3 focuses on ideas about Spirituality and the Archetypal symbols used in my work.

Indigenous Australian Spirituality. 70.

On Land/Country. 71.

Spiritual belonging. 72.

Ecology and spirituality. 74.

Experiencing Spirituality. 75.

Archetypal Symbols used in my work. 78.

The Circle 79.

On the use of number seven 83.

The snake or serpent 84.

Water 87.

The tree 94.

Axis Mundi 101.

Stones 101.

Binding and stitching. 106.

Conclusion. 107.

**Chapter 4 The Book of Clouds.** 108.

Chapter 4 analyses the issues around the problem of ‘landscape’ and its representations.

On the problem of ‘landscape’ and its representations. 108.

On the idea of the ‘materiality’ of landscape, how this can influence its representations. 120.

Conclusion. 125.
Chapter 5 The Book of Fractals.  126.
Chapter 5 discusses ideas about nature and the sublime.

On Ideas About Nature.  126.
On ideas about the Sublime.  136.
On the relationship between the Microcosm and the Macrocosm.  139.
Pages from The Book of Sand.  142.
Conclusion.  146.

Chapter 6 The Book of Lunar Cycles.  147.
Chapter 6 is about place and space concepts central to land-based art including perspective, phenomenology, cultural experiences, the Australian bush and ecological philosophy.

On Place and Space.  147.
Place as national Identity.  148.
Place defined by language and differing cultural perspectives.  153.
Place as a personal attachment.  154.
Place as spiritual belonging for non-Indigenous Australian peoples - self and memory.  155.
On Space.  156.
Place and space - personal and cultural experiences.  158.
Place as ecology, biodiversity, conservation and sustainability.  161.
On Experience.  164.
On time.  166.
Conclusion.  171.

Chapter 7 The Book of Growth and Decay.  172.
Chapter 7 concludes the thesis.

On Conclusion(s).  172.

Reference List.  177.
Notes on Appendices.  182.
Appendix 1.  
*By the Creek*, Gigs Art Gallery

Appendix 2.  
*The Seven Books of Genesis*

Appendix 3.  
*Archetypes and Land: Spiritual Belonging*, HR Gallop Gallery, CSU, Wagga Wagga

Appendix 4.  
*Archetypes and Land: Spiritual Belonging*, Wangaratta Art Gallery

Appendix 5.  
*Archetypes and Land: Spiritual Belonging*, Art Space Wodonga
Certificate of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and to the best of my knowledge and belief, understand that it contains no material previously published or written by another person, nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at Charles Sturt University or any other educational institution, except where due acknowledgement is made in the thesis [or dissertation, as appropriate]. Any contribution made to the research by colleagues with whom I have worked at Charles Sturt University or elsewhere during my candidature is fully acknowledged.

I agree that this thesis be accessible for the purpose of study and research in accordance with normal conditions established by the Executive Director, Library Services, Charles Sturt University or nominee, for the care, loan and reproduction of thesis, subject to confidentiality provisions as approved by the University.

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Date: August 2018
Table of Figures

Fig.1: Bärbel Ullrich Under Mount Bogong Photograph

Fig.2: Bärbel Ullrich #1 & #95 From 100 Prayer Mats for Gaia. 1999-2001. Mixed media on canvas. Each piece 78cm x 48cm.

Fig.3: Bärbel Ullrich from the series The Unfinished Universe. 2003 - 2004. Mixed media on paper. 38.5cm x 28cm.

Fig4: Bärbel Ullrich from the series Sacred Land 1-20. 2009. Mixed Media on paper. 77cm x 56cm.

Fig.5: Bärbel Ullrich from the series The Unfinished Universe. 2003 - 2004. Mixed media on paper. 38.5cm x 28cm.

Fig.6: Bärbel Ullrich collagraph plate, 2016.

Fig.7: Bärbel Ullrich photograph at THE SITE -collaboration with nature

Fig.8: Bärbel Ullrich photograph at THE SITE -collaboration with nature

Fig.9: Bärbel Ullrich photograph at THE SITE -collaboration with nature

Fig.10: Bärbel Ullrich photograph at THE SITE -collaboration with nature

Fig.11: Bärbel Ullrich photograph at THE SITE -collaboration with nature

Fig.12: Bärbel Ullrich Earth Print Mixed Media on paper, 53x53cm, 2016.

Fig.13: Bärbel Ullrich from the Seven rocks series, mixed media and print on paper, 53x53cm, 2016-2017.

Fig.14: Bärbel Ullrich from the Seven Rocks series, mixed media and print on paper, 53x53cm, 2016-2017.

Fig.15: John Olsen, Lake Eyre, Channel Country, 2011, watercolour and coloured chalk, 161.0x120.0cm

Fig.16: Bärbel Ullrich, page 4 from the Book of Creation, 2017, mixed media, sticks & print on calico and muslin, 350x180cm

Fig.17: Fred Williams, Strath Creek Falls VII, 1979, oil on canvas, 152.8x182.6cm.

Fig.18: John Wolseley, Forty-eight days in Tnorula – Gosses Bluff, Northern Territory, 1980, watercolour, charcoal and pencil on canvas, 259x315cm

Fig.19 John Wolseley, Forty-eight days in Tnorula – Gosses Bluff, Northern Territory, 1980, watercolour, charcoal and pencil on canvas, 259x315cm (DETAIL)

Fig.20: John Wolseley, 2015, 101 insect life stories no.13: Ur-Beetle, relief print from found wood, chine-colle over watercolour, edition 20, 38cm x 33cm

Fig.21: John Wolseley, 2016, 101 Insect Life Stories No.7: Whipstick Cerambycid Beetle, relief print from found wood, chine-colle over watercolour, edition 10, 18cm x 25cm
Fig.22: Bärbel Ullrich, page 52 from The Book of Sand, (DETAIL) 2017 ongoing, mixed media on paper, each page 19cmx28cm.

Fig.23: Bronwyn Rees, Motherland, 2013, etching on used steel 56 x 72 cm

Fig.24: Bronwyn Rees, Into the Woods, 2013, etching, 12 x 34 cm

Fig.25: Bronwyn Rees, Blue Wishing Tree, 2014, 3 plate colour etching 50 x 50cm

Fig.26: Bärbel Ullrich from the Earth Print series, 2016, mixed media print, 53x53cm

Fig.27: Bärbel Ullrich from the Earth Print series, 2016, mixed media print, each print 53x53cm. Installation at the HR Gallop Gallery, CSU campus, Wagga Wagga, 10 May -2 June 2017. See Appendix 3.

Fig.28: Winsome Jobling, Eclipse, 2009, drypoint on handmade paper from recycled mooring rope of Manilla hemp and chine-collé, 50x40cm.

Fig.29: Winsome Jobling, Breathe 2, 2012, monoprint drypoint on handmade papers from abaca and cotton, with watermark and stencilled cotton pulp, 61x64cm.

Fig.30: Bärbel Ullrich Photograph at THE SITE

Fig.31: Winsome Jobling, The Wet, (DETAIL) 2006, etching and handmade paper, chine-collé from banana and sugar palm, sedge and cotton, 33.5x23.5cm.

Fig.32: Bärbel Ullrich from the Earth Print series, 2016, mixed media print, 53x53cm

Fig.33: John Davis, Evolution of a Fish: Traveller. 1990.

Fig.34: Bärbel Ullrich, page 61 from The Book of Sand, (DETAIL) 2017 ongoing, mixed media on paper, each page 19cmx28cm.

Fig.35: Bärbel Ullrich The Book of Bark, Rocks, Sticks and Ferns, 2016-2017, mixed media, sticks & print on calico and muslin, H180cmx W53cm variable.

Fig.36: Bärbel Ullrich The Book of Bark, Rocks, Sticks and Ferns, (DETAIL) 2016-2017, mixed media, sticks & print on calico and muslin, H180cmx W53cm variable.

Fig.37: John Davis, installing Unrolled, 1973, at the Mildura Sculptural triennial.

Fig.38: GW Bot Bent Gylph – homage to Corot, 2017, watercolour and graphite on colombe paper, 106x200cm

Fig.39: GW Bot GW Bot Glyphs and Shadows, 2015, linocut and watercolour on BFK paper, 53x173 cm

Fig.40: Judy Watson Internal Landscape, 1993, synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 189.5x127.3cm cm (irreg)

Fig.41: Bärbel Ullrich page 1 from the Book of Creation, 2017, mixed media, sticks & print on calico and muslin, 3.5x1.8m

Fig.42: Djang’kawu Story 1 by Mawalan 1 Marika, 1959, natural pigments on bark, 191.8 x 68.9 cm. Art Gallery of New South Wales
Fig.43: James Farley, *Rambunctious Garden*, 2017, lumen print, 2017.

Fig.44: Bärbel Ullrich, from *The Seven Books of Tears*, (DETAIL), 2016-2017, mixed media, H800cm x W variable.

Fig.45: Renata Buziak, *Biochrome No1*, 2004, various sizes

Fig.46: Bärbel Ullrich from the *Fern Print* series, 2016, mixed media print, 53x53cm

Fig.47: Bärbel Ullrich from the *Earth Print* series, (DETAIL), 2017, mixed media print, 53x53cm

Fig.48: Bärbel Ullrich *Earth Print* mixed media and print on paper, 53x53cm, 2016.

Fig.49: Bärbel Ullrich *The Book of Creation*, page 3, mixed media and print on calico H350cmxW180cm, 2017.

Fig.50: Bärbel Ullrich *The Book of Creation*, page 2, mixed media and print on calico H350cm x W180cm, 2017.

Fig.51: Bärbel Ullrich Photograph on THE SITE

Fig.52: Bärbel Ullrich Photograph on THE SITE

Fig.53: Bärbel Ullrich Photograph

Fig.54: Bärbel Ullrich *The Book of Bark and Ferns*, 2016-2017, mixed media and print on canvas. Each unit approx H180cm W32cm

Fig.55: Bärbel Ullrich Photograph of Canvas in the creek flowing down from THE SITE

Fig.56: Bärbel Ullrich Photograph of WATER from the creek flowing down from THE SITE

Fig.57: Bärbel Ullrich *Earth Altar Cloth* produced on THE SITE, 2016-2017, mixed media on canvas, installed on the floor, length 300cm x 180cm.

Fig.58: Bärbel Ullrich *The Book of Scarification* 55 x 55cm variable. Mixed media and collagraph print. 2015.

Fig.59: Bärbel Ullrich Photograph of Ferns next to the creek flowing down from THE SITE

Fig.60: Bärbel Ullrich *The Book of Ferns, Moss and Lichen* (detail) 55 x 55cm variable. Mixed media and collagraph print. 2015.

Fig.61: Bärbel Ullrich *The Book of Ferns, Moss and Lichen* 55 x 55cm variable. Mixed media and collagraph print. 2015.

Fig.62: Bärbel Ullrich from the *Seven Books of Tears* (detail) mixed media on paper and fabric. H800cm W variable.

Fig.63: Bärbel Ullrich from the *Seven Books of Tears* (detail) mixed media on paper and fabric. H800cm W variable.
Fig. 64: Bärbel Ullrich from the *Seven Books of Tears* (detail) mixed media on paper and fabric. H800 cm W variable.

Fig. 65: Harding, *Women’s Mysteries*, 43.

Fig. 67: Bärbel Ullrich from *The Sacred Moon Tree* series 50x50cm Collagraph print with mixed media. 2015.

Fig. 68: Bärbel Ullrich from *The Sacred Moon Tree* series 50x50cm Collagraph print with mixed media. 2015.

Fig. 69: Bärbel Ullrich from *The Sacred Moon Tree* series 50x50cm Collagraph print with mixed media. 2015.

Fig. 70: Bärbel Ullrich Photograph of *Stones on THE SITE*

Fig. 71: Bärbel Ullrich Photograph of *Stones on THE SITE*

Fig. 72: Bärbel Ullrich from the *Seven rocks* series, mixed media and print on paper, 53x53cm, 2016-2017.

Fig. 73: Bärbel Ullrich from the *Seven rocks* series, mixed media and print on paper, 53x53cm, 2016-2017.

Fig. 74: Bärbel Ullrich from the *Seven rocks* series, mixed media and print on paper, 53x53cm, 2016-2017.

Fig. 75: Bärbel Ullrich from the *Seven rocks* series, mixed media and print on paper, 53x53cm, 2016-2017.

Fig. 76: Bärbel Ullrich *Earth Print* mixed media and print on paper, 53x53cm, 2016.

Fig. 77: Bärbel Ullrich *Earth Print* mixed media and print on paper, 53x53cm, 2016.

Fig. 78: Detail of canvas left out in the environment with black oxide, which became part of the series shown below.

Fig. 79: Bärbel Ullrich From *The Book of Bark, Rocks, Sticks and Ferns* (detail) mixed media and print on canvas, 7 panels H180cm x W50cm, 2016-2017.

Fig. 80: Bärbel Ullrich *The Book of Bark, Rocks, Sticks and Ferns* mixed media and print on canvas, 7 panels H180cm x W50cm, 2016-2017.

Fig. 81: Bärbel Ullrich *Earth Prints* mixed media and print on paper, 53x53cm, 2016.

Fig. 82: Bärbel Ullrich. Process documentation – paper left out in the environment with earth and oxide.

Fig. 83: Bärbel Ullrich. Process documentation – paper left out in the environment with earth and oxide.

Fig. 84: Bärbel Ullrich *Earth Print* mixed media and print on paper, 53x53cm, 2016.

Fig. 85: Bärbel Ullrich From the *Seven Rocks* series, mixed media and print on paper, 53x53cm, 2016-2017.
Fig. 86: Bärbel Ullrich photograph of environmental interaction on THE SITE

Fig. 87: Bärbel Ullrich photograph of environmental interaction on THE SITE

Fig. 88: Bärbel Ullrich EARTH PRINT 53x53cm mixed media on paper 2016

Fig. 89: Bärbel Ullrich EARTH PRINT 53x53cm mixed media on paper 2016

Fig. 90: Bärbel Ullrich Earth Altar Cloth 2016-2017, mixed media on canvas, 300cm x 180cm

Fig. 91: Bärbel Ullrich Photograph on THE SITE (in a hollow tree trunk)

Fig. 92: Bärbel Ullrich Photograph at THE SITE.

Fig. 93: Bärbel Ullrich detail from The Seven Books of Tears, mixed media, H 800cm W variable, 2016-2017.

Fig. 94: Bärbel Ullrich detail from The Seven Books of Tears, mixed media, H 800cm W variable, 2016-2017.

Fig. 95: Bärbel Ullrich The Book of Sand Installation View, HR Gallop Gallery, Wagga Wagga, May 2017. Each unit H19cm x W28cm x variable plus details.

Fig. 96: Bärbel Ullrich photograph at THE SITE.

Fig. 97: Bärbel Ullrich photograph at THE SITE.

Fig. 98: Bärbel Ullrich from The Seven Books of Tears, 2016-2017, mixed media, H800cm x W variable.

Fig. 99: Bärbel Ullrich photograph at THE SITE.

Fig. 100: Bärbel Ullrich Seven Months, time lapse photography, digitally presented. 2016-2017.

Fig. 101: Bärbel Ullrich Photograph of WATER from the creek flowing down from THE SITE
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I acknowledge the Duduroa and the Jaitmathang people, the traditional custodians of the land on which I have the privilege of living and producing artworks from, and I pay my respects to the Elders. past, present and future.
Prologue

I left my studio armed with seven pieces of paper and a jar of black oxide. I proceeded up the hill, out of the gate and up the paddock past the dam and then past the tank.

I got to the first creek crossing. Why didn’t I wear my gumboots? Wet socks, no matter. I kept going up and up on an old resurrected logging track. Puffed I reached the Site, the junction of two creeks separating 3 steep hills.

I drank from the creek. I proceeded to my special area and carefully laid out the paper. I collected stones, sticks, leaves and bark. I placed these on the paper and then sprinkled the oxide over them. They were to stay out in the environment and the weather to receive the imprints from nature.

I was collaborating with land to make images, relinquishing total control over the final work to be completed in the studio. I clambered down the bank to get to the junction of the two creeks. Two large trees had fallen down across this bank seemingly to block my way. I crawled over them with physical discomfort.

I walked into the creek and under the giant tree ferns to get to the large rock that marked this junction. Brushing away a small amount of moss and some blackberry vines, I noticed that the markings were still present. I did not want to disturb the rock any more or the process of nature.

I left that place and back up the steep bank. I found a place to sit and wonder. There was no horizon, only steep slopes and impenetrable bush around me. I had to look straight up to see the sky. I contemplated the flux and energy of nature, of this place. Looking at the ground, I noticed complex patterns and rhythms, the microcosm. Chaos and order, chance or design.

A cloud momentarily passed over the sun. It was afternoon and the shadows were lengthening. Aware of my wet feet and pants, the scratches on my arms from blackberry bushes and the sounds of the creeks and the smells of the peppermints.

I was spiritually at peace, emerged and engulfed in and by nature, mindful of place and space. Suddenly this mood changed, I stood up alert, the hairs on the back of my neck bristled, heart pounding, I was suddenly not welcome here.

And then
Abstract
My proposed area of research is the representation of land within a specific area or place to which I have a deep sense of connection or belonging.

Fig.1: Bärbel Ullrich Under Mount Bogong Photograph

I have aimed to depict the landscape as a manifestation of the creative force, that comes from the notion of Gaia where Earth is a living being, and, as such imbue it with a sense of spirituality. My work intends to reflect the need for a spiritual shift in our attitude to the environment as the unity of existence and the interconnectedness of life on the planet is the basis of my philosophy. I argue that there is a need to move away from the European pictorial conventions of representation of landscape which embody the dualistic philosophy that humans are not only separate from, but above nature and the non-human world.

I have focused on the microcosm where images reflect the particularities of place but also have universal qualities. As such, an important element in my research has been the use and meaning of particular archetypal symbols drawn from both Christian and Pre or non-Christian mythologies. The predominant symbols that I have used in my art making are the circle and the axis mundi, the symbolism of the centre with other symbols such as the elements; earth, fire, water and air.

My work has been exploring a new personal visual language that is in homage to Mother Earth, the Great Goddess and the Gaia principle. It will contribute to the current changes and ‘shift’ in representations of land from the past ideologies and cultural attitudes imbedded in the Australian landscape ‘tradition’. This includes researching, discussing and acknowledging new
philosophies and ideas about nature which profess the need for a respectful, material and relational participation in the world.

While respecting Indigenous Australian culture and spirituality and acknowledging past histories, I have aimed to find a personal sense of belonging to place and a new personal language of representing land that is not Indigenous Australian but also breaks with and decolonises Western landscape tradition.

The aim of the work is to show the primacy of land as sacred, the interconnection of all life on the planet and the evolution of our imagination towards inwardness and connection with a greater whole – a move away from our outward anthropocentric view and intense preoccupation with the human towards a focus on the world and environment where the earth is seen as the primary symbol of ‘God’ or Goddess’ – the divinity, the transcendent.¹

The methodology includes the development of imagery and concepts by art practice and research, experimentation with materials and techniques. I aim to imbue the work with mysticism and a sense of the fragility of our eco system and the delicacy and complexity of the Australian landscape. I have worked in collaboration with nature/land where I have created images from and with/within the landscape rather than of the landscape.

I have used the artists book concept utilising mixed media and printmaking on paper and fabric to create/develop a body of exhibition work informed by research of the above and re-presented from a personal interpretation of images of land in my site-specific environment.

¹ The natural world is the primal place where human beings experienced the transcendent for many centuries before the advent of Christianity.
INTRODUCTION

Where have I come from?

My artwork has dominantly been concerned with the landscape, whether within a confined urban environment (garden), or, extended to include the wider countryside and bush lands. The landscape has been an escape, a retreat, the subject/object of and place for contemplation. From childhood, the bush has been a secret garden, a physical landscape and the landscape of the mind, which germinated and nourished my inner being.

As a land-based artist I maintain that the word ‘landscape’ is not only inadequate but is laden and contaminated with historical ideologies and associations.

As my experience as a researcher I have found that the landscape tradition paints a single view – this view is framed and contained within the picture format created by the use of perspective. As Robert Hughes states:

It [perspective] is an ideal view, imagined as being seen by a one-eyed, motionless person who is clearly detached from what he sees. It makes a god of the spectator, who becomes the person on whom the whole world converges, the Unmoved Onlooker. Perspective gathers the visual facts and stabilises them; it makes of them a unified field. The eye is clearly distinct from that field, as the brain is separate from the world it contemplates. Despite its apparent precision, perspective is a generalisation about experience.

Early Australian landscapes generally depict man controlling and dominating nature. The natural world is represented as a usable ‘resource’ for economic growth to be exploited for the short-term advantage of humankind. These paintings generally represent a view or a space that is suitable for habitation or farming, I fondly call these works ‘real estate’ paintings. Examples include Joseph Lycett’s Inner view of Newcastle c.1880 and View with Cattle in Foreground c.1818.

I agree with Deborah Bird Rose as she maintains that the very term ‘landscape’ is problematic in that “the term ‘landscape’ signals a distance between the place, feature or monument and the person or society which considers its existence.”

I have moved away from the traditional single ‘view’ of landscape, the master narrative in the Australian (European) landscape tradition. My work has aimed to include a broader and more complex discourse about the depiction of land and our relationship to the environment. With the use of collage and mixed media, the surface became more complex and layered allowing for the interplay of ideas, images, materials and techniques.

The space in the work was also disconnected to ‘the view’ or any notion of perspective as it is an overlay and interplay of layers. The focus shifts within the work where the scale of the images shift from the macro to the micro, from the particular to the universal, from the natural to the cultural, from illusion to abstraction, from realism to stylisation, from denotative to

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symbolic. Small areas or fragments allude to a larger environment. It is this process of working that I have continued to develop in my studio-based practice.

The research for the project entitled *100 Prayer Mats for Gaia*, exhibited in 2002, enabled me to identify five separate yet interconnected ideas/concepts/concerns that I have continued to extend and develop to address new areas of research and knowledge.

The images below represent two examples of work from this project and I have identified five areas of interest/concern from the research which continue to inform my work in the present.

Fig.2: Bärbel Ullrich #1 & #95 From *100 Prayer Mats for Gaia*. 1999-2001. Mixed media on canvas. Each piece 78cm x 48cm.
1. Images of landscape are not natural but cultural.

Landscape painting is a cultural construct and is laden with ideologies relating to people’s/culture’s perceptions of the land and their relationship to the environment.

Landscapes are culture before they are nature; constructs of the imagination projected onto wood, water and rock.  

The above quotation acknowledges that images of land are cultural constructs rather than ‘natural’ images drawn from the environment and therefore express or represent the ideologies of the time in that they are produced.

Paul Collins in his book *God’s Earth* believes that our culture needs a deep spiritual change and a profound change of attitude to the natural world as nature is valued as subservient to the needs of humanity. I agree with his belief that we need to become ecologically aware and conscious of our human relationship to the natural world. He believes that spirituality and ecology are not mutually exclusive but actually belong together and increasingly need the support of each other.  

As such, in this thesis I aim to explore how new theoretical frameworks around ecology, ecofeminism and environmental humanities can reassess our relationship to nature/environment/land.

2. The earth as a living organism – the Gaia hypothesis

How does this idea of Gaia affect our way of relating to and viewing the earth, ourselves and our relationship with other living things both spiritually and economically? Our future attitudes and cultural practices? Could this idea create the spiritual change that Collins believes is necessary?

The Gaia hypothesis is an alternative to that pessimistic view which sees nature as a primitive force to be subdued and conquered.  

The new science of Gaia is called geophysiology. It is the idea of the Earth as a kind of living organism, something able to regulate its climate and composition so as always to be comfortable for the organisms that inhabit it. The idea of Mother Earth or, as the Greeks called her, Gaia, has been widely held throughout history and has been the basis of a belief that coexists with the great religions.

The universal and sacred Great Mother is at the heart and soul of all creation. It is from her womb that all life is birthed and it is to her that all life returns at death, like the cycles of the moon and the seasons of vegetation in eternal return. The life force that she signifies is an immanent power contained within the sphere of nature rather than the transcendent external force of Western belief.

The concept of Gaia where the earth has a consciousness of which everything is a part of is not in conflict with Indigenous Australian Culture. The belief system is based in the sacred relationships of the cycles and rhythms of nature that reflect the story of the earth’s

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metaphysical creation. Gaia, like the Dreaming “has continuity with the past back to the origins of life and extends into the future as long as life persists.” 11

For the Indigenous Australians:

the earth is the centre of the intelligence of creation; a symbol and memory of the primordial Dreaming; a receptacle of all seeds cosmic, metaphysical, and biological; the nurturer of all life, both visible and invisible. By listening to the songs and energies of the earth the Aborigines hear the voices of the universal dreaming.12

3. Restoring the balance

In our materialistic culture nature is separated from human consciousness, it is inanimate and mechanical.13 Money and profit are valued more than our natural resources, land, flora and fauna. There is the belief that:

We have lost the roots which binds us to the earth. We have lost the sense of our dependence upon the earth and our responsibility in the maintenance of the natural order - the perpetuation of the balance. We are the caretakers of the future. 14

Paul Collins maintains that this mechanistic view of nature may have achieved a great deal for science and still predominates scientific thinking today, but it sees nature as “a vast, inanimate storehouse of useable ‘resources’ that are there to be exploited for the short-term advantage of humankind.”15 It is this attitude that has brought us to the environmental catastrophe that we face today.

I agree with Collins when he says that:

We have simply lost the ability to see nature as an interlocking whole. We are entirely focused on the economic value of specific segments of the environment. We have expelled from our mental horizon any sense of iconographic mystery in the natural world.16

This idea is also supported by Ross Mellick who says:

One of the consequences of the commodification of the world in our time is the disconnection of the human from other living things and the draining away of the numinous dimensions of the world. The art experience, almost alone, stands against this process by opening us up to the experience of the interconnectedness of all things through the possibilities of thought and the twin wings of imagination and understanding.17

I believe in the notion of interconnectedness and an understanding of the unified character of the universe. This idea is supported by Suzi Gablik, who also believes that we need a new world view to restore balance, a new belief system that needs to evolve to expound a new

15 Collins, God’s Earth, 120.
16 Collins, God’s Earth, 213.
integrated relationship between humans and nature. Gablik believes that the issue of what beliefs we hold is crucial; a new belief system, if accepted by enough people, will have the effect of stabilising the relations of dominance.

Our belief and dependence on external material and economic values is beginning to be questioned and we are now experiencing a shift in our collective unconscious towards a renewed spiritualism and a fellowship with the earth. Tim Flannery also maintains that it is not so much our technology, but what we believe, that will determine our fate.

4. The idea of the need of a new mythology (or cultural mindset)

Joseph Campbell believes that we need a new myth to heal the planet and be inclusive of all nations and all living things – the interconnection of life on earth.

The notion of Gaia and the Earth as seen from space becomes a significant symbol that signifies the unity of existence on this planet and the balance of chaos and order. It is a new way of looking at humans and their relationship to the land and nature on a global perspective and about how to relate to this society and how to relate this society to the world of nature, the non-human or other-than-human world and the cosmos. It is this symbol of the Earth that I have used extensively in the project 100 Prayer Mats for Gaia.

The unity of existence and the interconnectedness of life on the planet is the basis of my philosophy which points to and reflects a necessary ideological and spiritual shift that may be necessary for our survival.

5. My own visual interpretation of the environment as informed by research

I am searching for new ways of looking at and visually interpreting the Australian natural environment that breaks with European pictorial conventions – such as ‘framing’ a landscape, controlling a view, power over nature.

The search is for a spiritual connection with space and place – spiritual belonging.

I record different layers, surfaces and observations creating visual diversity and complexity – a palimpsest of the experience of the land.

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Context

Where am I going to?

The project exhibited in 2005 entitled *The Unfinished Universe* was inspired by Louise Young’s book of the same name.\(^{22}\)

The text encompasses the philosophy that we are all part of nature and thus not only witnessing but participating in the creative process of evolution that is taking place throughout time. We are one with a living universe that is like “an unfolding flower that has yet to bloom in its full glory.”\(^{23}\)

The central premise of the book is that ‘the creation’ is not an event which happened in the remote past but is rather a living reality of the present. Creation is a process of evolution of which humankind is not merely a witness but a participant and a partner as well. This idea is not unlike the Indigenous Australian cosmology of ‘the Dreamtime’ where the past and the present are interconnected and have implications for the future. The concept of Gaia, the planet earth, as a single self-organised unit of matter, perhaps even a living thing, gives evidence to the idea that we are part of, not separate from, a greater whole.

This philosophy continues to inform my work and how I work. The text chosen from the book accompanies images and gives them another level of interpretation.

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\(^{22}\) Louise B. Young, *The Unfinished Universe* (Oxford University Press 1986).

The drawings/paintings/mixed media on paper (28x38cm x 260 works in series of 4 related images) are accompanied by text from the book and numbered sequentially. The images focus on specific places in NE Victoria around my home as well as locations visited.

\(^{23}\) Quote at the front page of book by Paul Davis, Young, *The Unfinished Universe*. 6
The body of work *Sacred Land* completed and exhibited in 2010 is the cornerstone of the direction in which I am heading. My work has continued to explore my spiritual connection with the land and the environment through interacting with nature and depicting archetypal symbols as shown in the work below.
Fig. 4: Bärbel Ullrich from the series Sacred Land 1-20. 2009. Mixed Media on paper. 77cm x 56cm.
Research QUESTIONS and AIMS

Central to the focus of the research are the questions:

How can representations of Australian landscape challenge or reframe the European landscape tradition and its pictorial conventions?

How can visual images of Australian landscape address the spiritual, mythical and symbolic?

Can images of the Australian landscape reflect a particular place as well as universal characteristics?

Subsequent questions include:

What is spirituality in art – is it through certain visual representation or through meaning/content or intention? How can I imbue my art work with spiritual or sacred significance or expressions of this?

As images of land are cultural constructs, how can or how does my work reflect or reject the dominant cultural ideas about the environment? How can my work develop and extend the ‘Australian (European) landscape tradition’ to introduce new knowledge through the depiction of land?

How can my work express the idea of ‘wilderness’ which enters into the experience of the ‘holy’ and the ‘numinous’ and enriches the psyche of both the artist and the viewer? Nature and wilderness have become vitally important for the spirituality of many people. It is this idea of ‘wilderness’ and the ‘sublime’ that I have aimed to imbue in my work. I agree with Emily Brady who discusses the sublime in nature and art and how it is connected to the great and grand things. It has expansive effects on the mind and has an association with strong expression and intense emotional responses. The sublime found in works of art can “penetrate to the mystery, beauty, and terror of life, with or without evident connection to religious or spiritual tradition.”

Theories and contemporary ideas about ecology, environmental humanities, materialisms, ecofeminism, eco-philosophy, quantum animism, have all played an important role my new understandings of nature and the environment and the new ideas about the human relationship to nature and the environment. I have learnt to see the environment as me being part of it.

Graham Harvey has presented the idea that animism sees all of nature, both animate and inanimate ‘things’ as ‘persons’. In this sense we must relate respectfully to different ‘persons’

24 Max Oelschlaeger in The Idea of Wilderness (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991) 1. states that the idea of nature/wilderness is the source of human existence. It is “a forbidden place, a heart of darkness the civilized people have long attempted to repress – that is, the wilderness within the human soul and without, in the living profusion that envelops all creation.”

25 Collins, God’s Earth, 226.


in the world. I can see and feel the life force and vitality of these ‘persons’ at THE SITE\(^{29}\) as we are all part of this grand unified whole of moving energy.

**AIMS**

In this research I have aimed to emphasise the importance of working with land using a phenomenological approach which is subjective rather than rational or objective. I aim to examine my perceptual experience through the use of my body in observing, sensing, responding and interacting with the environment. I will use an intuitive response to the environment to examine “essences and existence” and to embrace “transcendence and immanence.”\(^{30}\) The focus is on the lived world where I make explicit my own experiences.

In my work I have aimed to interpret and portray the Earth, land and environment as a source of creative and spiritual energy. I believe that land is sacred, and this idea needs to be restored in the collective unconscious for not only the health of humanity but the health of the planet. As such, I aim to reflect in my work the sense of nature as alive, sacred and divine rather than as a mechanical, inanimate system that needs to be controlled and exploited for economic gain and profit.

Many thinkers and artists today, including myself, are promoting a spiritual ecological awareness which recognises that we should live in harmony and respect with the non-human world. I believe we need to reconnect to a lived experience of nature. This reconnection should start locally and I have applied this to my art practice.

I have aimed to reflect some kind of relationship or understanding of my ‘belonging’ to this particular area, THE SITE, and the property in which it is situated, rather than as a detached observer. Through the creation of artworks, I have intended to depict the particularities of this place and also to create a universal meaning/content. To create a deeper understanding of the mythical and archetypal underpinnings of spiritual life and my/our relation, spiritual belonging to the land.

The aim is to produce a body of work (70%) supported by an exegesis (30%).

\(^{29}\) The images for my work come from our property under Mt Bogong next to the Alpine national park. There is a specific site in the bush on my property where I have been working at the junction of two creeks which is the focus of my work. My land-based art works draw their images and meaning from that area and I will refer to this as THE SITE.

Significance of the Study

From my readings I have come to understand that there are many different understandings, interpretations, experiences, critical writings and definitions of ‘landscape’ within the Australian context. The land or ‘landscape’ within the Australian continent is vastly varied with huge visual, aesthetic, climatic and geographical differences, from the coast to the mountains to inland and the tropics. People living in these environments would have different experiences to place and space.

I have aimed to deconstruct the white male urban dweller’s depiction of the landscape where the view is framed, contained and controlled and where land is viewed as real estate to be occupied and a resource to be consumed. I realise that this thesis is written from my perspective as a white person where I have developed a sense of belonging not from my birthright but through the privileged position of ownership. I also realise that the thesis foregrounds the universality of my own experiences which is different from that of the Indigenous Australian people.

To quote Peggy McIntosh from her essay ‘White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack’:

I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was “meant” to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks.

It is this ‘knapsack of special provisions’ that has helped to enabled me to complete this project – access to art materials, machinery to clear THE SITE of blackberries to allow for physical access, a largish studio to work in, ownership of a printing press, technology (computer and internet access), finance and support (including the support of white friends, professional and academic people) for the project.

My final exhibition was also attended by white people and during the time of its display was also viewed by white people (to my knowledge, no Indigenous Australian people visited the space). Also, the feedback I have received was from a white perspective. On saying this, when I exhibited my work in the HR Gallop Gallery at CSU Wagga Wagga in 2017, an Indigenous Australian woman walked through and viewed the space on completion of installation and called it ‘the Earth room’. A greater complement could not have been better received.

Although there is much Indigenous Australian art on display and for sale in many galleries they are usually run by white people and sold with a huge profit that does not benefit the artists. Thus representing “hidden systems of advantage” and “invisible systems conferring unsought racial dominance” of white people.

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31 Bonyhardy & Griffiths, Casey, Cosgrove & Daniels, Flannery, Hirsh & O’Hanlon, Levitus, Main, Seddon, Winton, Watson, Wylie. Ideas about ‘nature’ will be discussed in chapter 5.
32 I will discuss place and space in more detail in chapter 6 as my work has a specific particularity to the landscape in which I live.
34 For example, The Rocks in Sydney, Circular Quay, is one such place
I would hope that in the near future a publication of my work will be viewed by a larger and broader audience contributing to the significance of the study.

I have aimed that my body of work, both written and visual, will contribute to and extend the discourse about Australian land-based art, Australian identity, sense of place and belonging with a renewed spiritual emphasis. But as Virginia Spate questions “in the absence of a shared belief system, can the spectator experience what the artist conceives as spiritual experience?” The nature of this spiritual experience will be examined by the production of a body of work and the written exegesis. Spate concludes her essay by saying “as a spectator, it seems to me that the spiritual experience in art makes one conscious of one’s beingness on earth and of feeling one with its wholeness, both human and natural.” It is this consciousness that I have hoped to transmit to the spectator in my work.

Set in the climate of ecological crisis and global warming, my work aims to emphasise a new and needed focus of cultural and philosophical thinking relating to our relationship and interaction with the environment.

The challenge for me as an artist is how do I encompass these current shifts and ideas to find new ways and insights of representing ‘landscape’? To depict a contemporary ‘truth’ or experiential ‘truth’? My solution to the problem is working in collaboration with the land, depicting fractals, accidents, processes of time and relinquishing a lot of the total control of the end result.

Although nature is a collaborator, and I have relinquished a lot of control in the final artworks by setting up a dialogue between myself and the environment. There is the significance of setting up a dialogue with my work and the audiences at the exhibitions who view and respond to the works. In this sense also, I have to relinquish control of their response. They were encouraged to participate and engage with the works by walking on the floor piece, touching the Book of Creation and lifting the layers of fabric and handling and turning the pages of The Book of Tears.

The work is significant as it has “intended to convey a sense of participation in a world blessed by the presence and creative action of unseen forces”. I have aimed to recognise my place in a “larger reality” and “to relate to the powers beyond us.” To represent the spiritual and creative force of Gaia and to explore” the depths of our human identity, the beauty and frailty of our world, is significant in this study.

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38 Roger Lipsey in Catalogue Spirit and Place: Art in Australia 1861-1996, 72, 73.
Chapter 1

The Book of Flow

On Methodology and Methods

Chaos is a good metaphor for the art making process. It is as much about nature making new forms and structures as it is about ‘messiness’ and ‘unpredictability’. This concept relates directly to my methodology and methods. Studio-based practice as research can be related to a river with its unpredictability, complexity and perturbations. The stable vortex in the flowing river, ties and unites things together can be likened to my methodology, experimental format, layered symbolism and the structure of the work.

Each part of the river acts as a perturbing effect on all the other parts. In turn, the effects of these perturbations are constantly being fed back into each other. The result is turbulence, a chaotic motion in which different regions are moving at different speeds.

As the fast-flowing river approaches the rock, it swirls and turns back on itself. Behind the rock, a vortex is born and persists as a highly stable form. The river is demonstrating all the characteristics of chaos. Its behaviour is highly complex, including random, unpredictable flows, eddies, and stable vortices.

As methodology implies an overall strategy of constructing knowledge, my core strategy will be studio-based practice where the studio experience is a form of imaginative and intellectual enquiry. Sullivan (and others) maintain that new forms of knowledge can be constructed within visual arts practice and studio based inquiry that is not only new but has the capacity to ‘transform human understanding’. This transformation of human understanding is what I have aimed to achieve in my work which can be located and defined as a form of individual, social and critical inquiry through the making of artworks.

The purpose of my work is to achieve understanding rather than explanation. My artworks “have become an interpretive space where we construct meanings through the process”.

Through imagination and intellect, I have aimed to construct knowledge that is not only new but has the capacity to transform human understanding.

By experimenting with materials and exploring new processes, working in collaboration with the environment and creating artists’ books, I have aimed to create new knowledge through my relationship to the environment and place. For me, the land/environment is represented as...

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41 “Each vortex has a definite shape but is in reality composed of the material flowing through it.” Briggs and Peat. Chaos, 6.
42 Self-reflection, critical thinking, feedback loops both positive and negative– these together can create a new dynamic balance
43 Structure/ format of studio-based research (where the randomness of the natural world/landscape gives birth to structured forms/format/ archetypal symbols, self-organisation out of chaos where chaos is nature’s creativity)
44 Content, images, processes
45 Briggs and Peat, Chaos, 13.
47 Sullivan, Arts Practice, 78.
48 Sullivan, Arts Practice, xi.
49 Sullivan, Arts Practice, 49.
50 Sullivan, Arts Practice, xi.
a source of spiritual and creative energy and as such departs from the European pictorial tradition of landscape. As Sullivan says: "Artworks are an important source of new knowledge, personal meaning, and cultural experience in which the making of art is a quest for knowledge and understanding." He believes that making art has the capacity to transform us, and thereby change the world around us. This is supported by Barrett and Bolt who argue that art practice in itself is research, and Elkins who believes that:

Art should be recognised as a source of one of the highest levels of meaning. ... studio art is a way of coming to understand ourselves and the worlds in which we live – an enhanced way of being and possibly enjoying – that is central to human intelligence, different from and complementary to science and the scientific which are incapable of doing the things that art does just as art is incapable of being scientific in any deep sense.

The challenge for me is to produce art which can be identified as research, and research, my thesis, which can be identified and related to my art.

Of importance is my own self-reflexive mapping of the emergent work as enquiry and the generation of knowledge through action and reflection. Thus critical self-reflection and visualisation will also be strategies in my studio-based practice to sharpen ideas and inform actions. I will be using the idea of ‘thinking through art’, where practical activity is itself intrinsically intelligent and related to reflection which is also a form of doing. This “dialogue with the situation” is crucial to the generation of new knowledge obtained through practice.

Timothy Emlyn Jones also discusses the distinction and yet the close relationship between knowledge on reflection and knowledge in action. Rather than what he calls the ‘absurdity’ of the theory/practice dichotomy where you switch your brain off in order to make art and then switch it on again to reflect on what you have made, he supposes the research process, both the written and the practice-based research is motivated by personal interest and experience.

A feature of studio-based enquiry is that the method unfolds through practice- practice is itself productive of knowledge and engenders further practice demonstrating the emergent nature of the process.

The practice-based research methods in my work will move between theory and material studio processes. Thus, the methodology in the production of knowledge is based on the interaction of theory and studio practice, methods, materials and processes. This is also influenced by the changing demands of my physical and psychological states.

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51 Sullivan, Arts Practice, 139.
52 Sullivan, Arts Practice, 223.
55 Elkins, Artists with PhDs, 246.
56 Barrett and Bolt, Practice as Research, 5.
57 Sullivan, Arts Practice, 192.
58 In Elkins, Artists with PhDs, 99.
59 In Barrett and Bolt, Practice as Research, 5.
60 Barrett and Bolt, Practice as Research, 9.
61 Barrett and Bolt, Practice as Research, 11.
Judith Mottram says that the researcher by initial and continuing immersion in current ‘literature’ (words or images), the formulation of an argument for a specific enquiry using appropriate experimental or other methods to uncover new possibilities, propositions or problems, has an active role in participation and moving forward understanding in a field. She says the outcomes of doctoral study should include new perspectives, understanding or knowledge, of interest or useful to the subject. My work, which focuses on a specific site, aims to gain new understandings of place, nature, land and my relationship to the more-than-human elements that have agency in producing the artwork. The new perspectives include a vision of the complex relationships between things and the acknowledgement of the invisible forces in the world. These new perspectives can also be gained by using all the senses to enter into a dialogue with THE SITE. Through the use of observation, visual analysis, listening and tactile sensitivity will enable me to gain a more intimate understanding of the environment. This process of engagement with the environment will imbue the work with a quality of spirituality.

My experience as an artist is the core element in the creation of new knowledge. This includes as previously mentioned, experimenting with materials, exploring new processes and making decisions on the final outcome of the work that is not known or planned from the start. This includes taking risks, making mistakes, using chance, failures, successes, moments of insight and epiphanies! I have also had to work outside my comfort zone and my personal experience is a way of understanding new aspects of reality. I have undergone many field trips into the bush environment to work. This is a strategy to support my studio-based practice. Intuition, understanding and the visualisation of ideas are also related to experience, understanding and the ability to see things differently. When I am immersed in the bush environment, it is ‘seeing’ and ‘sensing’ that are important in representing experience as the basis for compiling thematic patterns of evidence from which meaning is made vivid.

Thus, the focus of my work will be on process and product to externalise ideas or knowledge. In this sense there is a need to keep the enquiry open-ended so that the topic can evolve, expand and thrive but this creates a conflict or tension as the need to be specific is to keep the research/enquiry feasible and credible. Again, in terms of chaos theory this is an example of the two opposites – the perturbations, unpredictability and uncertainty of nature/art process and the stable form of the vortex from which things flow through that ties and unites things together as the production, the data and the end result.

Elkins also questions the term ‘knowledge’ which is open. He suggests that the concept of ‘understanding’ is used as a synonym for knowledge as it has a much deeper and broader intellectual history. For Elkins, ‘understanding, expression, meaning, and affect (feeling, emotion) could serve as the goal and outcome of studio-art PhDs in place of knowledge or in addition to knowledge. Certainly in terms of affect, the final exhibition for my examination in the PhD, has been an addition to knowledge which is shared with the viewers and experienced by the viewers arousing a range of feelings, associations and emotions. The viewers were invited to interact with the work, walk on the floor piece, turn the pages of the books and

62 In Elkins. Artists with PhDs, 39. 40.
63 Sullivan, Arts Practice, 60.
64 Jones in Elkins, Artists with PhDs, 111.
65 Elkins, Artists with PhDs, 259-261.
interact and touch the wall hangings – creating a new dialogue by sharing the knowledge and experience.66

It is thus through the process of visual arts practice using ‘seeing’, ‘sensing’, ‘lived experience, ‘subjectivity’ and ‘memory’ that will form the basis of my methodology to create a context for meanings, new knowledge and new understanding. And as Sullivan says “you are never quite sure of the outcome.”67 This is supported by Barrett and Bolt who claim that the outcomes of creative practice cannot be pre-determined.68 Elkins also states that an artist doesn’t know why they are doing something until after they have done it.69 This is certainly true in regards to my project. From the beginning I did not have a plan as to where the work would head or how it would look. Only through experimentation, self-reflective thinking and a lot of ‘mistakes’ is that it ‘evolved’, not only through my input but through the collaboration with nature – allowing things to happen and making the decision whether this is ‘true’.

Thus, visual thinking and ‘material thinking’ have been important processes in the creation of my artworks. The emphasis has been on breakthrough, originality and new knowledge. I agree with Bolt as she writes that “the materials and processes of production have their own intelligence that come into play in interaction with the artist’s creative intelligence.”70

I also agree with Sullivan as he believes that imagination and intellect, critical vision, reflexive action and the changing dynamics of experience and knowledge construct the tools of inquiry. One needs to make informed choices about creative ends and means which involves selecting, adapting, and constructing ways of working and ways of seeing. Thinking practices, imaginative thinking, insights and intuitions in visual arts are also important to bring ideas to fruition.71

‘New knowledge’ and ‘original research’ for me has been problematic in relating it to my practical/ studio-based art research as it is still too closely associated with scientific research. I have replaced this term in my thinking with ‘new understandings’ in a ‘defined field’. The idea that art-based enquiry should be an open-ended project has been useful to my thinking about, understanding and positioning my research methodology particularly in relation to the terms ‘new knowledge’ or ‘new understandings’ and ‘thinking through art’ in a ‘defined field’.

Also ‘research through art’ is a category that pertains to the PhD where knowledge, evidence and experience in the world are brought into the art practice and the artwork thus reappears as knowledge through art.72 This definition was helpful to me in thinking about the ideas of ‘artistic research’. It is thus clear that the artwork(s) IS the new knowledge and provides evidence of the ‘new understandings’ with the support of the thesis.

Separate and different from the term ‘artistic thinking’ is the term ‘critical thinking’. While Wilson believes that ‘critical thinking’ is important in doctoral programs in art practice,73 Elkins wants to question the value of self-reflexivity even though it is an unavoidable and implicit goal and inescapable result of every doctoral program. He suggests that self-reflection may even

66 See appendix 5.
67 Sullivan, Arts Practice, xii.
68 Barrett and Bolt, Practice as Research, 186.
69 Elkins, Artists with PhDs, 236.
70 Barrett and Bolt, Practice as Research, 30.
71 Sullivan, Arts Practice, 32.124.
72 Elkins, Artists with PhDs, 244-259.
73 In Elkins, Artists with PhDs, 189.
disrupt your artistic practice for is self-awareness measured and who is trained in teaching it? 

I find that I experience ‘self-reflection’ and ‘self-awareness’ as I wander and work in the environment. Maybe the words ‘daydreaming’ and ‘contemplation’ would also suffice as ‘self-reflection’ and ‘self-awareness’ as these experiences do not disrupt the artistic practice but enhance it. Ultimately, I can see that my art practice has been and will be a search for meaning which is both personal and spiritual, and its knowledge and understandings can be shared.

And, thus the creative process of studio-based research can be seen as a search for a ‘truth’, meaning or ‘new knowledge’, questioning what we see and think about the world. To get to the ‘truth’ of my perception, I need a shift in my mental perspective and the authenticity of my experience. In realising this I know that images, experiences and ideas are constantly in motion, reshaping, repeating and changing. The image making process has been in a constant flux, heading in different directions. This is where artistic thinking and critical thinking are important tools in my methodology as I have had to make decisions about what work will go into the exhibitions and what work will be edited and how the images evolve. Also, decisions were made regarding the scale and dimensions of the work and how the works on paper relate to the textile pieces.

The above ideas and mental processes relate to the creative process and the making of meaningful artworks. I have aimed to use these ideas and mental processes to develop my body of work supported by the research in the thesis.

Important and underlying my methodology, and informing my work, is the concept that everything is alive. In Deborah Bird Rose’s studies of the Yarralin people of the Victoria River area of the Northern Territory is that they pay close attention to what people, country and cosmos are telling them – it is a participatory quality of life. “To be alive is to act, and to act is to communicate. Anything which is alive communicates, and in Yarralin people’s thinking, everything is alive.” 

It is this participation and communication that forms the basis of my artmaking. This is also connected to the concept of ‘intersubjectivity’ which is ways of knowing and relating to others (including the land) in direct communication, received knowledge, observations and informed interpretations.

For me, this is also a process of communicating with the land and observing the behaviour of the environment. Rose claims that “Country is alive with information for those who have learned to understand” and by making works that collaborate with land comes with it new understandings.

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74 Elkins. Artists with PhDs, 233-236.
75 Deborah Bird Rose Dingo makes us Human: Life and Land in an Australian Aboriginal Culture (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 2000), 90.
76 Rose, Dingo makes us Human, 91.
77 Rose, Dingo makes us Human, 225.
Methods

The previous ideas and processes relate to the creative process and the making of meaningful artworks. Within these, drawing, printmaking, textiles and artists books become the dominant techniques/methods for producing images and the building up of layers. Visual metaphors are produced that create and transform meaning. These visual metaphors are developed from site related work with the use of archetypal symbols.

Site related works.

I have deliberately chosen to create site related works from ‘my place’ as it is where I live and where I feel I have a strong spiritual connection. Through this work I have aimed to understand myself and my artistic practice in greater depth as well as getting to know the ‘bush’ environment surrounding my home dwelling.

I have endeavoured to interact with the environment and use material from the environment. The methodology I use, as does John Wolseley, is “wandering and wondering”\(^{78}\), collecting materials and making drawings, rubbings and shadow drawings in the environment,\(^{79}\) maintaining a sketchbook and journal(s). I have drawn on this experience of working from the environment and walking in the environment as a key strategy for creating images and symbols in my work. As the concept that everything is alive is an important philosophy that underlies my methodology and informs my work, I also spend a lot of time sitting still in the bush and practicing deep listening while looking for information.

Archetypal symbols

The use of archetypal symbols in my work includes the Axis Mundi.\(^{80}\) THE SITE for me, also metaphorically becomes an Axis Mundi as it is the centre of my known universe – tall eucalypts connect the sky to the earth. The Axis Mundi is not only a symbol but for me is a significant way of working as an artist. I interact with the environment and work from intuition – letting things happen and materialise from within/the centre. Other symbols include the shadow, the circle, stones, the spiral, the mandala and Jungian and Goddess symbolism.

Text

The use of text in my work was aimed to be a strategy to locate different layers of meaning and interpretation in the work. Text has been used in the initial Seven Books of Geneses\(^{81}\), but after much experimentation, I have decided not to use text in the final body of work. Language can often overpower the images. I wanted the images to speak for themselves and allow for ambiguities of interpretation.

Palimpsest

The use of palimpsest as a process/methodology of making marks, drawing, erasing the marks, leaving traces of earlier marks, layering colour, removing colour is an important

\(^{78}\) John Wolseley
\(^{79}\) Peter Sharp
\(^{80}\) “Since ancient times, many cultures have held the view of their homeland as the centre of the world, as it was the centre of their known universe.” [https://www.ancient-origins.net/myths-legends/axis-mundi-sacred-sites-where-heaven-meets-earth-009464](https://www.ancient-origins.net/myths-legends/axis-mundi-sacred-sites-where-heaven-meets-earth-009464) accessed 10/12/2018
\(^{81}\) See appendix 2
strategy in my work. Nature is constantly in a state of change, there may be elements of permanence, yet the layers rhythms and movements of nature reflect cyclic developments. The idea of ‘palimpsest’ encompasses the notion of time, growth and decay in nature as well as recording the process and memory of the making of the artwork.82

Like John Wolseley, I also think that the bits of paper with marks on them are directly connected to the physical world where they were made.83 The resulting imagery is a matrix built up with complex layers which reflects the transience, flux and chaos of nature. Order (cosmos and permanence) is created by structuring the format with ‘horizon’ lines, delineated areas and the overlay of symbolic shapes.

Photographic documentation

Through photographic documentation I have collected many images of THE SITE that explore the essence of the place, its form, structure and surface appearance. The photos I take of the land do not represent a traditional ‘view’ of the land but aspects of the rhythms, energy and movements in the environment. The details explore the microcosm, fractal patterns, textures, colours and shapes, especially the local characteristics of specific places. This information along with the drawings/experiments produced on site, is taken back into the studio to produce and refine the finished works. I have also incorporated photographs in The Book of Tears, but rather than have them stand out and look like they are glued down, they have been sanded back, stained and shellacked, so that they merge with the paper and produce a vague and ghostly appearance.

The use of cloth, stitching and binding

The use of cloth and stitching contains the symbolism of binding and knotting and is related to mending and healing. It also has magical connotations and evokes the heritage of these textile crafts as gendered, anonymous, and skilled. I have used stitching and binding as a visual devise, not only in the textile works, but also on paper and binding the pages of my artists books.84 This has become a dominant method but also a methodology that gives unity and coherence to my work.

Tim Ingold’s social and ecological philosophy is based on the study of lines, and his idea of interweaving, interpenetration and knotting of fibres can also be directly related to the philosophy supporting my work. He says:

When everything tangles with everything else, the result is what I call a meshwork. To describe the meshwork is to start from the premise that every living being is a line or, better, a bundle of lines.85

My more immediate purpose is to suggest that in a world where things are continually coming into being through processes of growth and movement — that is, in a world of life — knotting is

82 John Wolseley has a fascination with sand dunes where the image of the desert becomes a palimpsest. “Sand is a metaphor for the palimpsest of life, concealing earlier layers of existence yet preserving their traces” Sasha Grishin. John Wolseley, LAND MARKS (North Ryde, Sydney: Craftsman House,1998) 79-86.
83 Grishin, John Wolseley, 95.
84 The symbolism and spirituality of stitching and binding will be further discussed in chapter 3.
the fundamental principle of coherence. It is the way forms are held together and kept in place within what would otherwise be a formless and inchoate flux.  

**Printmaking**

The use of printmaking to collaborate with the environment and create images has been used as a primary method for the creation of images based on land/environment. It is a collaboration and a synthesis of artist, process, subject matter, emotion, materials, techniques and nature. The preparation of plates, predominantly collagraph, but also using dry point, lino-cut and etching, includes working with the environment. The preparation of plates gives me the time to consider what the final image is going to portray.

For example, the collagraph plates are made by either gluing down natural materials or coating the plate with no more gaps, covering with glad wrap and placing the materials on top of this then weighting them down to get an impression. It is this process of making a printing plate directly from the environment and using the materials of the environment that make it my preferred method of printing. Also, the plates can be inked up intaglio method or the inks can be rolled on the surface as a relief print. This creates varying effects of marks and the plates can be used many times even printing over another print to create complex layers and surfaces.

Discovering different techniques through printmaking reinforces experimentation and a means of expression.

The below example (fig. 5) is a plate make from embedding bark from the environment into no more gaps. Due to the fragility of the bark, each time the plate is printed it further deteriorates creating differing impressions.

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87 See fig. 7.
Fig. 5: Bärbel Ullrich collagraph plate, 2016.

Fig. 6: Bärbel Ullrich collagraph plate, 2016.
With printmaking everything is a bit of a surprise. I have had to relinquish almost total control of the process and allow for chance, experimentation, variation in marks and techniques as a means of expression. Accidental effects might change the experience and the outcome. Nature is in constant change and flux and this can be expressed and represented through the printmaking process. My printmaking process has displayed the representation of nature’s energy through unordered forms.

Contrary to prints being made in the studio with mechanical processes, they can also be made in the environment where nature imprints its energy, flux and patterns onto the paper with natural materials and through the process of time. The process of printmaking is a dialogue between the effect of the materials on the image and the materiality of nature on the image.

I have also started to use the method of stencilling in the work where ferns, leaves, bark and sticks are placed on the surface and sprayed to leave an impression, imprint or trace or memory of the natural environment. This can be used to build up layers or overprint or as an underprint. I realise that this technique may be culturally associated with graffiti, but I have endeavoured to recontextualise it as a direct engagement with the environment and often producing very photographic like results.

Collaboration of artist and process, artist and environment involve active participation with the environment and an engagement that is bodily wearing and internally strenuous. It involves physical immersion in the landscape.

The images below represent the processes and dialogue with the environment where nature imprints its mark on the work.

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88 See figures 8 & 9
Fig. 7: Bärbel Ullrich photograph at THE SITE - collaboration with nature

Fig. 8: Bärbel Ullrich photograph at THE SITE - collaboration with nature
Fig. 9: Bärbel Ullrich photograph at THE SITE - collaboration with nature

Fig. 10: Bärbel Ullrich photographs of process collaboration at THE SITE.
Fig. 11: Bärbel Ullrich photograph of process collaboration at THE SITE.

Fig. 12: Bärbel Ullrich Earth Print Mixed Media on paper, 53x53cm, 2016.

See appendix 3 for the full installation of the work.
On the Use of Artists Books

Books can be vessels of possibility. Like seeds, they contain potential for expansion and transformation.90

The structure of my work is in the form of Artists Books91. These may not necessarily be bound but may be loose pages, also not necessarily displayed on the walls but in stacks with some form of containment such as cloth or a box. They require the physical interaction of the viewer on an intimate and personal level as they can only be viewed by one person at a time. They can also utilise the sense of touch and smell to evoke a response/reaction from the viewer. The concept of ‘books’ can also be a metaphor for how Western culture imparts knowledge and learning in contrast to the traditional oral story-telling of Indigenous Australian peoples. The commonality is not in the text/words but in the visual stories in the artworks produced.

As a land-based artist and as part of my research is to question how representations of land can challenge or reframe the European tradition and pictorial conventions. I endeavour to use the artist book as a ‘discipline’ in which to situate my work in relation to contemporary practice. The artists book is inventive92 and part of a “diverse, tactile area of contemporary printmaking.”93 I believe this format can fulfil my aim to use images of the Australian landscape which address the spiritual, mythical and symbolic.

Although it is difficult to define an artist book because of the variability in the use and combination of papers and materials, display, unorthodox shape and fragility, a general definition could be “An artists book is a book made by an artist, and is meant as an artwork.”94 They also can be categorised as an independent art form and part of a “living, changing discipline” where a more specific definition would appear to be impossible.95

The artists book is an object which has physical qualities – size, texture, surface - that the viewer can touch and interact with. They are also sculptural objects. Drucker questions, as an aesthetic practice, how might the artists book be defined as an art form in a way which differentiates it from being simply an artfully crafted object? She says it is the artist’s aesthetic vision, the selection of elements – images, text, materials and the process by which they evolve into a book that is key to its interdisciplinary status as an art form.96

The book is also more than an object, it is an idea. The book embodies the idea of containment – many images and ideas contained in a small space which becomes personal, private as well as tactile. The object/idea can be made to look mysterious and sacred thus imbuing the land-based content with the same attributes.

91 Alex Selenitsch, Australian Artists Books (National Gallery of Australia, 2008) 6. Selenitsch states that Artists books without an apostrophe has, in some circles, become the standard name for this activity.
92 This is an alternative format to the traditional ‘landscape’ art format of painting, printmaking and drawing and working with prescribed images and media.
93 Alex Selenitsch, Australian Artists Books (National Gallery of Australia, 2008), 3.
94 Selenitsch, Australian Artists Books, 5.
The materiality and conceptuality are what intrigues and interests me about artists books. The artist book can explore the interplay of content and form where, as a ‘book’, the role of text can be made integral to the work and the use of pages and sequences are used instead of a single sweep of an image. The use of text means that the artist can work in a ‘poetic’ way. Language and text have the potential as a ‘material form’ having the capacity to ‘be’ as well as to ‘mean’.

The use of text and writing not only functions to express an idea, as elements of language, but also functions as image or visual medium. Drucker says that “because of this fundamental dualism, writing is charged with binary qualities. It manifests itself with the phenomenal presence of the imago and yet performs the signifying operations of the logos.”

As mentioned previously, I have decided to abandon the use of text in my work, as an aesthetic device, as I fear that the primacy of language can overpower the images and distract the viewer from the meaning, mystery and experience of the images. In future, I would like to experiment with this idea – the juxtaposition of text and image in art works.

What I like conceptually and aesthetically about the use of artists books, is that the artist becomes a storyteller sequencing images, text and ideas together or it may have no sequential narrative but may be thematically connected. The “movement and timing, the flicker of papers, colours, textures, elements,” are part of the “sensual theatre” of artists books.

Each page has the potential of generating different spatial formats, arrangements and the capturing of ideas. The sequence is the great structural instrument of the book. The reader needs to use their imagination. It is a book where you can go backwards and forwards and spend as much time as you wish with each image which remains open to various interpretations. It can also be an experimental narrative, the idea of a book without a story. The use of images, fragments and text can have no sequential narrative but may be thematically connected.

The importance of the artists book is the visual thinking, a means to convey ideas rather than just being about the craft of binding. It is about how to make a book respond to a concept. The book can go from the structural to the conceptual – “a leap from the observation of form as specific to the medium to the associative play of form as idea: the metaphysics of the book, its full range of roles from initiation and knowledge to perfidy and deceit.”

Artists books are an ever-expanding field with a wide range of approaches. It is also a means of finding new and different ways to work for myself as an artist. The concept of transformation becomes important – using the book to explore new images and ideas. I find that the technique of palimpsest is useful for representing the Australian landscape and lends itself to the transformation aspect where there is a layering of text and/or images overwriting

97 Selenitsch, Australian Artists Books, 5.
99 Drucker, Figuring the Word, 57.
100 instead of a single sweep of an image
101 Drucker, Figuring the Word, 173.
102 Drucker, Figuring the Word, 172.
103 Drucker, Figuring the Word, 173.
104 Selenitsch, Australian Artists Books, 11.
old text and/or images. Layers from the original prints or drawings come through other images creating interesting layers of surface quality.

Finally, the artists book embodies the idea of a journal or journey – a record of ideas and images over time. Books are very portable and can travel with you. A journey through the book for the viewer. It is also a vehicle of recording knowledge as books in Western Culture are a means of learning about the world.
Chapter 2

The Book of Roots and Branches

On Artists, Strategies and Influences

I believe that everything is connected in subtle ways to everything else. Our art is consciously or unconsciously influenced by the culture in which we live, our environment, other artists and the ideas or ideology of the time.

The influence of individuals can have subtle but profound effects on the way land/nature is represented or written about. In my field of land-based art, and the project related to a specific site, these influences can give new insights and understandings my relationship to land, nature and environment. They expose other perspectives to be lived and experienced.

In this chapter I will discuss the visual strategies in my work and how they are used, or relate to, or are influenced by other artists. I have aimed to show their work as evidence of my understanding in the field of land-based art and as precedents upon which the research was built. Just like the roots and branches of a tree, we search for nutrition and direction.

Aerial and abstracted view/perspective, use of energy lines, textures and movement.

John Olsen

John Olsen is one of the major figures in the story of Australian art. His unique pictorial language, a blend of abstraction and figuration, makes a major departure from the dominant European tradition of representing land and the landscape ‘view’. John Olsen came to think of the landscape as “a nervous system”.

Tim Winton states that:

Previousl steeped in European ways of seeing, Olsen was one of the first non-indigenous painters to sense in this country an organic whole, a web of interdependent relationships ...

This way of working and thinking about ‘landscape’ representation goes deeper than the mere surface appearance; it addresses the wonders and fragility of the ecology of place — an aim in my work.

David Hurlston and Deborah Edwards in the NGV catalogue, JOHN OLSEN: The You Beaut Country write “Through his evocative depictions of the landscape Olsen has, arguable more than any other non-Indigenous artist, captured the spirit and uniqueness of Australia.” He depicts what he sees as a “contradictory beauty that is latent in Australia and expresses an overall view” in his You Beaut Country paintings. The intimate connection with the natural world, depicting wildlife and their environments, also became a feature of his work.

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105 For example, eco philosophy, environmental humanities, kinship between humans and other living things and sacred geography.
108 Hurlston & Edwards, JOHN OLSEN, 11.
Olsen comments:

... Townsville is where I saw tree frogs for the first time, where I saw brolgas, ibis and so on. There was one particular place, a swamp, where the brolgas were going through their dancing. This really had an influence on me – nature and movement.109

Olsen’s journeys into the landscape have been journeys into self, elaborating the area of the imagination and portraying specificities of place. His artistic engagement with the environment and his commitment to landscape as a genre is expressed in his often-quoted line. “I am in the landscape and the landscape is in me.”110 This quote I relate to quite strongly, particularly with reference to THE SITE and my surrounding country; this I have aimed to express in my processes and my work. As such Olsen’s work has become a precedent for my explorations.

Vitalist philosophy and Zen texts have had an impact on Olsen – the repeated invocations to the energy and organic interconnectedness of all things and his extraordinary celebratory responses to life and the environment. This interconnectedness is literally expressed by linking all through line. “Line has traced a cohesive world and in its exuberant, doodling, staccato or spidery loops became the primary expressive vehicle for Olsen’s sensibilities.”111

Nature and movement, flux, time, growth and decay have always been underlying themes in my work with the environment, as illustrated in the examples below.

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109 Quoted in Hurlson & Edwards, JOHN OLSEN, 16.
111 Hurlson & Edwards, JOHN OLSEN, 25.
Fig.13: Bärbel Ullrich from the Seven rocks series, mixed media and print on paper, 53x53cm, 2016-2017.

Fig.14: Bärbel Ullrich from the Seven rocks series, mixed media and print on paper, 53x53cm, 2016-2017.
Fig.15: John Olsen, *Lake Eyre, Channel Country*, 2011, watercolour and coloured chalk, 161.0x120.0cm\textsuperscript{112}

\footnote{Hurlson & Edwards, \textit{JOHN OLSEN}, 176.}
Although my visual strategies differ, it is this energy and connection I have aimed to imbue in my work. Layers of surface and texture more so than line in my work express the matrix of interconnection. The multivalent symbol of the archetypal circle that is used in my work, also has prevalence in Olsen’s work.

When Olsen captured a vast landscape or habitat, line was used to elaborate delicate networks of dry creek beds and rivers in aerial landscapes. Line, he believed, was the only appropriate means to grapple with the land. Using the aerial view, he could capture a vast space, inferring a world without end and the endless flux of nature. Olsen has consistently preferred looking down vertically on the land, ‘the poetic map’.¹¹³

My work could also be described as ‘a poetic map’ in that the paper/material is placed horizontally on the land and the images are initially produced on the ground and worked in collaboration with the land. Yet, at the same time, it is displayed vertically which again gives a different perspective. The work captures the flux of nature in the microcosm rather than an aerial view nature. My work also takes on a particular abstract quality and aims to express a search for ‘direct mystical experience’ and connection with nature, as does Olsen’s work.

Olsen was quoted:

> My painting takes on its particular abstract quality because only in this way can I express my search for direct mystical experience. There is the feeling of an abyss, a void between oneself and everything outside, and one has the impulse to bridge it. The thing which I always endeavour to express is an animistic quality – a certain mystical throbbing throughout nature.¹¹⁴

Already Olsen is pre-empting today’s ecological thought where humans are not separate from nature. There is the desire to rethink and critique our relationship to the non-human world. I have also aimed to express an animistic quality in my work; where the land/environment is viewed as a sacred place.

As the title of his book suggests, Graham Harvey argues that Animism is about respecting the living world. He argues that:

> Far from being a primitive, simplistic and irrational misunderstanding of the nature of life, animism has much to contribute to significant debates taking place in particular academic disciplines.¹¹⁵

I embrace the idea of Animism as it expresses the vitality of nature, the ‘mystical throbbing’ as Olsen describes it, and our spiritual belonging to land through a renewed experiential engagement and relationship. In the example of my work below, I believe I have captured this ‘mystical throbbing’ and the vitality of nature as well as the elements of fire, water, air and earth.

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¹¹³ Hurlson & Edwards, JOHN OLSEN, 32-33.
¹¹⁴ Hurlson & Edwards, JOHN OLSEN, 54.
Fig.16: Bärbel Ullrich, page 4 from the *Book of Creation*, 2017, mixed media, sticks & print on calico and muslin, 350x180cm
Fred Williams

Fred Williams is another major figure in the story of Australian art who breaks with traditional European conventions. He was a major influence on my landscape paintings ‘last century’ in his simplification of the strong verticality of the trees in the Australian bush and the richness of the colours which were significant to me and prominent in my work. It was not until I viewed some of his landscapes in ‘real life’ in the National Gallery that I became aware how thin the use of oil paint actually was; where one could see the surface texture of the ground or canvas through the paint.

Hart claims that Williams’ talent lies in abstracting from the real:

> Williams was deeply concerned with the formal, abstract qualities of his works. Yet he didn’t ultimately want to paint purely abstract pictures. His talent was abstracting from the real. ‘The source of all my paintings is in something that I’ve seen … The impetus always comes from some notation I’ve made outside.’

I would question what is the ‘real’ and how can it be represented? I would also argue that all representations of land/landscape are abstractions, even those that appear to be more ‘real’. What is interesting to note is that Williams says that the source of his paintings is in something that he has seen. Although I am concerned with the formal and abstract qualities of my work, it is the notion of ‘abstraction’ and ‘representation’ in landscape painting that I aim to challenge and call into question. Also, I aim to challenge that the concept of the ‘real’ comes only from the ‘outside’ and what can be seen. I would claim that it also comes from the inside, the experiential participation with the environment.

I propose that by just ‘seeing’ one separates the viewer from the view. My aim was to not only see but to feel, experience, smell and collaborate with the environment. It is this process that informs the end result of my work and contributes to new knowledge about modes of ‘representation’ of land.

Although Williams employs the use of horizons in his work – both as a compositional device, and, to give a sense of space and perspective. I have subsequently eliminated horizons from my work, due to the steep terrain of the country, where the focus becomes the ground and the shifting shadows. Also, horizons are used in the landscape painting tradition to position the viewer in a safe distance from, and separate to, nature.

Much of Williams’ work also focus on the aerial view or the perspective of looking down from a high vantage point. He uses “the confluence of land and water that runs like a thread” through his work. In the 1970’s this was a particular theme in his work with emphasis on waterfalls.

William’s work presents a macro view of a larger terrain whereas my work focuses on a smaller area. The flow of the creeks and water are a significant element of place, and, to represent this I have used images of the ferns that grow next to the creeks and subtle washes of blues that complement the earthier colours and blacks.

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117 This idea will be further discussed in chapter 4.
Fig. 17: Fred Williams, *Strath Creek Falls VII*, 1979, oil on canvas, 152.8x182.6cm.119

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Collaboration of artist and process, artist and environment, active participation with the environment and an engagement that is bodily wearing and internally strenuous.

John Wolseley

Wolseley’s recent project/exhibition at the NGV\textsuperscript{120} was very inspirational. His work has always been an important influence on me, not so much his use of images, although very beautiful, but the processes he uses to capture the essence of the place of where he is working. I have aimed to build on and extend, by the use of further printmaking and artists books, Wolseley’s approach to depicting or re-presenting images of land.

Wolseley subverts traditional approaches of the depiction of landscape by collaborating with the landscape, using materials from the landscape, clay and burnt wood and even burying half of a drawing only to retrieve a year later. The space and scale of his work is significant for me as he refers to the microcosm and the macrocosm simultaneously. The insertion of smaller units of information, the loose handling of marks and colour contrasted with extremely detailed observation, the use of text to record his observation and response to the environment, a dialogue with self, and the idea that each piece of work is a journey through time and space.

Wolseley says he wants to “link with the matrix in which we live to get back our sense of belonging and re-chant our connection to nature”. He wants to enter into the ‘flow’ of the natural world – using its materials and moving in it.\textsuperscript{121} This can be shown in the example below which is like a map but also a matrix of the natural world.

\textsuperscript{120} Heartlands and Headwaters. NGV. 11 April-20 September. 2015.
Fig.18: John Wolseley, *Forty-eight days in Thorula – Gosses Bluff*, Northern Territory, 1980, watercolour, charcoal and pencil on canvas, 259x315cm (DETAIL BELOW) 122

Fig. 19: Detail

Fig. 20: John Wolseley, 2015, 101 insect life stories no.13: Ur-Beetle, relief print from found wood, chine-colle over watercolour, edition 20, 38cm x 33cm

I have always been fascinated with the markings on found wood by the larvae of the beetle. I have a collection of this found wood and use it for rubbings in my work and to create collagraph plates. They are natural ‘drawings’ from the environment that reflect the energy, transition and life force of these insects and the processes of nature.

The example below has been created from such rubbings.

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Fig.22: Bärbel Ullrich, page 52 from *The Book of Sand*, (DETAIL) 2017 ongoing, mixed media on paper, each page 19cmx28cm. See appendix 3 for installation of work.

Regarding his ongoing practice, Wolseley writes:

My work over the last thirty years has been a search to discover how we dwell and move within landscape. I have lived and worked all over the continent from the mountains of Tasmania to the floodplains of Arnhem land. I see myself as a hybrid mix of artist and scientist; one who tries to relate the minutiae of the natural world – leaf, feather and beetle wing – to the abstract dimensions of the earth’s dynamic systems. Using techniques of watercolour, collage, frottage, nature printing and other methods of direct physical or kinetic contact I am finding ways of collaborating with the actual plants, birds, trees, rocks and earth of a particular place.

I like to think that the large works on paper on which I assemble these different drawing methods represent a kind of inventory or document about the state of the earth. I want to reveal both the energy and beauty of it, as well as show its condition of critical even terminal change. My interest is to paint the processes and energy field of the living systems of this land – flocks of birds, or water plants in swamps, or the movement of sand dunes or the ways in which trees regenerate after fire. In the last few years I have been concentrating on the wetlands of Australia which are threatened by our changing climate and the clearing of ground for industrial farming. These works will be exhibed in *Heartlands and Headwaters* at the National Gallery of Victoria in early 2015.125

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Although my work uses similar techniques to Wolseley and has a similar philosophy, I have concentrated on my own lived environment as a specific site of reference, whereas Wolseley has lived and worked all over the continent as well as overseas. Unlike my work, Wolseley has used a lot of text in his work to record his observations. Much of his drawings of insects, reptiles and flora, are like scientific illustrations immersed in a vast topography of landforms. My works refers to the microcosm and macrocosm in a very different way. In the example shown above page 4 from _The Book of Creation_, I have used printmaking and stencilling from objects in the environment representing the details of the microcosm. The work as a whole, due to its scale becomes a metaphor for the larger environment.

**Bronwyn Rees**

As has been my aim and intention, Rees investigates the emotional, psychological and spiritual experience of the natural world and has a keen awareness of her place within it.

Throughout Rees' printmaking oeuvre, nature is represented as powerful, potent and unsettling. This includes using unusual perspective, tapping into wild unseen energies. She writes:

> For me, I feel most Australian when walking and camping in the bush, my humanity slipping away and becoming smaller and more fragile. Feeling the power, space and ferocity of our wilderness.\(^{126}\)

It is this notion of the sublime, feeling the power, space and ferocity that I relate to when walking in the bush and experiencing the claustrophobic, enclosing atmosphere of the bush rather than vast space traditionally depicted as an experience of the sublime.\(^ {127}\) This is quite a different sensation that you get from the tamed and cultivated paddocks of farmland and as a result, darkness, formlessness and chaos have all become elements of the sublime in my work.

Rees moves beyond representation to something more deeper and experiential which includes a sense of being physically and spiritually connected to the physical world, which is something I have also aimed to achieve. Her use of printmaking creates markings that represent both the rough ‘spikiness’ and the delicacy of the Australian bush; something I also feel I have achieved.

Particularly dramatic are her black and white etchings. I find that black is a strong ‘colour’ to represent the bush as it connotes both a mood and a reference to bush fires whose aftermath so dominates the landscape as well as the human psyche, as shown in the examples below.

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\(^{127}\) I will be discussing more ideas about the sublime in chapter 5.
Fig. 23: Bronwyn Rees, *Motherland*, 2013, etching on used steel 56 x 72 cm

Fig. 24: Bronwyn Rees, *Into the Woods*, 2013, etching, 12 x 34 cm

Fig.25: Bronwyn Rees, *Blue Wishing Tree*, 2014, 3 plate colour etching 50 x 50cm

Fig.26: Bärbel Ullrich from the *Earth Print* series, 2016, mixed media print, 53x53cm. See appendix 3 or below for full installation photograph.

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Fig. 27: Bärbel Ullrich from the *Earth Print* series, 2016, mixed media print, each print 53x53cm. Installation at the HR Gallop Gallery, CSU campus, Wagga Wagga, 10 May -2 June 2017.
Winsome Jobling

Jobling has an active participation with the environment and an engagement that is bodily wearing and internally strenuous. She traverses the landscapes of the Northern Territory collecting plants and fibres to make her papers. This often involves trekking and hauling of plant matter or wading through the ‘detritus of life’. The creative process involves transforming the matter into pulp and making paper and then printing on it.

Our environmental perception and its after-image dissolve into the sensations of materiality and in doing so move beyond the representational and signified. … If papermaking for Jobling is the sensual environmental collaboration, printmaking is the conscious experience. To think ecologically is both to acknowledge and displace oneself as ‘operator’ of the world in order to invite interrelation and interaction.  

It is these sensations of materiality of the environment that I have aimed to capture in my work through use of materials, printmaking and mark making. Although I don’t make my own paper, I do use materials from the environment to construct the collagraph plates that are printed from.

As I do, Jobling physically engages with the land continually observing, responding and collaborating with nature. “Her works highlight the fragility of ecosystems that sustain life and warn of the accelerating and catastrophic destruction that threatens the earth.”

The basis of her philosophy, which resonates with my own, is about the interconnectedness of all things and that human beings are part of the natural environment. Note the use of the circle embedded in her work, a device I have also used, as a symbol to connote this wholeness and interconnection. A symbol that makes reference to the moon, a feminine archetype; and the infinite details and fractals of nature. Jobling’s work also operates on the level of a microcosm, it could be seen as looking through a microscope revealing the minute organisms and plant structures. (as shown in figures 28, 29, 31)

Angus Cameron states:

Her art shows us that the bush is like a complex city of organisms and species that survive through their own ingenuity yet are vulnerable to destruction and invasion by exotic and dominant competitors. The basis of Jobling’s philosophy is that human beings are part of the natural environment and therefore we have a responsibility to treat all things with respect and to hold them in the same regard as we do ourselves.

This complexity of organisms is revealed in the two examples below.

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132 Angus Cameron, Director Nomad Art productions, Winsome Jobling: The Nature of Paper, Catalogue. 7.
133 Angus Cameron, in Catalogue, 12-13
Fig.28: Winsome Jobling, *Eclipse*, 2009, drypoint on handmade paper from recycled mooring rope of Manilla hemp and chine-collé, 50x40cm.\(^{134}\)

Fig.29: Winsome Jobling, *Breathe 2*, 2012, monoprint drypoint on handmade papers from abaca and cotton, with watermark and stencilled cotton pulp, 61x64cm.\(^{135}\)

\(^{134}\) Jobling, Catalogue. 29.
\(^{135}\) Jobling, Catalogue. 51.
The bush surrounding THE SITE also is a “complex city of organisms and species that survive through their own ingenuity yet are vulnerable to destruction and invasion by exotic and dominant competitors” including Samba deer, wild dogs, foxes, feral cats as revealed by my time lapse photography project Seven Months. The Samba deer are quite destructive to the natural bushland as well as to the introduced trees that were planted around the dwelling – fences don’t keep them out. The spread of blackberries throughout the bushland, especially in the gullies of the creeks, throttle the natural vegetation. Their seeds are spread by fox dung so that the cycle is continuous and impossible to eliminate. Even control is difficult as they thrive in inaccessible areas.

Fig. 30: Bärbel Ullrich Photograph at THE SITE

Jobling’s works are complex arrangements that “are a testimony to the artist’s ability to work with multiple opposing and complementing elements.” Jobling uses a variety of printmaking techniques including monotypes, drypoint, etching, mixed media and stencilling. I have also used a variety of printmaking techniques which serve to express the hidden qualities of nature as are displayed in Jobling’s work. (as shown in figures 28, 29, 31)

Angus Cameron comments that:

As the viewer we peer unnoticed into a world in which elements are gradually revealed. Like reading a coded message, hidden stories, histories, associations and cultural references are imbedded in the layers of her imagery.

Rather than landscape representation being a mere ‘simulacrum’ of the natural world - to add new information to the work and new knowledge for the viewer - messages, stories, associations, are an important visual strategy to subvert the myth of the pristine wilderness. Wherever I walk throughout the bushland I find evidence of human ‘interference’; from a footprint in the soil to a piece of barbed wire, old logging truck cuttings and felled trees.

136 Not to mention human clearing of bushland to create more pastures for sheep or cattle in neighboring blocks.
137 Jobling, Catalogue. 12.
138 Cameron in Jobling, Catalogue. 15.
As I aim to do, Jobling represents the changing face of nature – a living reality that is continuously in flux, constantly becoming or metamorphosing into something else.\textsuperscript{139}

Cameron states that:

Through her work, Jobling constantly reiterates the residual magic of plants that hovers playfully around the preoccupation of our daily lives. She reminds us of how much we depend on trees, rivers, wetlands and the sea; that our relationship with the natural world is physical, cultural and spiritual. She connects us to the laws of nature. ...she demonstrates that, like us, plants have the capacity to transform, to renew, to grow, to adapt, reproduce and flower, much like the artist herself.\textsuperscript{140}

It is these aspects and experiences of nature, the constant flux and metamorphosis, that I have aimed to explore and express in my work. My mark making is subtle and layered to show the transformation and renewal process in the environment. These ideas of transformation and renewal are elements and processes in my work that add to the contribution of new knowledge about land representations. I aim to express through my work that my relationship with the natural world is physical, cultural and spiritual as is expressed in Jobling’s work. (as shown in figures 28, 29, 31, 32)

\textsuperscript{139} Pirrie in Jobling, Catalogue. 17.  
\textsuperscript{140} Cameron in Jobling, Catalogue. 25
Fig. 31: Winsome Jobling, *The Wet*, (DETAIL) 2006, etching and handmade paper, chine-collé from banana and sugar palm, sedge and cotton, 33.5x23.5cm.
Fig 32: Bärbel Ullrich from the *Earth Print* series, 2016, mixed media print, 53x53cm
John Davis was an artist who wanted to make meaningful works based on the environment, using and exploiting whatever materials were on hand. He used the simple processes of gathering, stitching and arranging by which to capture the sense of place and space as well as the "silences of the Australian bush". Davis’ work is also imbued with the use of symbolism, in particular “his focus had centred the image of the fish as metaphor for nature and the essence of being.”

From the mid 1980’s Davis employed fish in his work as symbols for human movement and relationship with each other and with the environment. He commonly referred to his fish as ‘nomads’ or ‘travellers’. … he described them as ‘a metaphor for people and the way we move around the world [and] a statement for diversity’.

The river was also an important metaphor in Davis’s works … it represented connectedness and life … a contemplative space that measures time.

The creeks are also a significant metaphor in my work. In this mountainous country they never dry up; their movement is continuous and infinite. As such, I have used many images of tree ferns, the different varieties and stages of change as a symbol of growth and decay, permanence, impermanence and ecological health. (see example below fig. 34)

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At the core of Davis’ practice was “an awareness of ecology and a sensitivity to the elemental forces of nature and the effect of human actions.” His philosophy aligns with mine in that he believes that all ecological systems and processes in nature are both interconnected and interdependent. Davis’ life’s work captured the “essence of being within the gestalt of the continuum of time and place.” The essence of being is captured by the physicality of the work and although deceased one can still feel his ‘presence’ in the work which is the title of the publication. He captures the gestalt of the continuum of time and place by his perceiving patterns in the environment, use of repetition and the similarity of objects and the relationship and connection of his objects to the environment. (see fig. 37) It is this philosophy I have aimed to capture in my work.

As in Davis’ work, I have also aimed to create a ritual in making, assembling, sewing and constructing. My selection of materials is symbolic, physical and metaphoric. This use of materials is integral to my process and art practice. I use printmaking papers, raw canvas, bitumen, shellac, muslin, oxides and materials from the environment such as earth, sticks, leaves and rocks. The use of cloth, stitching and construction for me, plays a significant role in my land-based art as it connotes the mending and healing of the environment. (see fig. 35 & 36 below)

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144 Hurlston, ed., John Davis, 8.
145 Hurlston, ed., John Davis, 142
Fig. 35: Bärbel Ullrich *The Book of Bark, Rocks, Sticks and Ferns*, 2016-2017, mixed media, sticks & print on calico and muslin, H180cm W53cm variable.

Fig. 36: Bärbel Ullrich *The Book of Bark, Rocks, Sticks and Ferns*, (DETAIL) 2016-2017, mixed media, sticks & print on calico and muslin, H180cm W53cm variable.
Fig. 37: John Davis, installing Unrolled, 1973, at the Mildura Sculptural triennial. 147

147 Hurlston, ed., *John Davis*, 114.
John Davis’s practice synthesised material diversity with an idiosyncratic concept of landscape and ecology. His mature works “reflect his sensitivity to elemental forces, the organic world and his profound connection to the ecological fragility and beauty of the landscape.”

Davis “saw his selection of materials as both symbolic and metaphoric. His use of bituminous paint not only rendered the surface patterns of nature with a natural product – tar being a traditional preserver of organic material – but its burnt surface also reminded the viewer of fire as a constant vehicle of destruction in the landscape.” Davis depicted the materiality of the bush rather than its look and the physicality of the detail.

If my materials are temporal it does not concern me. It’s what they express at the time of their existence which matters, and if the materials deteriorate over time, then that becomes part of the work: the process continues as part of the content just the same as the space works in their installation. Therefore, the materials embrace time and journey through their own history. Each exhibition is an event in my history.

As in Davis’s work, my materials are also temporal as they have been exposed to the processes of nature by being left out in the environment (as shown in figures 35 and 36). His work, like mine, also has a compact and portable nature. My works on paper can be stacked and take up minimal space and the large canvas works can be rolled up.

Davis also saw nature as an extension of culture – a radical idea in his time but new ideas are now developing about ‘nature’, ecology, eco philosophy and environmental humanities.

**Asemic writing, patterns and irregularities of shapes and forms**

**GW Bot**

My aim, as in GW Bot’s work is to capture “the endless patterns and irregularities of shapes and forms spread before us in the fractal field of nature.” Bot’s work is dominated by her use of ‘glyphs’ and the spaces around them which is how she sees the world and interprets her visual perspective. She abstracts the world with her determined and unique language in an effort to understand and describe what she sees.

For GW BOT, glyphs transform life into allegories of timelessness. For the viewer they can require time to ‘read’ but once read they are made real and tangible. We can see them clearly wherever and whenever we care to look. Armed with our own glyph alphabet we too can travel into the bush, into our suburb, and regenerate our own visual perspective. Glyphs are on the ground, up in the air, in the trees, the sky; shadows redolent with life and death, witness to our existence and the encroachment of the ‘grid’.

Printmaking, drawing and mixed media are her main methods to render these marks. She looks at the microcosm of nature as well as the immensity of space using multiple layers of line and tone.

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149 Hurlston, ed., *John Davis*, 142.
151 Jones, Jan. “Artist, Printmaker, Sculptor: GW Bot” (in *Art Monthly Australia* October 2010), 34.
152 Jones, “GW Bot”, 35.
Fig. 38: GW Bot *Bent Glyph – homage to Corot*, 2017, watercolour and graphite on colombe paper, 106x200cm\(^1\)

Fig. 39: GW Bot *Glyphs and Shadows*, 2015, linocut and watercolour on BFK paper, 53x173 cm\(^2\)


Sensitivity to the environment, specific places and awareness of self are important processes within Bot’s work.

For her the organising of thought, perception and meaning is intimately related to specific places. This incorporates memories and how they become embedded in consciousness, and thence inseparable from our awareness of ourselves.\(^{155}\)

Bot makes use of the negative spaces between the forms which also contribute to the endless patterns of nature. Once again, the archetypal circle is evoked:

There is no beginning and no end in the existence of nature for BOT, only a continuum, a never-ending cycle of life enmeshed in decay and death. Her marks imprint also an impenetrable silence.\(^{156}\)

Growth and decay have always been a theme in my land-based art work. But I find the idea of ‘impenetrable silence’ a particularly poetic reference to being alone in the bush – a notion of the sublime.

Certainly, her works do represent ‘the spirit of life’ as Bot uses a mass of tiny marks that supply visual depth and move the eye through the print; “they imbue the total work with a fluid rhythmical energy that sings to the viewer.”\(^{157}\) Both the positive and negative spaces dance across the surface creating a sense of energy and life. For me, her work also alludes to fabric, stitching and weaving of cloth.

**The mystical and the Spiritual.**

**Judy Watson**

It’s the mystical, contemplative and ephemeral quality of Judy Watson’s work that reflects an aspect of the spiritual sublime. The land is represented personally and from within, as my work has intended to do.

“I try to paint the land from both above and beneath to integrate the body with Country.” \(^{158}\)

Watson is an Indigenous Australian of the Waanyi, Gulf Region language group. She has a strong connection and maternal link to the country of her ancestors. Watson particularly draws inspiration and experience of her travels to her great grandmother’s country in north-west Queensland.

The hidden histories of Indigenous experience on the colonial frontier – particularly those of women – continue to inspire her. Watson seeks the indelible impressions of past presence on the landscape – rubbings, engravings, incisions – and subtly inscribes them on her work.\(^{159}\)

\(^{155}\) Haynes, Peter. “Anima and Essences” (Craft Arts International No. 61. 2004), 31-33.

\(^{156}\) Jones, “GW Bot”, 34.

\(^{157}\) Haynes. “Anima and Essences” 35.


Fig. 40: Judy Watson *Internal Landscape*, 1993, synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 189.5x127.3cm cm (irreg)\textsuperscript{160}

Her works are representations of landscape but are more internal and metaphysical than actual. They are not representative or fixed and located in time and space. They are “emotional and transportable experiences of land” that have multiple layers which create a drift and locate the viewer above, below or somewhere within. They also are a record of the process, “the pooling and puddling of pigment, the imprint of burnt ground, the controlled float of colour and the accretion of forms and images”.  

It is this intuitive process of making art that also resonates in my work. The multiple layers as well as the layers beneath the ground and the record of the process becomes a significant part of the content.

Watson says this of her work:

As an artist I seek to reveal layers beneath the ground, within objects, their history, their making and their taking, to ‘rattle the bones of the museum’, to wake the dead who are not dead but alive to all of us.

There should always be controversy in the air surrounding artists and makers, museums and objects and culture. It comes as a spark of energy, reverberating from the objects, which ricochets to the ceilings and the walls and the floors and between the other objects and the viewers in the space. It is a necessary combustible reaction to what we see, what we know and don’t know, the power of the object and its impact upon us. The force, like osmosis, will slip under our skin, seep into our bones and electrify our impulses so that we are tasting culture on our tongue. It is this that keeps museums alive and relevant, part of an ongoing dialogue and questioning as the past and the present collide and coalesce.

These are very powerful statements where the artworks, displayed in the museums/galleries should have sparks of energy that react as a force with the viewers. I have aimed that my work has this kind of impact as well as being a relevant part of the dialogue questioning the role or nature of land-based representations. (see fig. 41 below)

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161 Watson & Martin-Chew, Judy Watson, 14.144.
Fig.41: Bärbel Ullrich page 1 from the *Book of Creation*, 2017, mixed media, sticks & print on calico and muslin, 3.5x1.8m. For the full installation of these works see appendix 5.
Yolngu Art

Howard Morphy in his book *Becoming Art* discusses the history of art from the Yolngu peoples of north-east Arnhem Land. He says the “Yolngu have always produced art but Yolngu art has only recently been recognized as art.” Signiﬁcant to me is their visuality and form of representation used to convey meanings and evoke feelings about land and its human and non-human inhabitants.

For Yolngu, rather than using techniques of visual representation to imitate the reality of the seen, are more concerned with conveying the reality of the unseen, the underlying forces in the landscape.

The relationship between the invisible is a central trope of Yolngu art. In part this reﬂects that paintings are connected to a revelatory system of knowledge about the world in which people learn deeper meanings as they pass through life. …In harmony with this is the belief that the surface forms of things derive from underlying structures and relationships.

It is this sense of a spiritual journey and gaining knowledge through life that I can identify with in relation to my art making. Morphy discusses the visual systems of Yolngu art which reveal and sometimes reproduce an aspect of nature such as the ﬂash of light or the movement of ﬁsh beneath the water. Their images are simultaneously “conceptual and perceptual” and communicate the “mythological signiﬁcance of place and representing the particularities of ancestral beings.”

Vision is an integral phenomenon in that it is processed by the brain and the mind. But it is also external – reﬂecting that which is and acting as a communication between people.

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167 Morphy, *Becoming Art*, 110.
168 Morphy, *Becoming Art*, 110.
Fig 42: *Djang’kawu Story 1* by Mawalan 1 Marika, 1959, natural pigments on bark, 191.8 x 68.9 cm. Art Gallery of New South Wales\(^{169}\)

\(^{169}\) https://www.nma.gov.au/exhibitions/yalangbara/art_and_meaning
Photography and Organic forms

James Farley

![Image](image_url)

**Fig.43: James Farley, Rambunctious Garden, 2017, lumen print, 2017.**

Farley’s exhibition and PhD project “explores camera less photography as a tool for ecological thinking.” (see above figure 48)

My research is motivated by the rising ecological crisis of anthropocentric climate change and the driving forces of unchecked exploitation from western capitalist cultures. I am particularly interested in the ways traditional landscape photography is implicated in this ongoing culture of exploitation through the lingering influence of aesthetic traditions such as the beautiful, the picturesque and the sublime. Such traditions allow landscape photography to be used as a colonial tool for classifying, conquering and commodifying the land, ultimately reinforcing the western narrative of a Nature/Culture dualism.¹⁷¹

I also use photography in my work to record images of nature, but in a different way to that of Farley. Quite often they are embedded in my artists books to make a direct connection to the land. But I glue them down and sand them back so that only fragments of the image remains recognisable. They then become an integral part of the book rather than a separate ‘glued down’ snap shot image (see Figure 44.) This becomes stitched into the work – glazed with shellac and bitumen. The images have an organic ambiguous quality – fading in and out of focus. As do Farley’s lumen prints.


Fig. 44: Bärbel Ullrich, from *The Seven Books of Tears*, (DETAIL), 2016-2017, mixed media, H800cm x W variable,
Renata Buziak

Buziak’s creative photographic work is also underpinned by the exploration of the natural environment through experimental processes. She uses chance patterns displayed by natural events, conditions of time, physical circumstance and the duration of decay in her photographic images, as shown in the example below:

Fig. 45: Renata Buziak, Biochrome No1, 2004, various sizes.

172 Dr Victoria Garnons-Williams, essay, Rexer, Lyle foreword, Renata Buziak: Afterimage. (Queensland Centre for Photography, Brisbane, Australia, 2010.) 4.
173 Garnons-Williams, Renata Buziak, 27.
Buziak exploits “the physical and molecular attributes of de-composing plant matter” and employs an “ecological viewpoint.”

Her work hovers between abstraction and representation, where some plant forms are vaguely recognisable. She uses experimentation where the outcome of the process is called a “biochrome”. The image depends on interactions of the organic matter in contact with chemical photographic surfaces.

Buziak has gone beyond the world of surface appearances that has dominated photography, especially botanical photography. Part of her strategy involves a gentle subversion of the sentimentality of previous eras of floral imagery. …in Buziak’s world, nature is intensely personal, and she extrapolates every meaning from it.

Stencilling has become a dominant visual strategy in my work as it directly connects the paper to the organic objects leaving a ghostly photographic-like impression. This strategy creates a similarity to Buziak’s work, in that the organic forms are partially recognisable and float in and out of an abstract background. (see figures 46 & 47 below)

Both our work responds to the mystical, symbolic and abstract qualities of the world of natural forms.

\[\text{\textsuperscript{174} Garnons-Williams, Renata Buziak, 8.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{175} Garnons-Williams, Renata Buziak, 8}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{176} Garnons-Williams, Renata Buziak, 8}\]
Fig. 46: Bärbel Ullrich from the *Fern Print* series, 2016, mixed media print, 53x53cm

Fig. 47: Bärbel Ullrich from the *Earth Print* series, (DETAIL), 2017, mixed media print, 53x53cm
Conclusion

Through representing land and positioning themselves in a relationship to environment or place, the above artists discussed have imbued a personal spirituality in their work. By the use of materials and processes that contribute to the structure of the content and a personal philosophy, these artists have transgressed the European pictorial tradition that has so dominated the representation of ‘landscape’ in Australia.

For many contemporary land-based artists today including myself, ecological thinking and eco philosophy are important theories that inform and support the work and as such the European pictorial tradition of depicting ‘landscape’ is inadequate in this contemporary milieu. Enmeshed in this is a questioning of our relationship to the land – there is a renewed idea of spirituality and spiritual belonging to place that is not connected to traditional religion. But, more so inspired by the gift of Indigenous Australian cultures.

The next chapter will explore ideas about spirituality, spiritual belonging and connection to place.
Chapter 3
The Book of Seeds

All life begins and ends with a seed. The seed is the plan.\textsuperscript{177}

Indigenous Australian Spirituality

To discuss land and spiritual belonging within Australia, one must respectfully acknowledge the many Indigenous Australian languages, regions, and diverse forms of living heritage. This is an important project for all Australians. A common problem is the difficulties caused by abstraction or generalisations.\textsuperscript{178} To contextualise this project it is necessary to outline the broader issues and ontologies of Indigenous Australian Spirituality where my work shares common interests.

Indigenous Australian Spirituality is connected to The Dreaming which encompasses a wide range of concepts and entities that can vary from different geographical and ecological regions, language, family, social groups and clan areas.\textsuperscript{179} Deborah Bird Rose says that it can usually minimally refer to the following:

- The creative beings who were born of earth and who walked first, creating geographical features, different species, and the Laws of existence;
- The creative acts of these beings;
- The period in which these things happen;
- Many of the relationships between humans and other species.\textsuperscript{180}

To immerse myself in the bush environment surrounded by nature is a form of escape, personal reflection and healing. I understand this experience to be comparable to what Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann has called Dadirri, a word from the Ngan'gikurunggurr and Ngen'giwumirri languages of the Aboriginal people of the Daly River region.\textsuperscript{181}

\textit{Dadirri} can be defined as contemplation, “an inner deep listening and quiet still awareness” where it spreads over our whole life and one can find peace. It is where one is listening to the sense of “oneness and harmony with the cosmos in its rhythms, the mystical union with the cosmic whole.”\textsuperscript{182}

Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann is an artist, an educator and a tribal elder who comes from the Daly River country of the Northern Territory. Baumann says it is not just an Indigenous spirituality but one that everybody has – only they haven’t found it yet.\textsuperscript{183}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{178} This problem is also of concern to Deborah Bird Rose in \textit{Nourishing Terrains: Australian Aboriginal Views of Landscape and Wilderness} (Australian Heritage Commission, 1996). 1, 38.
\textsuperscript{179} Deborah Bird Rose \textit{Dingo makes us Human: Life and Land in an Australian Aboriginal Culture} (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 2000), 44, 117.
\textsuperscript{180} Rose, \textit{Dingo makes us Human}, 44.
\textsuperscript{181} Deep listening (dadirri) - Creative Spirits, retrieved from \url{https://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/education/deep-listening-dadirri}, accessed March, 2019.
\textsuperscript{183} \url{https://www.miriamrosefoundation.org.au/about-dadirri} accessed 1/03/2019
\end{flushleft}
Baumann’s significance/importance is her aim to empower young Indigenous people today. Her aim is to educate young Indigenous people to respond to who they are and their connection to land, to empower Indigenous Australian youth through education and to help their mental health. To exchange knowledge between the two cultures is to listen deeply which is to connect – where we can all grow together. As a shared aim of my research, healing and deep listening requires time to address pain and disorder in our society.\textsuperscript{184}

\textit{Dadirri} may also be likened to the Wiradjuri concept of \textit{Yindyamarra Winhanga-nga}, “the wisdom of living respectfully in a world worth living in”, which has been extensively studied by Bernard Sullivan and Stan Grant (Senior) at Charles Sturt University, amongst others.

The Wiradjuri people, despite the ravages of colonialism, have managed to maintain their identity through the concept of \textit{Yindyamarra}, which may be translated as a way of life based on respect and responsibility that shapes every aspect of living, including how to relate to country, other people, and one’s self. It may be possible for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal to learn to understand this way of living and foster a fuller way of experiencing both the land and one’s place in it.\textsuperscript{185}

Indigenous Australian Spirituality should be seen as a vital way of seeing nature and the land. It reflects a sacred bond with humans and the land. There is a belief that a powerful spiritual change is happening where new concerns and values have been aroused including a greater sensitivity to the environment\textsuperscript{186} According to Lawler, these views can include that:

Everything in the natural world is a symbolic footprint of the metaphysical beings whose actions created our world. As with a seed, the potency of an earthly location is wedded to the memory of its origin…. and this Dreaming constitutes the sacredness of the earth. Only in extraordinary states of consciousness can one be aware of, or attuned to, the inner dreaming of the earth.\textsuperscript{187}

\section*{On Land/Country}

Deborah Bird Rose has developed a definition of ‘Country’ from her studies with Indigenous Australian peoples. She describes Country as a “nourishing terrain” that “is a place that gives and receives life. Not just imagined or represented, it is lived in and lived with.” She states that “Country is multi-dimensional – it consists of people, animals, plants, Dreamings; underground, earth, soils, minerals and waters, surface water and air.”\textsuperscript{188}

Country or the ‘nourishing terrains’, are the active manifestation of Creation where “everything in the world is alive: animals, trees, rains, sun, moon, some rocks and hills, and people are all conscious.”\textsuperscript{189} This resonates with my personal philosophy and my approach to working in collaboration with land.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[184] https://www.miriamrosefoundation.org.au/about-dadirri. The Miriam – Rose foundation is a not-for-profit organisation working to empower Indigenous youth through education, art, culture and opportunity. Also see The Value of Deep Listening - The Aboriginal Gift to the Nation | Judy Atkinson | TEDxSydney accessed 1/03/2019
\item[186] Tacey, Stockton, Lawler
\item[187] Lawler, \textit{Voices of the First Day}, 1.
\item[188] Rose, \textit{Nourishing Terrains}, 7, 8.
\item[189] Rose, \textit{Nourishing Terrains}, 23.
\end{footnotes}
Djon Mundine states that:

Aboriginal people have no name for the whole land, but many different names for specific locations and areas to which they are related through their spiritual ancestor. … the term ‘country’ is often used by Aboriginal people, and is now almost a formally accepted term meaning the area of land with which an individual or group has a special spiritual relationship.\(^{190}\)

Indigenous Australian peoples are part of the land itself. They know the country; they know the story of how it came into being and that story also carries knowledge of how the human owners of that Country came into being. This understanding, ownership and transmission of knowledge of Country is specific to the place and the people.\(^{191}\) Rose states that “discussions of Country readily slide into abstractions, and it becomes easy to forget that we are talking about specific places, homes for specific life. Aboriginal people are situated within their own country emotionally, psychologically and metaphysically.”\(^{192}\)

Wisdom lies in being aware of life systems and in behaving responsibly so as to sustain the created world.\(^{193}\)

Deborah Bird Rose studied and lived with the Yarralin people of the Victoria River Area in the Northern Territory. For the Yarralin:

Earth is the initial mother and, by virtue of being original, is now and forever the mother of everything. All the different kinds of living beings, and all knowledge, are ultimately born of Earth.\(^{194}\)

They believe that “those who know how to look can see in the earth the stories of our beginnings. Those who have the knowledge to understand can find in this visible story the meaning and purpose of life.”\(^{195}\) It is through this process of working with the environment and looking at the earth, I have aimed to find meaning and knowledge – a spiritual belonging. The idea that human bodies are microcosms of larger systems and are identified with parts of the cosmos\(^{196}\) resonate with my own philosophy and approach to art making.

**Spiritual Belonging**

Though I acknowledge the limitations of my understanding through language, cultural permission, and the exceptional depth of Indigenous Australian knowledge systems, it is this state of connectedness and consciousness that I have aimed to portray in my work and experience within the environment. Spirituality and spiritual belonging are indeed connected to the inner Dreaming of the earth, as well as the Gaia hypothesis. I believe that it is this spiritual development and evolution that is necessary for human kind to see life and land as sacred. We need to survive by entering into a caring and spiritual partnership with the land where the land becomes a place of custodianship – to enter into a kinship relationship with


\(^{194}\) Rose, *Dingo Makes Us Human*, 42.

\(^{195}\) Rose, *Dingo Makes Us Human*, 43.

\(^{196}\) Rose, *Dingo Makes Us Human*, 58, 59.
Country not unlike the relationship that Indigenous Australian peoples have with land and in caring for land.

The notion of caring for country is quintessentially Aboriginal. Nowhere in the world is there a body of knowledge built up so consistently over so many millennia. Nowhere are there so many living people who continue to sustain that knowledge and engage in associated land management practices.\textsuperscript{197}

Peter Read argues that “spiritual belonging is diverse and complex, which the non-Indigenous people have yet to understand.”\textsuperscript{198} But does this mean that they cannot feel a sense of spiritual belonging? How then can this be manifest? Read asks the question what conceptions of belonging will other Australians bring to this divided land and how will they place themselves in relation to the Indigenous past and present? He expresses the need to feel that he belongs here. He says “I want to feel I belong here while respecting Aboriginality, neither appropriating it nor being absorbed by it.”\textsuperscript{199} I respectfully seek to share this approach.

At the same time, he feels an ‘anguish’ about this because of his knowledge of Aboriginal history and the atrocities inflicted on the Aboriginal peoples. “I belong but I do not belong; I seek a solemn union with my country and my land but not through Aboriginality; I understand our history but it brings me no relief.”\textsuperscript{200}

It is this sense of spiritual belonging that creates a guilty anxiety among many non-indigenous peoples who are sensitive to land and their relationship to it and love of it. The opposite response is that land is wild and untamed and must be controlled and conquered.

Read claims that “landscape is more powerful than person” and the uncleared landscape has a greater force.\textsuperscript{201} When I go into the bush alone it is not only a physical experience but a psychic mythic experience which makes a shift in my normal state of mind/consciousness. There is a presence in the bush that can be felt, sensed or intuited, almost as if I am intruding and being enveloped simultaneously; \textit{apart} from the environment and \textit{within} the environment at the same time. In this sense I feel respectful of Indigenous Australian Spirituality but I also need to find my own meaning and relationship to land.\textsuperscript{202}

The Dreamtime implies a world in which the metaphysical and physical are held in symbolic integration. The physical, psychological, and spiritual levels of experience are integrated in this world view whereas the basis of Western civilisation and ‘progress’ under industrial modernity was to exploit the natural world. As Lawler states:

\begin{quote}
All creatures – from stars to humans to insects – share in the consciousness of the primary creative force, and each, in its own way, mirrors a form of that consciousness. In this sense the Dreamtime stories perpetuate a unified world view. This unity compelled the Aborigines to respect and adore the earth as if it were a book imprinted with the mystery of the original creation. The goal of life was to preserve the earth, as much as possible, in its initial purity. The subjugation and domestication of plants and animals and all other manipulation and exploitation of the natural world – the basis of Western civilization and “progress” – were antithetical to the
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{197} Rose, Nourishing Terrains, 84.
\textsuperscript{198} Peter Read, Belonging: Australians, Place and Aboriginal Ownership (Australian Print Group, 2000) 195.
\textsuperscript{199} Read, Belonging, 15.
\textsuperscript{200} Read, Belonging, 21.
\textsuperscript{201} Read, Belonging, 107. 109.
\textsuperscript{202} This experience is different to being in awe of the land as the work of an external creator. My beliefs are in line with Animism rather than Christianity.
sense of a common consciousness and origin shared by every creature and equally with the creators. To exploit this integrated world was to do the same to oneself.  

There is a need now to transform the way we exist in the world and Indigenous Australian Spirituality can be a guiding code or a seed for the next cycle of regeneration/rebirth where humanity is re-integrated with the earth and the living spirit of the natural world. This view is reinforced by Deborah Bird Rose’s concluding chapter. She states:

Visions of the holistic Earth, combined with the rapidly increasing understanding of how badly she is being damaged, forces us to confront difficult questions. How do we, as individuals, assert our right to take responsible care of the systems with which we interact and on which we are dependent? What wisdom have we inherited, what systems and knowledge do we bequeath to the future?  

Ecology and Spirituality

In relation to our connection to the land, ecology and spirituality are closely related. Rose maintains that the Dreaming and ecology intersect constantly and thus providing a rich understanding of universal and local life where the result is a set of interrelated parts which are always in a state of flux.  

George Main talks about the displacement and destruction of Indigenous Aboriginal people, the white ideology of mastery over nature and the continued ecological destruction of rural farming lands due to repeated cultivation, mechanisation, use of chemical and industrial farming methods driven by globalised market forces. The destructive dynamics of the modern farming framework which positions humanity above and in control over rural terrain and other species is the cause of mounting ecological disorders.  

Spiritual ecologists attempt to develop new ways of relating to the planet that entail not an ethic of domination, but one of partnership with nature.  

Spiritual ecology is an awareness of the interconnectedness of the whole cosmos, a reverence for the earth, and a compassion for all creation.  

The main project of spiritual ecology is to effect a transformation of values that in turn leads to action to heal the planet.  

The experience of spiritual interconnectedness has much to do with the land, and ...from the lived experience of this earth.  

Nature’ is not only outside us but also within, and ultimately, what we do to nature we do also to ourselves. ... In killing off the spiritual essence of the Earth, we end up killing ourselves, for this essence nourishes our own biological and spiritual life.  

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203 Lawler, Voices of the First Day, 17.  
204 Rose, Dingo Makes Us Human, 233-234.  
205 Rose, Dingo Makes Us Human, 218.  
206 George Main, Heartland: The Regeneration of Rural Place (Sydney: UNSW Press), 2015. 81-82.  
208 Merchant, Radical Ecology, 133.  
211 Tacey, ReEnchantment, 168.
Rose also refers to our “dramatic awareness of the dreadful conflict between human needs and ecological needs.” She claims that human and ecological rights are most properly embedded each within the other. As a final note on the tension between ecology and spirituality, I will quote David J Tacey, in his book Edge of the Sacred: Transformation in Australia who says:

The cure for our ecologically disastrous abuse of the earth and for our culturally debilitating racism is the spiritual renewal of consciousness. … The only ‘place’ where the black and white cultures can genuinely meet is … in the imaginal world. The living soul is that barely explored mythic place where the conflict of archetypal forces in Australian society can be resolved.

**Experiencing Spirituality**

Escaping into the landscape/environment gives me a sense of connectivity and spiritual belonging. For me, spirituality is also about self-understanding and using intuition.

But what is spirituality and how can it be expressed in art?

As Nick Waterlow states:

The very word spiritual is often viewed with suspicion, seen either as a hangover from an outmoded and irrelevant faith or the buzzword of a new order. It certainly does not sit naturally in the late twentieth century. Yet evidence of the *unnamedable* abounds, and the number of people grows that are searching for a better balance in their daily lives, for a greater harmony. … In our own world, dominated by the material, there is a deep seated and widely held need for our daily lives to be enriched, as for so many conventional religions and doctrinaire faiths fail to provide spiritual sustenance.

Notions of ‘spirituality’, and its representation in art, and the idea of the sacredness of land is central to my research. As Tacey states:

Only by remaking and restoring the sacred can we achieve individual and collective health, since the sacred stands at the very heart of humanity, and if it is repressed or ignored humanity must suffer.

I agree with Tacey that the sacred stands at the very heart of humanity; it is a basic category of human experience. I believe that the human cannot be separated from the non-human and the archetypal – we can only know and fulfill ourselves in relation to a transcendent other. For me, this ‘transcendent other’ is connected to the idea of Gaia, where the earth is a living organism and we are all part of a greater whole. It is in this sense that we need to redefine our humanity in our relationship to land/nature and environment.

I believe that spirituality is connected to earth and nature. Timothy Morton in his book *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* states that:

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212 Rose, *Nourishing Terrains*, 84.86.
One of the basic problems with nature is that it could be considered either as a *substance*, as a squishy thing in itself, or as *essence*, as an abstract principle that transcends the material realm and even the realm of representation.  

For me, land/nature is both a *substance*, and an *essence*. As I work in collaboration with nature, it has materialistic qualities that interact with the canvas, the paper, the body. It is a physical act of immersion. As I walk through the environment, I look and contemplate the essence, sacredness and my place in it, a spiritual act of immersion creating a sense of spiritual belonging. I have aimed to represent the sacred in my land-based art through the use of archetypal symbols, the circle, earth, fire, water, air, and the archetypal drama of death and rebirth.

Neville Dury and Anna Voight in their book *Fire and Shadow, Spirituality in Contemporary Australian Art*, state that:

> By its very nature, the concept of ‘spirituality’ is intangible and open to debate but it would seem, in the context of contemporary Australian art, that it conveys more than formal religious faith or belief. In its broadest connotation it relates to the sacred and transcendental dimensions of human consciousness and touches directly on the fundamental mystery which underlies the process of creation. Artists explore this mystery in different ways…

It arises from individual spiritual awareness derived from personal insights and experiences. These may include profound life changes, new knowledge, and how we think about ourselves and our place on this earth. Spirituality is the basis of ‘seeing and being’ and is beyond the physical. It can be expressed through overt mythic and religious symbolism, intangible and metaphysical resonances which arise within the work and processes of work, ethereal modes of abstraction and symbolism, images of transcendence and the recognition of ‘primal source’, light and/or darkness, the void and the eternal.

Spiritual art, is finally about “essence, about the intangible – and the sacred”. To express this concept in my art I have used abstraction and symbolism, primarily of the circle. Images sourced in collaboration with the environment are combined and overlapped to create complex and mysterious layers for the viewer to contemplate. This effect is emphasised by light emanating from the central circle as shown in the example below.
Fig. 48: Bärbel Ullrich *Earth Print* mixed media and print on paper, 53x53cm, 2016.
I would also agree with Jane Magon, as she writes in her essay, “Spirituality in Contemporary Australian Art: Some Contexts and Issues of Interpretation” in describing spirituality as referring to:

a looking beyond or deeply within the self, this world and the other, sacred and mundane, heaven and earth, our relationship to the cosmos, the visible and invisible, grandeur and transcendence through healing, suffering and death and our relationship to the unknown. The spiritual refers to a dramatic shift in experience in undoing and remaking ourselves.219

Although attitudes may be changing with current theories in ecology, environmental philosophy, eco-feminism and environmental humanities, I still believe that the prime directive of the modern world is the exploitation of nature for ‘progress’ and profit. Balance and harmony have been disrupted by human production and reproduction. To address this, we should become ecologically aware and conscious of our relationship to the natural world.220

I agree with Rupert Sheldrake who believes that the worship of earth as source of creative and spiritual energy has been lost in our present global economic culture.221 He also believes that with the rise of the green movement, Mother Nature is reasserting herself. It comes with the acknowledgement that our planet is a living organism and that nature is alive connecting us with a personal and intuitive experience of nature.222

Marija Gimbutus’ work in her books The Language of the Goddess and The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe. Myths and Cult Images, seeks to identify the Old European patterns of Goddess religion.223 Her research is an important legacy for today’s ecological thinkers. For Gimbutus, the power of the feminine and the earth is revered in ancient, primal and pagan cultures where archetypal symbols are the main lines and themes of a past religion that is in veneration of the universe as the living body of a Goddess-Mother Creator where all living things within it are partaking of her divinity. Again, we cannot restore these mythologies in their original contexts, but through our thinking about our relationship to the environment, we can restore their attempts to balance between male and female energies. Reverence and respect for the female principle should contribute to a spiritual shift toward balance with the Earth.

**Archetypal Symbols used in my work**

By revisiting the ancient and primal mythologies through the work of Gimbutus, I have aimed to create a contemporary land-based art through symbols and images which balance male/female elements and give priority and agency to the non-human world. Some of these archetypal symbols subtly inform my work They are not representational but have persistent references to nature as I can experience it.

I agree with Edward O Wilson who says that “only by discovering the ancient symbols can the artist express meanings that cross generations and open the full abundance of nature.”224

220 Collins, Campbell, Gablik, Tacey, Magon, Sheldrake, Lawler, Merchant, Plumwood.
Through the use of these symbols, we can communicate the sacredness and the mysteries of nature rather than just a mimetic surface appearance as represented by European pictorial traditions. My work expresses and reflects my connection to land, the sacredness of land and spiritual belonging, and articulates my processes to inform that knowledge.

**The Circle**

The circle (or sphere) is a multivalent symbol that includes the self, unity, moon\(^{225}\), sun, earth, stones, seeds, axis mundi, mandala and the spiral. It is also a symbol that occurs naturally in the environment. The circle also captures the idea of infinity.

The circle is a symbol of the self, for as Jung interpreted it:

> It expresses the totality of the psyche in all its aspects, including the relationship between man[woman] and the whole of nature. ...it always points to the single most vital aspect of life – its ultimate wholeness.

The circle is a symbol of the psyche (even Plato described the psyche as a sphere). The square (and often the rectangle) is a symbol of earthbound matter, of the body and reality.\(^{226}\)

The circle is a significant spiritual symbol in my work. In my *Earth Prints*\(^{227}\) series, I have deliberately used the square format to relate to earthbound matter with the circle appearing on many occasions. The circle can also be seen as a scope, giving the viewer a glimpse into the microcosm of the environment.

In the examples below I have used the circle to represent the above ideas but with specific reference to THE SITE. Circles also appear in the environment as natural forms as shown in the following photos below.

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\(^{225}\) See the series *Moon Scapes* in Appendix 3


\(^{227}\) See Appendices 3, 4 & 5.
Fig. 49: Bärbel Ullrich *The Book of Creation*, page 3, mixed media and print on calico H350cm x W180cm, 2017. See Appendix 5 for installation photos.
Fig. 50: Bärbel Ullrich *The Book of Creation*, page 2, mixed media and print on calico H350 cm x W180 cm, 2017. See Appendix 5 for installation photos.
THE SITE has many huge blue gum trees. It is remarkable to think they have grown from a very tiny circular seed. All life passes on information about itself from one generation to another through codes or patterns carried by seeds. The seed is symbolic of the life/death cycle where life is reborn from the death or dormancy of the seed. It never duplicates a past formation exactly; rather:

It grows in the paradox of ever new possibilities held within an unchanging essence. It is a centrifugation into the mystery of that which is the same yet different, unchanging yet novel. The dance begins when the seed sheds its shell. The breaking of the encasement is a symbol of throwing off the accumulated encrustation of the previous cycle to reveal anew its essence.228

The seed is thus the metaphor for the archetypal dance of the birth, life, death cycle. I believe that if humans are to connect in a spiritual way to the non-human world this process needs to be acknowledged and accepted.

On the use of the number seven used in my work

To symbolically suggest a sense of spirituality, time, movement and flux in my work, I have created works in series of seven.

Within Brewer’s Dictionary of Phrase and Fable, the number seven is a particularly meaningful number for folkloric research. One implication is that it connotes the properties of the soul combining earthly elements with spirituality:

According to ancient teaching the SOUL of man or his ‘inward holy body’ is compounded of seven properties, which are under the influence of the SEVEN planets. The properties are fire, which animates; earth, which gives the sense of feeling, water, which gives speech; air, which gives taste; mist, which gives sight; flowers, which give hearing; and the south wind, which gives smelling. Hence the seven senses are animation, feeling, speech, taste, sight, hearing and smelling.229

The number seven represents, for me, the four compass points, looking up (sky/heaven') and looking down (earth) and the centre, the soul/spirit. I have also noted that the number seven has many references in the Bible. There it is described as the number of completeness and perfection, both physical and spiritual. Seven derives much of its Biblical meaning from being tied directly to God’s creation of all things whereas I would interpret it as the embodiment of the feminine earth-bound spirit and the interconnectedness of all things rather than a ‘product’ of the creation of a celestial male deity.230

Seven is also a significant symbol in Buddhist art and iconography. It is the seven steps which take the Buddha to the summit of the world.

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230 For example, there are seven days in the week and God’s Sabbath is on the seventh day. The bible as a whole was originally divided into seven major divisions, the seventh one being the Book of Revelation. The total number of originally inspired books was forty-nine, or seven by seven, demonstrating the absolute perfection of the word of God. In the book of revelation there are seven churches, seven angels to the seven churches, seven seals, seven trumpet plagues, seven thunders and the seven last plagues. Jesus performed seven miracles on God’s holy Sabbath day and Jerusalem is a city of seven hills.
The expression, “I am the highest in the world”, refers to the Buddha’s *transcendence of space*. He has, in effect, reached the “summit of the world”, by mounting the seven cosmic stories that correspond, as we know, to the seven planetary heavens. 231

The number seven is enmeshed in the Jungian ‘collective unconscious’. I am discovering more and more of its meaning in different religions and cultures, separated by time and space, that are uncannily similar. At the beginning of my research I chose the number seven intuitively, which led to further research regarding its symbolic significance. Previously I had worked in series of threes, fours, and nines which also have significance in pre-Christian cultures.

Also, there are seven colours of the rainbow – red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet. It represents magnetic energy and invisible forces. The rainbow as seen from the sky looking down is a circle.

In both traditions [Egyptian and Indigenous Australian cultures] the rainbow is a symbol that makes visible the hidden energies that stir earth and animals to fertility. These invisible forces control the patterns of weather and the cycles of animal and plant fertility; the Aborigines consider them the lawgivers of the earth, since they were deposited in the womb of life in the Dreamtime. 232

**The Snake or Serpent**

The Rainbow serpent in Indigenous Australian cultures is linked to the earth’s magnetic fields. She extinguishes and recreates life and holds all original ancestors of the Dreaming in her stomach. 233

The Rainbow Serpent or Rainbow Snake is an immortal being and creating God in Aboriginal Mythology. It is a popular image in the art of Aboriginal Australia. It is the shape of a rainbow and a snake.

The connection between snake and rainbow suggests the cycle of the seasons and the significance of them and water in human life. When a rainbow is seen in the sky, it is supposed to be the Rainbow Serpent traveling from one waterhole to another.

This is meant to explain why some waterholes never dry up when drought strikes. There are countless names and stories connected with the serpent. They all illustrate the importance and dominance of its presence within Aboriginal traditions.

It is said to be the giver of life, due to its connection to water, however it can be a destructive force if enraged.

The Rainbow Serpent (Snake) has a significant role in the beliefs and culture of the Aboriginals in western Arnhem Land. Today it is associated with ceremonies about fertility.

Aboriginals in the Kimberley regions believe that the Rainbow Serpent places spirit-children throughout waterholes in which women will become impregnated if they wade in the water. 234

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233 Lawler, *Voices of the First Day*, 119-120.
There are many archetypal interpretations of the snake or serpent in both contemporary and ancient cultural stories. Even within the diversities of Indigenous Australian Culture, ‘she’ appears in different forms and plays different roles in creation acts and ceremonies.

The snake or serpent is an archetypal symbol of renewal and rejuvenation, as it sheds its skin. It is also symbolic of energy, vitality, life giving powers and the vehicle of immortality. It has both positive and negative connotations in mythology.235

Walking alone in the bush I have a fear, a veneration and fascination for these highly adapted and sensitive reptiles. Unlike the red bellied black snake, which is happy to get out of your way, the tiger snake is not only deadly but can be aggressive. They disappear into the environment and sometimes can only be noticed by an instinctual sense of their presence. According to Wilson:

Science and the humanities, biology and culture, are bridged in a dramatic manner by the phenomenon of the serpent. The snake’s image enters the conscious mind with ease during dreams and reverie, fabricated from symbols and bearing portents of magic. It appears without warning and departs abruptly, leaving behind not the perception of any real snake but the vague memory of a more powerful creature, the serpent, surrounded by a mist of fear and wonderment. ...The snake and the serpent, flesh-and-blood reptile and demonic dream image, reveal the complexity of our relation to nature and the fascination and beauty inherent in all forms of organisms. Even the deadliest and most repugnant creatures bring an endowment of magic to the human mind.236

In my textile work I have stitched snake skins gleaned from THE SITE in to the matrix of the work. The long panels represented below reflect the patterns of the environment but are also reptile-like because of the length and the markings, these patterns have evolved together. The image of the snake reoccurs through bark and sticks while walking through the bush. The meandering of the snake is also a metonym for the creeks on our property near which they live.

The patterns on the snake are also reflected in the patterns and fractals in the environment. The Book of Bark and Ferns as depicted below 237 has very serpentine qualities. Fear and wonderment are induced by evocations and sightings of these reptiles. Their potential presence is consciously and subconsciously ever present in the Australian environment.

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235 Gimbutas The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe,
236 Edward O Wilson, Biophilia: The Human Bond with other Species (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: Harvard University Press, 1984), 84.
237 Fig. 60. See also appendix 3.
Fig. 53: Bärbel Ullrich Photograph

Fig. 54: Bärbel Ullrich *The Book of Bark and Ferns*, 2016-2017, mixed media and print on canvas. Each unit approx H180cm W32cm
Water

Water is the pure, primordial unformed element from which all life springs, and with it comes the concept of genesis of the universe from an elemental aqua substance, standing as a symbol of the deep unconscious.

Specific to THE SITE are the creeks that flow through the property down from the mountain. The water is pure and unpolluted containing many life forms including yabbies, trout and platypus. It also transports seeds which germinate on the edge of the dam close to the dwelling.

Fig.55: Bärbel Ullrich Photograph of Canvas in the creek flowing down from THE SITE

Fig.56: Bärbel Ullrich Photograph of WATER from the creek flowing down from THE SITE
Regarding water, Lawler states that:

The plunge into the deep unconscious is comparable to the metaphor used in many shamanistic cultures. The shaman enters the creative performative realm [as in diving into the water] and returns with revelations about the recurring seasons of new life, growth, and fertility. In other myths, all of creation plunges into unconsciousness or a cosmic sleep before beginning a new cycle.\(^{238}\)

The teeming waters in the creeks and the abundance of frogs (especially after a dry spell), has mythic resonances of atmospheric energies and fertility. The *Earth Altar Cloth* was placed in the creek at *THE SITE* and weighed down with seven rocks for seven months. The striations of the silt in the creek were imbedded on the surface. It was then partially buried to allow the rain and earth to further imprint and rot the canvas in places. The flow of water and silt across this canvas provided a medium for other mark-makings to occur and then I added some fern stencils as an extra layer to the surface to reflect the creek environment. The canvas was given time ‘to listen’, so to speak, to processes I could not perceive myself.

\(^{238}\) Lawler, *Voices of the First Day*, 117.
Fig. 57: Bärbel Ullrich Earth Altar Cloth produced on THE SITE, 2016-2017, mixed media on canvas, installed on the floor, length 300cm x 180cm. (see also appendices 3, 4, & 5 for installation photographs)
The flowing movement of water and air also creates spirals, another archetypal symbol that reoccurs in my work. As Jill Purse states:

> Time itself is cyclic, and by the spiral of its returning seasons we review the progress and growth of our own understanding. …

> It denotes eternity, since it may go on forever. But because we necessarily conceive infinity in our own, and therefore finite, terms, we are forced to limit the limitless. It is only by imposing limits that we can make infinity accessible to us. … The universe and man’s consciousness (the macrocosm and the microcosm) consist in a continuum and dynamic whole; this can be expressed by the spiral … This symbol which is perpetually turning in on itself, expanding and contracting, has an interchangeable centre and circumference, and has neither beginning nor end.²³⁹

My work departs from pictorial conventions of ‘landscape’ by featuring cyclic time rather than linear time, the macrocosm and the microcosm, the dynamic whole which is in constant flux, the idea of the centre, and situating my consciousness in relation to land/nature.

The spiral reflects both chaos and order as stated by Purse:

> This order, reverberating down into the microscopic and subatomic levels, both structures and reflects our consciousness. … the growth of human consciousness is the continuous refining of its own organization, the ordering of its individual microcosm. … Furthermore, we are the spiral and all the spirals within.²⁴⁰

This idea connects us in a spiritual way to the non-human world and can be used as an archetypal symbol and/or metaphor in art to represent this spiritual connection. The image of the large cold climate tree ferns, which have taken many years to reach their height, are an appropriate symbol to represent this unfolding and organisation of the individual microcosm. The young fern leaves unfold in a spiral motion.

I have used the spiral in my work as a symbol and a compositional device tying together many textures and layers. It reoccurs, deliberately, intuitively and unconsciously, as in the example below.

²⁴⁰ Purse, The Mystic Spiral, 8.
Fig 58: Bärbel Ullrich *The Book of Scarification* 55 x 55cm variable. Mixed media and collagraph print. 2015. See this book and further information in Appendix 2.

Fig 59: Bärbel Ullrich Photograph of *Ferns* next to the creek flowing down from *THE SITE*. See *The Book of Ferns* in Appendix 2.

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241 The images used in this book are based on ‘tree wounds.'
Moss and lichen are also found in moist conditions by the water and the tree ferns. Lichen was believed for many years to be a single organism but is really a double plant created by the symbiosis of mould-like fungi and single-celled green algae. According to Young:

The algae are photosynthetic and can live alone, but when they are housed within the mass of fungi threads, the live a more sheltered and favourable existence. The fungi, on the other hand, are dependent upon the photosynthetic ability of the green algae cells to manufacture food. ... Lichens are so successful that they have been able to colonize an unusually wide range of environments. They are found almost everywhere on the land surfaces of the earth, from deserts to tundra to rainforests.\textsuperscript{242}

When I walk through the bush, I am constantly picking up and photographing pieces of dried lichen that has fallen of the branches of large trees. These images have been used in my work. The patterns are consistent and yet infinitely variable – the microcosm of nature. These two separate species existing in a symbiotic relationship can be a good metaphor for how we should exist with nature and the land, especially as humans have colonised a wide range of environments. These are highly fragile and also resilient, having the ability to rejuvenate and heal without constant interference.

\textsuperscript{242} Louise B Young, \textit{The Unfinished Universe} (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 103-104.
Fig. 60: Bärbel Ullrich *The Book of Ferns, Moss and Lichen* (detail) 55 x 55cm variable. Mixed media and collagraph print. 2015. See *The Book of Ferns, Moss and Lichen* in Appendix 2.

Fig. 61: Bärbel Ullrich *The Book of Ferns, Moss and Lichen* 55 x 55cm variable. Mixed media and collagraph print. 2015. See *The Book of Ferns, Moss and Lichen* in Appendix 2.
The Tree

The tree and attributes of the tree such as leaves, bark and sticks are images that also dominate my work. The bark of Eucalypt trees which peels off periodically revealing a smooth surface can be an anthropomorphic symbol of skin – shedding, renewal, growth and decay. Gum leaves, specifically the very large leaves of the Blue Gum[^243] are iconic of this specific Australian landscape and place.

The Seven Books of Tears are dedicated to the Australian bush with particular reference to THE SITE. The materials used are designed to look fragile but are actually quite sturdy. They are meant to reflect the above process of shedding bark, renewal, growth and decay. The symbol of the circle is also used in these books, and, the light areas represent the dappled light shining through the leafy canopy of the bush is a representation of my sense of spirituality informed by landscape.

[^243]: Victorian Blue gum – Eucalyptus Biscostata, a subspecies of Eucalyptus Globulus
Fig. 62: Bärbel Ullrich from the Seven Books of Tears (detail) mixed media on paper and fabric. H800cm W variable. For installation photographs see Appendix 5.
Fig. 63: Bärbel Ullrich from the *Seven Books of Tears* (detail) mixed media on paper and fabric. H800cm W variable.

Fig. 64: Bärbel Ullrich from the *Seven Books of Tears* (detail) mixed media on paper and fabric. H800cm W variable.
The Sacred Moon Tree is an archetypal symbol found in ancient mythology. It represents the generative power of woman and the worship of the Moon Goddess. It is represented in different symbolic forms over time and throughout different cultures and often in ancient art. As Harding describes:

[the] tree is the source of inspiration and secret wisdom. … [The] fruit is the source of that drink of immortality, of secret knowledge, and of inspiration so highly prized by the gods and so jealously guarded by them. Belief in the wonderful powers of this tree long predated the Genesis story of the trees in the midst of the garden, but we cannot fail to be struck by the similarity of the powers ascribed to them and their surroundings. In the garden of Eden, the fruit of knowledge and the fruit of immortality grew on separate trees. More often both these gifts are thought of as the fruit of the one tree which grows in the central place of the earth …

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245 Harding, Women’s Mysteries, 46.
246 Harding, Women’s Mysteries, 43.
This sacred tree is “the house of the mighty mother who passes across the sky, a beautiful description of the moon.” The meaning of the Moon Goddess and the Sacred Moon Tree is a mystery as it expresses metaphysical concepts and meaning. Rather than just affirming the material reality of nature of which we are apart, it is useful to rethink the wisdom of ancient mythologies that revere nature as sacred with transcendental qualities. Before we continue to destroy the land, we need to reach a new level of consciousness that respects all life.

My process proposes one pathway toward that consciousness.

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Fig. 67: Bärbel Ullrich from *The Sacred Moon Tree* series 50x50cm Collagraph print with mixed media. 2015.

Also see *The Book of the Sacred Moon Tree* in Appendix 2.
Fig.68: Bärbel Ullrich from *The Sacred Moon Tree* series 50x50cm Collagraph print with mixed media. 2015.

Fig.69: Bärbel Ullrich from *The Sacred Moon Tree* series 50x50cm Collagraph print with mixed media. 2015.
The tree is also an **axis mundi**, a symbol that links heaven and earth or communication between the two. It is also the symbol of the centre, the still point around which the seeming chaos or movement of the universe revolves. Also, it is symbolised as a cosmic tree, the tree of life.\(^{248}\) As a centre it could also be interpreted as a mandala.

Mircea Eliade states that the **axis mundi** is an image of a universal pillar through which the three cosmic levels – earth, heaven, underworld. The **axis mundi** connects and supports heaven and earth and whose base is fixed in the world below. Eliade says that such a cosmic pillar can be only at the very centre of the universe, for the whole of the habitable world extends around it. It is the Centre of the World or the navel of the earth, the symbolism of which marks a sacred place or precinct. It can be a cosmic or sacred mountain, a holy site, a temple, a tree or a vine where the axis is located at the centre and the sacred is manifest. It turns chaos into cosmos.\(^{249}\)

The sacred reveals absolute reality and at the same time makes orientation possible; hence it *foundsthe world* in the sense that it fixes the limits and establishes the order of the world.\(^{250}\)

I believe the axis mundi is a primal archetypal symbol – both spiritual and psychological. It is embedded in mythology, and inherent in the collective unconscious but is dominantly hidden or forgotten in our materialistic culture. I interpret the symbol metaphorically\(^{251}\) to connect the physical realm (earth) and the spiritual realm (heaven) with the soul/creative force being the centre. Thus, the orientation is metaphysical and the axis mundi as such is a key to the understanding of our spiritual belonging to the earth.

The axis mundi is a significant way of working (methodology) as an artist. I interact with the environment and work from intuition – letting things happen and materialise from within the centre using intuition, imagination, processes and experimentation.

**Stones**

Stones had a highly symbolic meaning for ancient societies. Jung noted that “Rough, natural stones were often believed to be the dwelling places of spirits or gods, and were used in primal cultures as tombstones, boundary stones, or objects of religious veneration.”\(^{252}\) They invested the stone with more expressive power than chance and nature could give it.

**THE SITE** contains massive stones which would have been moved by the force of water over the aeons. Two creeks meet at the base of three large hills. At this point of the creek intersection there is a huge stone, now covered in moss and lichen. When I first discovered it, it had some markings in it. The markings represented a triangle – an archetypal symbol.\(^{253}\) It is now overgrown with moss and I am reluctant to disturb it.

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\(^{248}\) An ancient tree or plant represents symbolically the growth and development of psychic life. Jung, 1978, 152.


\(^{250}\) Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane, 30.

\(^{251}\) Use of synecdoche where the part stands for the whole

\(^{252}\) Jung, Man and his Symbols, 258.

\(^{253}\) Natural or human made?
These types of stones could be known as ‘omphalos’ which are conical stones representing the central point of the earth. Stones and mountains are among the oldest symbols of the Great Mother Goddess.

I have used images of stones in my work as they are not only an archetypal symbol but a predominant aspect of THE SITE and are related to the creek environment (see figures 70&71) The also reflect a sense of permanence in the environment which is in a constant state of flux and change.

In many cultures, stones are also believed to contain divine powers, they are used as monuments to represent the eternal and immortal forces, or the transcendence of time. Many religions use a stone to signify God or to mark a place of worship. Christ was also called “the spiritual rock from which the water of life springs.” Stones are invested with sacred powers and are believed to contain a spiritual life force and a mystery. As such, they are more than inanimate objects representing something greater-than-human. I am always in awe of large stones – there is an aspect of the sublime within their profound mass and permanence.

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256 Jung, Man and his Symbols, (1 Cor X:4). 225.
Fig. 70: Bärbel Ullrich Photograph of Stones on THE SITE

Fig. 71: Bärbel Ullrich Photograph of Stones on THE SITE
Fig. 72: Bärbel Ullrich from the Seven rocks series, mixed media and print on paper, 53x53cm, 2016-2017.

Fig. 73: Bärbel Ullrich from the Seven rocks series, mixed media and print on paper, 53x53cm, 2016-2017.
Fig. 74: Bärbel Ullrich from *the Seven rocks* series, mixed media and print on paper, 53x53cm, 2016-2017.

Fig. 75: Bärbel Ullrich from *the Seven rocks* series, mixed media and print on paper, 53x53cm, 2016-2017.

See Appendix 5 for installation photograph of final exhibition.
Binding and Stitching

Throughout these books is the use of cloth and stitching to not only bind the books but to create extra layers of transparency between the pages. The washing of the cloth:

is a symbol for cleansing and purification of the entire bearing of the psyche. In mythology the woven cloth is the work of the Life/Death/Life mothers. ...To wash something is a timeless purification ritual. It not only means to purify, it also means... to drench, to permeate with a spiritual numen and mystery.\(^\text{257}\)

This process is also associated with religious rituals, such as the pure white altar cloth. The perceived purity of the cloth relates to the pureness and perfection of God and heaven. As it refers to something ethereal and transcendent, I have treated my cloth in the opposite manner. I have stained the cloth with bitumen and inks; using shellac as a varnish on paper. I wish to refer to the earth and environment and pay homage to the earthly impurities.

Thus, the thread or the cord in mythology symbolises the cosmic principle that unites all things and also the support, the power and the divine law that hold the universe together. The labyrinth is sometimes conceived as a ‘knot’ that has to be ‘un-tied’, and this notion belongs to a metaphysico-ritual unity which comprises the ideas of difficulty, of danger, of death and of initiation. Thus, key words conveying the idea of ‘bondage, shackling, attachment’ and the idea of ‘binding’ appear on magical and religious planes and are a complex archetypal symbol of man’s recognition of his own situation in the world.\(^\text{258}\)

The symbolism of binding and knotting is related to mending and healing and lend themselves to various spiritual connotations. In many countries the ‘thread of life’ symbolises human destiny. The goddesses of fate spin the thread of human life as Eliade states:

The cosmos itself is conceived as a tissue, as a vast ‘web’. In Indian speculation, for instance, the air has ‘woven’ the Universe by linking together this world and the other world and all beings, as it were by a thread, just as the breath has ‘woven’ human life. ...From all this rather involved symbolism two essential things emerge: first, that in the Cosmos as well as in human life, everything is connected with everything else in an invisible web; and secondly, that certain divinities are the mistresses of these ‘threads’ which constitute, ultimately, a vast cosmic ‘bondage’.\(^\text{259}\)

Plaiting, weaving, binding and knotting become “the repository of transformation and in the primordial mysteries they lay the foundations of human culture, which is transformed nature”.\(^\text{260}\) Thus, the idea of nature being a thread or a web which binds, ties and attaches us together, is a good metaphor for our future and needed relationship to the land. It also gives the context and methodology of my artists books a further symbolic meaning beyond mere ‘craft’.

Conclusion

The idea of place being alive and having agency,\textsuperscript{261} creates a richer experience of the world and facilitates respect for the environment. My research develops an individualised and personal spirituality based on archetypal symbols, my experiences and relationship to land. We cannot aim to return to a primordial existence, but through reviving or reinterpreting cultures, mythologies and symbols we can enrich a spiritually depleted culture and create an ideological shift that sees the more-than-human-world as sacred. A contemporary Australian Spirituality can be proposed when one is respectful of Indigeneity and attuned to our individual sacred bonds with land.\textsuperscript{262} My artwork creates critical evidence to test this proposal.

We must extend our imagination to discover a common consciousness that relates to the earth as a living organism. We are part of this ecology, not separate or superior to it. This raises aesthetic and philosophical problems in the representation of landscapes in visual art; which will be discussed in the next chapter. Even the term ‘landscape’ is problematic as it “signals a distance between the place, feature or monument and the person or society which considers its existence” and therefore must be contrasted with the term ‘Country’.\textsuperscript{263} My research argues for a re-negotiation of this dichotomy.

\textsuperscript{261} As revealed in the new directions of ‘object-orientated ontologies’ see Harman \textit{Object-Orientated Ontology}, 2018.

\textsuperscript{262} As emphasized throughout the work of David Tacey and Eugene Stockton.

\textsuperscript{263} Rose, \textit{Nourishing Terrains}, 10.
Chapter 4

The Book of Clouds

On the problem of ‘landscape’ and its representations

Our connection or relationship with the universe, the cosmos and the environment or land is not only based on a physical experience but also a mental and philosophical experience that is conditioned by culture and ideology. The tradition of “landscape painting” not only represents history but a process. It is a descriptive journey of the mind that locates, relocates and dislocates reality. Humans through culture, technology and the need for survival have transformed the world and the land and given it meaning.

The natural landscape is not only a physical region but a place of myth and imagination. The ‘representation’ of this landscape into the medium of art forms is not a neutral transfer of information but a symbolic one. What may appear to be real in the picture, that quality of likeness, is not real. It is established by cultural and aesthetic conventions rather than fact.

Landscapes are culture before they are nature; constructs of the imagination projected onto wood, water and rock.264

My research poses questions about the nature of art depicting landscape and our relationship to the land – that landscape painting is a cultural construct and is laden with people’s perceptions of the land and their relationship to the environment. The formal qualities of landscape art, European and early Australian pictorial tradition, propose a ‘view’ through a system of perspective to represent the ‘real’ landscape.

For although we are accustomed to separate nature and human perception into two realms, they are, in fact, indivisible. Before it can ever be a repose for the senses, landscape is the work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock. ... Even the landscapes that we supposed to be most free of our culture may turn out, on closer inspection, to be its product. 265

The above quotation from Simon Schama acknowledges that images of land are cultural constructs rather than ‘natural’ images drawn from the environment. They therefore express or represent the ideologies of the time in which they are produced.

Rather than trying to represent a ‘view’, I have aimed to work with nature/land rather than being a separate and detached observer of it. My research has aimed to represent the fractals in the landscape/nature, micro patterns and rhythms of growth and decay, the simple and the complex, which breaks with the European pictorial conventions. This I would argue is also a cultural perspective as there is much contemporary thought about ecology, balance, climate, destruction and extinction in the environment.

Is life [art] simple or complex? Chaos theory says it can be both, and moreover, it can be both at the same time. Chaos reveals that what looks incredibly complicated may have a simple origin, while surface simplicity may conceal something stunningly complex.266

265 Schama, Landscape and Memory, 6-9.
266 John Briggs, and David F Peat Seven Life Lessons of Chaos: Spiritual Wisdom from the
The very simple and the highly complex are reflections of each other. Paradox is a good way of thinking about how simplicity and complexity are entwined. Paradox and the ‘coincidence of opposites’ can help us see the truth beyond our restrictive ideas about reality.267

Fractals – the geometry of irregular shapes and chaotic systems – are a way of seeing and thinking about the complexity-simplicity paradox of nature.268

My research has aimed to represent these fractals in nature. Firstly, by leaving the works out to interact with the environment and then by the printmaking process, overprinting and reworking in the studio. This process underpins the ‘structure’ in my work where simplicity and complexity are depicted.

“Intermittency” is the scientific terminology used by Briggs and Peat to describe the alternation of simplicity and complexity. It not only means bursts of chaos within regular order, but also outbreaks of simple order in the midst of chaos.269 In my work, the term “intermittency” can be used to describe a visual device where I use simple images which are then overlaid and interwoven with complex surfaces and other images. The repetition of the square format and the use of the number 7 in a series gives order to the work as shown in the examples below.270

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267 Briggs and Peat, Chaos, 80.
268 Briggs and Peat, Chaos, 80.
269 Briggs and Peat, Chaos, 83.
270 For installation photos see appendix 5.
Fig. 76: Bärbel Ullrich *Earth Print* mixed media and print on paper, 53x53cm, 2016.

Fig. 77: Bärbel Ullrich *Earth Print* mixed media and print on paper, 53x53cm, 2016.
The idea of intermittency, order and chaos, can conceptually support my ‘obsession’ with the use of numbering the work in series of seven. Within a defined pattern of numbers in my work the chaos of nature can emerge allowing the combination of simplicity and complexity to co-exist. Numbers are an abstract construct to order reality on one level. ‘No matter how chaotic and random life seems at the moment, we also sense that it contains some underlying order.’

Our chaotic life/reality is governed by numbers – the time of day, days in the week, lunar cycles, phone numbers, street numbers, distances etc. Numbers for me provide a continuum as well as a repetition; a balance between time’s arrow and time’s cycle. Between the finite rational numbers there are an infinite number of irrational numbers. Briggs and Peat claim that irrationality lies at the very heart of both logic and the cosmos where there is total randomness inside an otherwise regular system. For me, to depict the land as being irrational, chaotic and random denotes a more ‘real’ aspect of land than the traditional ‘view’.

We can begin with a simple system and allow it to develop in ever more complex ways so that its internal order becomes richer and richer, yet in the limit, when this complexity becomes infinite, it ends up looking exactly like chance and randomness – the opposite of any order.

The above quote not only refers to chaos but also the creative process. In this creative process I also search for ‘synchronicities’ which are “apparently disconnected but highly meaningful coincidences” and hidden patterns. Thus complexity and simplicity “aren’t so much inherent in the objects themselves, but in the way things interact with each other, and we, in turn, interact with them.” This is certainly true when working with nature/land as subject matter in the creative process. In this sense one would also ask whether the ‘objective’ appearance of things actually exists?

Our potential interactions with the world are so incredibly complex that our brains have evolved many strategies of abstraction and simplification. These strategies change over time. ... Science, in its desire to understand nature, has employed strategies that objectify and divide reality into manageable chunks for study. ... but the reliance on mathematics as an abstracting tool means science can only deal with what is quantifiable, numerical, and measurable. Thus, scientific progress takes place at the expense of nature’s qualities and unquantifiable values.

When working with nature and trying to break with the traditional European pictorial conventions, it is important to avoid stereotypes of representation, those ‘manageable chunks’ that we can safely know and control, that are quantifiable and measurable. The aim for me is to find ‘difference’ in representation which is a form of complexity, and this can engender feelings of apprehension and uncertainty. These pictorial conventions, especially those imported into Australia in the early colonial period and up to the turn of the twentieth century,

\[271\] Briggs and Peat, Chaos, 89.
\[272\] Briggs and Peat, Chaos, 88.
\[273\] Briggs and Peat, Chaos, 88.
\[274\] This term was used by Carl Jung. Briggs and Peat, Chaos, 88.
\[275\] Briggs and Peat, Chaos, 89.
\[276\] The rendering of the ‘objective’ appearance of things was primary in the European landscape tradition.
\[277\] Briggs and Peat, Chaos, 90.
have so dominated our western thinking that they can easily distort our interactions and observation with and of land/nature.

Seduced by our own simple abstractions, we can quickly come to see the world through categories that blind us to the subtleties and the richness of the small things that bring alive the individuality of each encounter and the freshness of each day. But the obverse is also true. We can be so overwhelmed by detail and complexity that we become unable to abstract the underlying meaning of a situation.\textsuperscript{278}

By applying the ‘art’ of the simplicity and complexity paradox, we can touch the force of life that flows into and beyond our abstractions.\textsuperscript{279}

I have aimed to observe and experience the land not in terms of a ‘view’ but by sensing the subtleties and richness of the small things. In this way the microcosm becomes a metaphor of the larger environment creating a different spatial order to that of the early Australian landscape paintings. It is this connecting with the force of life in the environment by using all the senses that give energy and potency to the art work.

In European pictorial traditions as applied to early Australian landscape painting, the landscape is rationally perceived and accurately represented by the mathematical system of linear perspective where objects converge on one or two vanishing points. It assumes the existence of some pre-existing spatial order – it compartmentalises our experience of seeing and experiencing the landscape. A visually convincing system producing a 3D impression or illusion of space and distance, separate from the observer.

Perspective is not objective but culturally encoded and defines human relationships with the land and environment. Sasha Grishin states that:

\begin{quote}
while perspective may be viewed as a handy tool to create the illusion of three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface, symbolically, it can also be taken to signify, within the broader context of art history, the total subjugation of nature to a scientific rule. Nature, now culturally encoded, could be viewed from a safe and controllable distance, as if through a window.\textsuperscript{280}
\end{quote}

Western culture is hardwired into this way of seeing and perspective has authority as a scientific vision which gives the detached eye mastery over space and creates an ideal version of reality. Thus, as argued previously, traditional images of landscape are more cultural than natural, they are a ‘visual ideology’ which reflect culture’s relationship to the land, one of authority, control and domination. Tim Bonyhady claims that “artists have long been credited with changing the way we look at nature.”\textsuperscript{281}

Louis Buvelot’s \textit{Waterpool at Coleraine (sunset)} (1869)\textsuperscript{282} is a beautiful Romanticist work capturing the Australian landscape bathed in the orange light of the setting sun generating a glowing and spiritual feeling. When I first viewed the original in the National Gallery in Melbourne, I noticed something not easily recognisable in reproductions. In the right-hand foreground corner was a huge felled eucalypt with an axe leaning on the remains of the trunk. This image signifies settlement, ownership and power over nature. The painting sings not of

\textsuperscript{278} Briggs and Peat, \textit{Chaos}, 95.
\textsuperscript{279} Briggs and Peat, \textit{Chaos}, 98.
\textsuperscript{282} Collection of the National Gallery, Victoria.
the praise of the beauty of nature or God or spiritual contemplation but of man who has created, occupied and dominated this land. It signifies civilisation, progress and capital gains; it is a materialistic image disguised as a Romantic or spiritual one. It is this ideology, not the uniqueness of the ‘Australian’ landscape that reflects national identity.

Another two famous examples are Hans Heysen’s painting *Summer*, (1909), and Arthur Streeton’s *Purple Noon’s Transparent Might*, (1896). Although they pertain to capture the ‘true Australianness’ of the landscape, a beautiful view, they are in fact saturated with this ideology of control, colonisation and ownership. The Heysen work, although visually ‘accurately’ capturing the heat and the Eucalypts in the Australian bush, has sheep grazing under the trees which signify farming and the capitalisation of land. I would fondly call the Streeton work a ‘real estate painting’ which promises a future for white European occupation.

The current contemporary philosophy, supported by many contemporary writers is that we are not separate from the land but connected to it, a part of it. Today it is not only aesthetics that informs representations of land or landscape but human and cultural geography, ecology, science, religion and philosophy. Thus, the idea of ‘landscape’ has entered into an interdisciplinary field of discourse which is certainly influenced by the Australian Indigenous spirituality and connection to land.

Casey not only claims that landscape is more than scenery in the background but is ‘panperceptual’ in that landscape painting depends so much on the unconscious response of man’s whole being to the world which surrounds him/her. He says that as a perceptual unity, landscape defies any simple imitation or effort to reduce it to a kind of definite object that can be grasped in a single apprehension and therefore in a single image. He claims as I do, that the representation of landscape is problematic. I agree with him when he asks questions on the problem of representation:

How is one to do representational justice to such a complex, puzzling thing as landscape? How is one to represent, in what medium and style, something that is at once elusive and omnipresent, a whole and not a totalisation, perceived by no single sense but by all the senses in a com-position that is itself problematic?

My challenge has been to do this ‘representational justice’ to the complexity of landscape. As stated in the introduction, my solution to the problem is working in collaboration with the land, depicting fractals, accidents, processes of time and relinquishing a lot of the total control of the end result. Below are some examples of this process.

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284 Collection of Art Gallery, NSW.
285 Collection of the National Gallery, Victoria.
286 Flannery, Harvey, Lawler, Lovelock, Magon, Main, Merchant, Morton, Plumwood, Rose, Seddon, She drake, Tacey, Winton, Wilson.
288 Casey, *Representing Place*,6. He says that landscape, while being experienced as a single whole, is nevertheless not reducible to the sum of its parts (a totalisation).
Fig. 78: Detail of canvas left out in the environment with black oxide, which became part of the series shown below.
Fig. 79: Bärbel Ullrich From *The Book of Bark, Rocks, Sticks and Ferns* (detail) mixed media and print on canvas, 7 panels H180cm x W50cm, 2016-2017.

Fig. 80: Bärbel Ullrich *The Book of Bark, Rocks, Sticks and Ferns* mixed media and print on canvas, 7 panels H180cm x W50cm, 2016-2017. See Appendix 3 for installation photograph
When I enter the landscape/the bush, I have a conflict of emotions – one of being in a quiet, peaceful and beautiful environment with the stillness and the sound of the creek and the other a feeling of anxiety. A feeling that I am alone, isolated and vulnerable where the bush is at once peaceful but also psychologically threatening due to the feeling of being enclosed and engulfed by the environment. Wylie has aptly described this experience as he says that landscape is tension – tension between proximity and distance, body and mind, sensuous immersion and detached observation.289

As I think about how to ‘represent’ this place, a conflict arises around the psychological, physical and emotional experience of this place. I think about how I can use or reuse visual strategies and devices of the traditional landscape genre to observe and document this place. I always come to the conclusion that they are false and inadequate as descriptive devices.290 Rather than the use of perspective or a fixed point of view, I have allowed the landscape to make its mark on the work by leaving the work out in the environment and the use of printmaking and stencilling where the environment leaves its ‘trace’ or imprint on the work.291

I have endeavoured to move away from the traditional strategies of representing landscape. These belong to the idea that ‘landscape’ implies separation and observation. Landscapes set us at a distance and turn us into detached spectators where the world is distant scenery to be visually observed. It is a particular way of seeing and representing the world as a conceptualised separate external reality to be rationally perceived and accurately represented.292

Landscape tradition encompasses the idea that landscape is found ‘out there’ – it is at a clear distance from urban civilisation, it is real and solid, a physical material reality that is factual and objective. It is “an external independent material field, a unified synthesis and arrangement of material forms and objects, and not a contrivance of our perception. We must therefore look outwards rather than inwards to understand it.”293 I would argue that we may experience it physically, as external to ourselves as this is how our Western tradition has taught us, but we need to look inwards to understand it. And to look inwards for understanding we also need to reprogram the way in which we experience and engage in the landscape. In particular, to experience the differences in the Australian landscape where the aesthetic of place changes from environment to environment even within a one-hundred-kilometre radius.

To visualise and to just look outwards, is to set at a distance and negate experience, smell, touch, sound, emotion, time and space. This creates tension and Wylie asks “is landscape a scene we are looking at or a world we are living in? Is landscape all around us or just in front of us? Do we observe or inhabit landscape?”294 We see the world from particular cultural perspectives, the ones into which we have been socialised and educated – our way of looking

289 John Wylie, Landscape (Routledge; New York, USA & Canada.2007) 1. I will further explore this idea of ‘the sublime’ in chapter 5.
290 Particularly the use of perspective which gives the eye of the detached subject mastery over space and presents a particular fixed point of view. It separates the observer and the observed and is associated with reason and the mind.
291 As shown in the above example The Book of Bark, Rocks, Sticks and Ferns fig 108.
292 Wylie, Landscape, 3.
293 Wylie, Landscape 20.
294 Wylie, Landscape, 4.
at the world is already laden with particular cultural values, attitudes, ideologies and expectations.\textsuperscript{295}

The dictionary definition of landscape is ‘that portion of land or scenery which the eye can view at once’.\textsuperscript{296} This definition certainly does not fit my area of bush. The eye is overwhelmed, near and far are in constant tension, the tall verticals of the Alpine Ash, Peppermints and Blue Gums break up and appear through the chaotic and impenetrable undergrowth with glimpses of the vertical ground. The horizon, a visual device in European landscape representation disappears and you only see the sky if you look directly up. There is no clear distinction where the vegetation ends and the sky begins. This ‘landscape’ defies any simple form of imitation or effort to reduce it to a definite object, a single image that can be grasped in a single viewing contained within a border or format. So, the problem of representing landscape, especially this particular landscape, can be seen as a quandary of ‘containment’.

The issue is how something that, by its very nature, overflows ordinary perception can be represented by something else that, by its very nature, can only present itself to the viewer as a discrete object with definite dimensions and often within a delimited frame. How can the decisively determinate contain the inestimably indeterminate?\textsuperscript{297}

To overcome this problem, I have used the visual device of working in a series of images as well as artists books where images and motifs overflow and are repeated/altered sequentially. Casey also asks how is the artist to contain something as overflowing as landscape within the very particular confines of a painting [or a format]\textsuperscript{298} The visual device of overlapping/overprinting images on the paper works and including layers of panels within the textile work, I believe, addresses this problem of nature ‘overflowing ordinary perception’.\textsuperscript{299} The eye does not rest on one image.

\textsuperscript{295} Wylie, \textit{Landscape}, 7. Schama also discusses the ‘cultural’ aspect of looking at landscape and images of landscape.
\textsuperscript{296} Wylie, \textit{Landscape}, 9.
\textsuperscript{297} Casey, \textit{Representing Place}, 7.
\textsuperscript{298} Casey, \textit{Representing Place}, 7.
\textsuperscript{299} As shown in the above example \textit{The Book of Bark, Rocks, Sticks and Ferns}, and the below example of \textit{Earth Prints}. 

117
Fig. 81: Bärbel Ullrich *Earth Prints* mixed media and print on paper, 53x53cm, 2016.

Also see Appendix 3 and 5 for installation photographs
The challenge for my research was how can I distinguish between the real and the perceived landscape, the material and the mental landscape? I have asked myself as Casey does “What does it mean to represent landscape, that is, a portion of the perceived earth that lies before and around us?” Or, a more preliminary question: “Why should we want to do so in the first place?” He also asks “why re-present what is already presented so effectively and thoroughly in ordinary and direct experience?”

The truth is that representation is not a contingent matter, something merely secondary; it is integral to the perception of landscape itself – indeed, part of its being and essential to its manifestation. ... To be a landscape at all, to be an integral part of a sensuously qualified place-world, is already to have entered the encompassing embrace of the representational enterprise.

When I have examined ‘landscape’ there is a process of continual interaction in which nature and culture both shape and are shaped by each other. Landscapes have been traditionally defined by geographers as the product of interactions between sets of natural conditions – weather, terrain, soil type, resources etc – and sets of cultural practices – agricultural practices, religious or spiritual beliefs, shared values and behavioural norms, the organisation of society, property ownership. Thus through images and understandings of nature which have arisen via art, literature, science and philosophy there has become a widely entrenched and accepted cultural ‘construction’ of nature. Wylie asks “But where does this leave nature, especially in terms of will, force and presence? Is nature a vital medium or inert thoughtless matter?”

The question for me is, does nature have some vital spiritual force, consciousness, Gaia, a living organism that feeds the spirituality of humans and awakens archetypal symbols and meanings in the collective unconscious (as in the Australian Indigenous connection to land and their land-based spirituality) or is it in fact an indifferent and inert material where humans need to impose their own meanings on it to give it value and make their life meaningful?

I would see landscape as both a material entity which is real, has presence, something we can touch, observe, experience with all our senses and walk in as well as a symbolic source, a repository for personal and cultural meaning, myth and imagination.

Landscape phenomenology is an alternative experience of landscape to that of the detached viewer and the objective, rational observation of the land. It foregrounds an engaged experience rather than detached reflection. It is the vision of landscape as a shared lived-in world where we are not spectators but participants in the world. Phenomenological approaches often stress direct, bodily contact with, and experience of, landscape. They commonly aim to reveal how senses of self and landscape are together made and communicated, in and through lived experience.

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300 Casey, Representing Place, xiii.
301 Casey, Representing Place, xv.
302 Wylie, Landscape, 9.
303 Wylie, Landscape, 10-11.
304 Ideas about nature are further discussed in chapter 5.
305 Wylie, Landscape, 149.
306 Wylie, Landscape, 141.
The phenomenology of self, body and world already enables a new definition of landscape as a term and concept. Divested of assumptions regarding observation, distance and spectatorship, the term landscape ceases to define a way of seeing, an epistemological standpoint, and instead becomes potentially expressive of being-in-the-world itself: landscape as a milieu of engagement and involvement. Landscape as a ‘life-world’, as a world to live in, not a scene to view.\footnote{Wylie, \textit{Landscape}, 149.}

The argument is that human vision is not the particular hallmark of a detached, spectating subject but is always caught in the fabric of the world.\footnote{Wylie, \textit{Landscape}, 150.} Notions of landscape, vision and subjectivity are transformed from a Cartesian spectatorial epistemology (where a particular type of knowing is a way of seeing) to a phenomenological ontology, a specific mode of being (a seeing-with). The gazing subject and ‘thinking’ self is no longer the priority to project meaning onto the landscape. The subject belongs to the landscape of visible things and ‘intertwines’ with the landscape to have a meaningful engagement with the visible world.\footnote{Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy in Wylie, \textit{Landscape}, 151-153. Merleau-Ponty uses the term \textit{intertwining} to capture the way in which self and landscape relate to each other.}

On the ‘representation’ of landscape there is still the desire to want to believe that traditional representations are ‘true’ representations of ‘reality’. We may well ask: What guarantees the truth of representation? Is there any such truth or is it only a lie?\footnote{Casey, \textit{Representing Place}, xvi.}

The notion of being-in-the-world is important as opposed to the self-contained individual confronting a world ‘out there’ where the mind is detached from that world. Landscape phenomenology is an ontological engagement with the material environment where by inhabiting and involving oneself in that world, it becomes a meaningful environment.\footnote{Wylie, \textit{Landscape}, 158.} This is a significant reason why I have chosen \textit{THE SITE} as the focus of my work. I am not a visitor to the area, I inhabit and involve myself within this piece of land through walking, sitting, listening, planting trees and land management. I have intimate knowledge of \textit{THE SITE} but there are still unexplored areas that permeate a sense of mystery and intrigue.

On the idea of the ‘materiality’ of landscape and how this can influence its representations.

The philosophy of the new Materialism aims to persuade us to think differently about our relationship to the environment and to understand the world in a different way both ontologically and epistemologically. We are to think of “an embodied humanity enveloped in nature, rather than as external to the inert stuff it dominates”.\footnote{Dianna Coole, and Samantha Frost, ed. \textit{New materialisms: Ontology, Agency and Politics} (Durham & London: Duke University press, 2010) 106.}

We find ourselves “having to think in new ways about the nature of matter and the matter of nature; about the elements of life, the resilience of the planet, and the distinctiveness of the human”.\footnote{Coole and Frost, \textit{New materialisms}, 6.} To rethink “the relationship of humans to the world, the very definition of the human in relation to the non-human, and the way shifting definitions of nature and life affect subjective experiences of selfhood”.\footnote{Coole and Frost, \textit{New materialisms}, 21.} The new materialist ontology “sees its task as creating new concepts and images of nature that affirm matter’s immanent vitality. ...materiality is always
something more than ‘mere’ matter: an excess, force, vitality, relationality, or difference that renders matter active, self-creative, productive, unpredictable.”

By understanding the world in a different way and reconceptualising the term ‘nature’ or ‘landscape’ as a dynamic self-organising force not for human control, leads me to think about its representation in a new way. The collaborative approach I have taken with the environment gives ‘nature’ a voice in the process and the final artwork. It becomes an exchange and a dialogue between artist and nature/land.

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Fig. 82: Bärbel Ullrich. Process documentation – paper left out in the environment with earth and oxide.
Fig. 83: Bärbel Ullrich. Process documentation – paper left out in the environment with earth and oxide.

Fig. 84: Bärbel Ullrich *Earth Print* mixed media and print on paper, 53x53cm, 2016.
Through my research, I have made a conceptual shift from landscape-as-image where the horizon is dominant, to the earth, the ground. Working in this way increases the attention to tactile as opposed to visual landscape experiences where the viewer/artist are distanced. The ground on which these works are produced is part of the environment in which I live thus entwining and merging self and world which creates a sense of spiritual belonging.

With the concept of materiality comes the idea of humans do not act as the subject in an object world but are constituted as perceiving beings at the interface between subject and object. The idea of ‘praesentia’, the state of being present in the world, involves the encounter through touch, presumes an involvement and a confirmation of subject formation in the materiality of the world – we look, we listen, we touch. There is a renewed attention to issues of movement and mobility in landscape – perception-in-motion. Landscape now ceases to be understood “as a static, framed gaze, and becomes instead the very interconnectivity of eye, body and land, a constantly emergent perceptual and material milieu.”

Tim Ingold also supports this idea but goes further to state that the mind and the ground are one and the same. The ground of knowledge is itself the very ground we walk where “earth and sky are tempered in the ongoing production of life.” He says:

Walking along, then, is not so much the behavioural output of a mind encased within a pedestrian body as a way of thinking and knowing. …the walker is thinking in movement … Thus, the ground comprises a domain in which the lives and minds of its human and non-human inhabitants are comprehensively knotted with one another."

This is particularly pertinent to my methodology where I have spent a lot of time walking through the bush, experiencing the space and place using all senses, where the body is caught in the fabric of the environment. The process of placing the work in the environment, covering with dirt and oxide, also involves movement and mobility. This haptic way of working includes touch as a form of vision and observation. The work is left out for a period of time in the weather and needs to be ‘rescued’ before it is subsumed by nature. There is a move away from the interpretative, rational and observational standpoint of representation to one of a participation in and with the landscape/environment.

I perceive and experience the landscape as a world continually in the making. Vitalist ontology is related to materialism in that it captures a particular ethos – a sense of life in general – an imminent, vital, emergent force. It is the philosophy of becoming, creativity and transformation. What is envisaged is an understanding of matter – the materiality of thing and nature – as alive and animate and in opposition to the notion of nature as a cultural construct.

The following example of my work not only depicts the materialism and vitality of the rocks but the invisible forces of nature as alive and animated.

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319 Wylie, *Landscape*, 201-203.
Conclusion

My research has aimed to ‘represent’ place or land, not in terms of resemblance, but for the purpose of connecting with place and land and to embody ideas of spiritual belonging. Rather than imposing my own preconceived meanings on the landscape, I have allowed the meanings to arise from my interaction and participation with the landscape; from the subconscious. I have aimed to discover meaning in the landscape and with the landscape – not imposed externally by cultural constructs imbedded in my mind. My research has aimed to create images from and with/within the landscape rather than of the landscape. The word ‘landscape’ is tied inescapably to the idea of nature – ideas of nature will be discussed in the next chapter.
Chapter 5

The Book of Fractals

On Ideas About Nature

Nature is an important element of my work. But what do we mean when we think about ‘nature’? It is probably a word we should not use as it is too laden with cultural ideologies. It is related to the ‘natural’ world – out there, separate from our selves. Maybe we should use a broader term such as ‘environment’ which includes the built and natural environment. In this way, as we are inseparable from our environment, we need to make sense of it and position ourselves within it.

I would argue that it is the internal aspects of human consciousness, the sensations and perceptions that contribute to experience, are by which a person makes sense of his/her environment.

It is not so much what we perceive but how we feel about what we perceive that is crucial to an understanding of our behaviour and ourselves. …Our idea of the earth more than the earth itself, is important as it effects our notions of reality and how we adjust and live.320

I would therefore ask do images of land/nature/environment expressed through art have an effect on the psyche of our culture? Can they change or shift culture’s psyche in terms of philosophy, ideology and spirituality? Yes, I believe they can.

The ideas that are surfacing today about the environment, nature, reality, science and matter are blurring the boundaries between science fiction and science fact. Ontologically, epistemologically, philosophically and ethically we are in a state of anxiety and at a crossroad where major decisions need to be made that will impact on our future existence on this planet.

‘Nature’ or ideas about nature have been part of humanity’s intellectual struggle to understand the environment and further the universe and the laws that govern it. Ideas about nature intersect all the different streams of science – physics, chemistry, biology, botany, geology, ecology, social science and even philosophy where we question the nature of our existence and purpose as well as our relationship to the non-human world and the universe. Hawking describes the scientific search for the ultimate laws of nature - a unified theory of everything in the universe.321

The term ‘nature’ is a culturally constructed term which encompasses ideologies of different times about the human relationship to the non-human world. Morton argues that the concept of ‘nature’ is the focal point that compels us to assume certain attitudes toward this “fascinating object”.322

But what do we mean by the term ‘nature’? With the development of science, ecology, human environmentalism and eco philosophy, we are changing our ideas about our relationship to

the environment - particularly in an age where climate change threatens our existence on the planet, in the Anthropocene.

We are now beginning to see and experience ‘nature’ and our planet as a living whole of which we are a part. I agree with Briggs and Peat as they state it is a new understanding and a new perspective:

The image of our blue Earth from space is an icon to this new holistic perspective. We can now see that from the fractal shape of the planet’s continents and the flow of weather patterns, right down to individual living cells, all of it is an enfolding of self-organised chaotic systems within systems.323

Experiencing solidarity with the whole universe is about freeing ourselves from the chronic habit of thinking that we’re just disconnected fragments. ...It is about moving from seeing nature as a collection of isolated objects to experiencing that we are an essential aspect of nature’s organisation. ... It is about moving from obsessive focus on control and prediction to a sensitivity toward emergence and change. It is about a new understanding of time and our path in it. It is about using our subtle influence to become the participators of the blue planet rather than its managers.324

When viewing some of my artwork a friend commented “You must love nature”. What did he mean by this? If I had images of dogs he may have said you must love dogs. This culturally implies and reinforces the ideology the ‘nature’ is a separate entity to ourselves. It exists as a separate and independent object to be viewed, enjoyed, to give us pleasure, to represent and to consume.

I wish to give a small outline on the cosmological thinking about the idea and philosophy of nature. Collingwood identifies three periods of this subject of “intense and protracted reflection”.325

The ancient Greek view of nature and natural science was based on the principle that the world of nature is “saturated or permeated by mind.” The mind was conceived as a primary dominating or regulating element imposing “order first upon itself and then upon everything belonging to it, primarily its own body and secondarily that body’s environment.” Greek natural science saw the world of nature as not only alive but intelligent consisting of ceaseless and orderly motion with a ‘mind’ of its own. The Greek view of nature as an intelligent organism was based on the analogy between the world of nature and the individual human being who finds certain characteristics in himself as an individual and thinks of nature as possessed of similar characteristics – a body whose parts are in constant rhythmic motion and a mind directing this activity of the body to preserve the vitality of the whole.326

The Renaissance view of nature began to take the antithesis of the Greek view where physical science denied that the world of nature is an organism and asserted that it is devoid both of intelligence and of life. They saw the natural world as incapable of ordering its own movements in a rational manner and that the movements which it exhibits are imposed upon it from without by an intelligent mind outside itself. Thus, the natural world was seen as a machine instead of being an organism. While the Greeks saw the orderliness of the natural world as an expression

324 Briggs and Peat, Chaos, 164-165.
of nature’s own intelligence, for the Renaissance thinkers, it was the intelligence of something other than nature: “the divine creator and ruler of nature.” The analogy it presupposes is also based on the human experience of designing and constructing machines as well as the Christian idea of a creative and omnipotent God.\textsuperscript{327}

The Renaissance’s increasing emphasis on the separateness of individual human consciousness led to a conception of nature as a vast collection of objects that could be subject to scientific investigation and experiment. ...Newton’s equations completed the dehumanisation of the natural world by picturing it as composed of mechanical building blocks in interaction. Understanding became a question of breaking things down into their components and explaining the causal links between them. Nature became a great clock that science could take apart and reassemble, and this became the over-riding metaphor of the scientific enterprise.

Prediction and control were the driving forces of a new scientific society. ...In its very success, science has intensified the mechanisation of our society and confirmed our perception of a mechanical universe.\textsuperscript{328}

The third view of nature that Collingwood identifies is the modern view that owes something to both Greek and Renaissance cosmology. It is based on “the analogy between the processes of the natural world as studied by natural scientists and the vicissitudes of human affairs as studied by historians.”\textsuperscript{329} The conception of process, change and development was recognised as a fundamental category of historical thought. The other idea that was to become famous was the idea of evolution where the species of living organisms are not a fixed repertory of permanent types but begin to exist and cease to exist in time. In modern thought there was the tendency to resolve the ancient dualism between changing and unchanging elements in the world of nature. There is the idea that something knowable and unchanging such as matter and natural law is the substrate of the changes in the perceptible natural world. Unchanging relations were sought between the changeables. There is a dualism between the vocabulary of ‘materialism’ and ‘idealism’ where materialism means the attempt to understand things by asking what they are made of and idealism is the attempt to understand things by asking what this form out of which it is made means.\textsuperscript{330}

This evolutionary conception of nature based on the analogy of history contains ideas such as: change is no longer cyclical but progressive; nature is no longer mechanical as a machine is essentially “a finished product or closed system” and as nature is not finished or complete – the notion that nature is a machine has been discarded.

Nature will be understood as consisting of processes, and the existence of any special kind of thing in nature will be understood as meaning that processes of a special kind are going on there.\textsuperscript{331}

Land and or nature is experienced quite differently for the Australian Indigenous peoples. For them, land is a dynamic and creative force, it is not bound by geographical limitations, it is a living place embodying spirit.

\textsuperscript{327} Collingwood, \textit{The Idea of Nature}, 5-8.
\textsuperscript{328} Briggs and Peat, \textit{Chaos}, 150-151.
\textsuperscript{330} Collingwood, \textit{The Idea of Nature}, 10-12.
\textsuperscript{331} Collingwood, \textit{The Idea of Nature}, 17.
The land for Aboriginals is the cornerstone of traditional religion, it is the physical link between living humans and all that is unseen and eternal in their spiritual world. The land is not just a surface over which people walk, hunt and live out their lives. It is not the inanimate, unresponsive stage for the action play of separate individuals who are superior to it in being animate, sentient, intelligent, self-conscious, as the European instinctively views the land. Aborigines are confirmed by their religion with the conviction that the land, together with its people, flora and fauna, and everything else it contains, is a corporate organic whole, at least as animate, sentient, intelligent and self-conscious as any of its organic parts. The Aborigine feels part of this whole, enmeshed with the land in a real dynamic identity.

...The land is a sacred place, the locus of creative acts of the Dreaming, which persist into the present.

An expression of this oneness is the readiness to make physical contact with the earth, as a mystical experience and a deliberate harmonising with the environment.

For the Australian Indigenous peoples, the human world and the non-human world are not separated. Today the new field of ‘Environmental Humanities’ challenges us to ‘rethink’ or ‘remake’ nature and to reframe contemporary challenges. The entanglement between facts and values, science and humanities are the heart of this emerging field. There is a recognised need to consider and create new narratives about how humans and the environment relate to one another. New ideas about nature are emerging and how these shape environmental issues.

Environmental Humanities is part of a growing willingness to engage with the environment from within the humanities and social sciences. It positions us as participants in lively ecologies of meaning and value, entangled with rich patterns of cultural and historical diversity that shape who we are and the ways in which we are able to ‘become with’ others.

As a land-based artist it is important for me to be aware of this ontological shift in our relationship to nature as it would include new representations of that environment expressing that relationship and as a departure from the modernist view of representation where the artist is separate from nature. In this sense my argument would be that ‘traditional’ pictorial representations of landscape are inadequate for today’s new environmental thinking as they place the artist and the viewer as separate from the landscape.

Eco Philosophy explores fundamental questions concerning the relationship between human thought, language [pictorial language] and the wider environment. It not only resituates humans within the environment but it also resituates non-humans within cultural and ethical domains. It aims to overcome the nature/culture binary that positions humans outside of nature.

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332 I would argue that Indigenous Australian spirituality is broader and far more encompassing than the dogmatic and restrictive field of ‘religion’ as such.


334 Stockton, The Aboriginal Gift, 56. The land is like the bible, it has a story to tell and that story calls for a response – the ethical system and the law. 57-58.

335 Stockton, The Aboriginal Gift, 86.


which implicitly posits that we are free to control our own destiny within a ‘broader’ natural world that is devoid of meaning, value and ethics.\textsuperscript{338}

The idea of nature as dead matter is part of the human/nature dualism entrenched in our white Western culture and the international mainstream modernism of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. It represents nature as passive and uncreative where non-human forms are emptied of agency, spirit and intelligence.\textsuperscript{339} In my studio practice I have aimed to be open to experiences of nature as powerful, agentic and creative. I have allowed nature to contribute to the artwork being a collaborator in the process. By partially burying the paper or canvas or placing organic matter on the surface and sprinkling oxide over the top then leaving the work out in the weather for periods of time, creates marks and traces that become fractals and patterns generated by the environment. I have therefore relinquished almost total control. These works can then be overprinted in the studio with plates made from materials of the environment.

Fig.86: Bärbel Ullrich photograph of environmental interaction on THE SITE
Fig. 87: Bärbel Ullrich photograph of environmental interaction on THE SITE

Fig. 88: Bärbel Ullrich *EARTH PRINT* 53x53cm mixed media on paper 2016 see Appendix 3 for installation photograph
Fig.89: Bärbel Ullrich *EARTH PRINT* 53x53cm mixed media on paper 2016 see Appendix 4 for installation photograph

Fig.90: Bärbel Ullrich *Earth Altar Cloth* 2016-2017, mixed media on canvas, 300cm x180cm
As part of my research and studio-based practice, I have aimed to understand more about ‘the agency of things’ in order to move beyond a simplistic human-centred understanding and representation of nature/landscape.

A thing has agency when it moves into a relationship with other entities – human and non-human. It is about putting things into relations to us as humans and also other living beings in that interaction so that nature is not ‘out there’ but nature is part of us. To remake our understandings of nature and the environment we need to pay attention to the ‘liveliness’ of things and to tell new stories [and make new artworks] about the world and our place in it.340

Jane Bennett talks about what she calls “Thing-Power” in nature which is the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle. Thing-power arises from bodies inorganic as well as organic where non-human things are vital players in the world. Bennett wants to generate a subtler awareness of the complicated web of dissonant connections between bodies and the energetic vitality inside of things generally conceived of as inert. 341 She sees nature as an ‘assemblage’, an ad hoc grouping of diverse elements of vibrant materials of all sorts including our participation and interaction with it. 342 We and nature are ‘actants’ which have ‘efficacy’ – can do things, produce effects and alter the course of events. 343

We seem to think that the idea of ‘nature’ is positively related to environmentalism. Bennett asserts that ‘environmentalism’ is identified with a world of nature versus culture and she prefers to make a shift to vital materialism which she describes as “a heterogeneous monism of vibrant bodies”344.

Bennett ends her book with a creed or litany for ‘would-be vital materialists’:

I believe in one matter-energy, the maker of things seen and unseen. I believe that this pluriverse is traversed by heterogeneities that are continually doing things. I believe it is wrong to deny vitality to nonhuman bodies, forces, and forms, and that a careful course of anthropomorphization can help reveal that vitality, even though it resists full translation and exceeds my comprehensive grasp. I believe that encounters with lively matter can chasten my fantasies of human mastery, highlight the common materiality of all that is, expose a wider distribution of agency, and reshape the self and its interests.345

Timothy Morton also has a problem with the term ‘nature’, he notes:

Whether we think of nature as an environment, or as other beings (animals, plants, and so on), it keeps collapsing either into subjectivity or into objectivity. It is very hard, perhaps impossible, to keep nature just where it appears – somewhere in between.346

342 Bennett, Vibrant Matter, 23.
343 Bennett, Vibrant Matter, viii.
344 Bennett, Vibrant Matter, 121.
345 Bennett, Vibrant Matter, 122.
Morton says that one of the basic problems with nature is that it could be considered either as substance, as a ‘squishy’ thing in itself, or as essence, as an abstract principal that transcends the material realm and even the realm of representation.\footnote{Morton, \textit{Ecology Without Nature}, 16.} If we consider nature as substance there is the assumption that it is outside of ourselves, possibly even \textit{independent} of us, so to correct this we need to consider ourselves as part of that substance.

From walking alone in the bush, I feel that nature, the environment, does have an essence. It is a transcendent force that induces a spiritual connection with the environment and enhances our sense of wonder and awe. The physical connection with nature, not viewing it from a safe distance, also enhances the need for us to consider ourselves as part of that ‘substance’.

I relate to the modern term ‘animism’. The older usage of the term alleges to a belief in ‘spirits’ that are embodied in creatures, nature or natural objects and places and that all things in natural phenomena and the material universe have a soul. The newer usage is now an important term for describing ways in which some people understand and engage respectfully with the larger-than-human world. It recognises that the world is full of ‘person’s’ only some of whom are human, and that life is always lived in relationship with others. It refers to the “widespread indigenous and increasingly popular ‘alternative’ understanding that humans share this world with a wide range of persons, only some of whom are human.”\footnote{Harvey, Graham. \textit{Animism: Respecting the Living World.} Second Edition. (London: Hurst & Company, 2017), xiii-xv.}

Nature is not merely represented in the artwork but becomes part of the artwork in its creation and the final product. It has left traces and impressions of its infinite fractals.

To think differently about nature, I would maintain that instead of attributing creation to an external deity, we should begin to try to see creativity and agency in the other-than-human world around us. I agree with Bennett as she talks of the need for a new self-interest and relates to a need for a new mythology.\footnote{Bennett, \textit{Vibrant Matter}, 113.}

Stephen Hawking stated that:

So long as the universe had a beginning, we could suppose it had a creator. But if the universe is really completely self-contained, having no boundary or edge, it would have neither beginning nor end: it would simply be. What place, then, for a creator?\footnote{Hawking, \textit{A Brief History of Time}, 160-161.}

The word ‘nature’ contains within it a very complex theological and philosophical debate. The idea of creation, or creator or the more-than-human world having creativity and agency brings me to consider ideas about the sublime.
On ideas about the Sublime

“The Sublime is Man lost in the immensity of Nature”\(^\text{351}\)

Emily Brady introduces her book by stating “The sublime is a massive concept.”\(^\text{352}\) And so it is.

The main question for me is where is the ‘sublime’ located and how do I locate it in my work? Is it found in physical nature/ the landscape or is it mental experience, located in the mind? If the sublime is a representation of limitlessness and what is absolutely great in magnitude, vastness of extent or quantity and is located within physical nature and within the landscape we experience then nature itself is sublime.\(^\text{353}\) I would also agree that nature itself is sublime but in opposition to this I would also argue that it is an expression of our own mind, not found in nature but stimulated by nature. The idea of ‘limitlessness’ and ‘what is absolutely great’ can only be sought in the mind of the judging Subject and not in the Object of nature as it is so large that it transcends any determination of quantity derived from the domain of sensible experience.\(^\text{354}\)

Tim Winton writes:

> Australia connotes something non-human. Of course, the genius of indigenous culture is unquestionable, but even this is overshadowed by the scale and insistence of the land that inspired it. Geography trumps all. Its logic underpins everything. And after centuries of European settlement it persists, for no post-invasion achievement, no city or soaring monument can compete with the grandeur of the land. Don’t think this is a romantic notion. Everything we do in this country is still overborne and underwritten by the seething tumult of nature.\(^\text{355}\)

It is this ‘seething tumult of nature’ that I experience when I work up at THE SITE. This sublime feeling for me arises through the activity of my imagination, an internal manifestation of nature. It is revealed through the metaphysical or transcendent imagination but, also, the external powers of nature. The physical and material presence of nature. Its power, its magnitude, its vastness, its complexity and its impenetrability, the threat and potential danger. It is through the mystery and intensity of nature that I find the sublime. Through feelings of being overwhelmed and anxious.

Emily Brady maintains:

> Sublime experiences of nature potentially lead to a re-valuing of environments and extraordinary phenomena, increasing both self-understanding and the potential for an aesthetic moral education with respect to nature – and our universe.\(^\text{356}\)

The problem with traditional theories and pictorial conventions of the sublime is that it creates a dichotomy of man against or separate from nature. It is the idea that we respond and experience it from a safe place – like looking at a Romanticist painting from a distance. For

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\(^{351}\) William Blake from *Poems of Childhood Innocence*.


\(^{353}\) Casey, Edward S. *Representing Place: Landscape Painting and Maps*, (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 2002), 46.

\(^{354}\) Casey, *Representing Place*, 47.


\(^{356}\) Brady, *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy*, 201.
me, the idea of an environmental sublime can enable us to develop forms of meaningful engagements with the environment. Like the term ‘nature’, the ‘sublime’ needs to be put in a more contemporary ecological context that involves not only aesthetics but ethics. My art practice seeks to determine a new attitude to nature and our relationship to it.

Brady asserts:

For sublimity, it will be great things that belittle us. For wonder it can be something large but also small, such as a delicate spider’s web, and even smaller, the tiny incredible form of a snowflake. …Both sublimity and wonder can be overwhelming, pushing us beyond what we can imagine …

For me, the sublime and wonder offer a pathway to a spiritual connection or belonging to land and a different awareness of myself as both artist and person.

The idea of the sublime found in the limitlessness and vast magnitude of nature, the macrocosm, and the minute and miniscule, the microcosm, made me think about the infinite and how could I represent this? The use of fractals and patterns in the representation of nature can be a metaphor for the macrocosm, microcosm, the infinite and the sublime.

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Fig.91: Bärbel Ullrich Photograph on THE SITE (in a hollow tree trunk)
On the relationship between the Microcosm and the Macrocosm

Patterns in nature are a constant inspiration for my artworks. I also believe that they have a ‘sublime’ quality that can be physically experienced and spiritually intuited as they not only connote the microcosm but the infinite universe. The ideas of chaos, chance and design are part of the philosophical debate about nature.

There’s something revitalising and deeply fascinating about the recurring and ceaselessly variable patterns of nature. ... Nature’s patterns, at once familiar and unexpected, inspire us, satisfy us, sometimes terrify us. Poets, mystics, and everyday travellers on Earth turn to these patterns for solace, for a sense of continuity, for a glimpse of the divine mystery. Nature’s patterns are the patterns of chaos.358

‘Fractals’ refer to “the traces, tracks, marks, and forms made by the action of chaotic dynamical systems.”359 The concept of nature (in my case it is the bush environment) being infinite because it is continuously being eroded and it is an infinity that is constantly changing. The chaotic action of water, fire, weather, geological forces and also human forces, act on every scale to generate shapes that repeat – visible on smaller scales and similar to the one visible at the large scale.360

Chaos generates forms and leaves behind tracks referred to as “self-similarity at many different scales”. This term also includes the idea of individual differences and uniqueness as well as similarities especially in fractals found in nature and art. “Self-reflecting patterns of self-similarity become a transforming vision, subtly transforming our experience of order in the world.” 361 As proposed by Briggs and Peat:

The fractal self-similarity between microcosm and macrocosm (which includes the dissimilarity of uniqueness and difference) is a product of all the complex internal feedback relationships going on in a dynamical system. Paying attention to the fractal features of reality is a way of glimpsing the mysterious, unpredictable movement that creates the world and holds it together. For a scientistic society, this is a new way to see. 362

A fractal aesthetic encourages us to explore the rich ambiguities of metaphorical connections between ourselves and the world rather than remaining only within the categorical abstractions that separate us from that world. 363

Chaos theory is as much about aesthetics as it is about science. Chaos theory isn’t art, but it points us in a similar direction: the direction we find in the healing images of nature, the direction in which lies our effort to contact the secret ingredient of the Universe we call spirit.364

The above quotes have relevance not only to my philosophy but to my interaction and relation to the environment and to my artistic processes. By placing the paper or canvas in the environment, and sprinkling black oxide over the bark, leaves or rocks, then leaving it exposed

359 The word coined by the mathematician Benoit Mandelbrot and now has wide use in chaos theory. Briggs and Peat, Chaos, 100.
360 As in the view from an airplane.
361 Briggs and Peat, Chaos, 102-103.
362 Briggs and Peat, Chaos,108.
363 Briggs and Peat, Chaos, 112.
364 Briggs and Peat, Chaos, 124.
to the weather, the work picks up the fractals of nature. It creates unpredictable movement and captures the 'spirit' of place.

Fig.92: Bärbel Ullrich Photograph at THE SITE.
Fig. 93: Bärbel Ullrich detail from *The Seven Books of Tears*, mixed media, H 800 cm W variable, 2016-2017.

Fig. 94: Bärbel Ullrich detail from *The Seven Books of Tears*, mixed media, H 800 cm W variable, 2016-2017.
*The Seven Books of Tears*, as shown in the above two examples, is all about the infinite variety of fractals and patterns in nature. The books are not in any numerical or narrative order – they can be viewed as seven parts of one book. I have played on the word ‘tears’ as the paper is torn and the word ‘tears’ also represent a weeping and lament for our environment, state of the planet and destiny of humankind.

The images in themselves express the ideas of the infinitude of patterns in nature, but, the books themselves are finite. I thought to myself what other way can I express the idea of infinity in an artwork where the approach reflects my processes?

**Pages from The Book of Sand**

I came across by chance, a short story by Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986) which was written in 1975 and published in 1983, *The Book of Sand*. The body of work of the same title was inspired by this book which is about the incomprehensibility of the infinite.

An unnamed narrator is visited by a bible-seller who presents him with a very old cloth-bound book that he bought in India. The book is said to be called “The Book of Sand”, because neither the book nor sand has any beginning or end. Upon opening it, he is startled to discover that the book, which is written in an unknown language and occasionally punctuated by illustrations, is in fact infinite: if one turns the pages, more pages seem to grow out of the front and back covers.

Still speaking in a low voice, the stranger said, "It can't be, but it is. The number of pages in this book is no more or less than infinite. None is the first page, none the last. I don't know why they're numbered in this arbitrary way. Perhaps to suggest that the terms of an infinite series admit any number."  

He trades his prized bible, his black-letter Wyclif Bible and his pension check for the book. He then hides it on a bookshelf behind his copy of “One Thousand and One Nights”. Over the summer, the narrator obsesses over the book, poring over it, cataloguing its illustrations, none of which were repeated, and as he was a prisoner of the book, he refused to go outside, he dreamed of the book and suffered from insomnia.

I thought of fire, but I feared that the burning of an infinite book might likewise prove infinite and suffocate the planet with smoke. Somewhere I recalled reading that the best place to hide a leaf is in a forest.

And so, he goes to the Argentinian National Library:

“One day I went there and, slipping past a member of the staff and trying not to notice at what height or distance from the door, I lost the Book of Sand on one of the basement's musty shelves.”

My interpretation of *The Book of Sand* is a collection of ongoing work where minute aspects of nature/ the environment are printed, drawn, collaged on both sides of small pieces of paper

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The embossings in the work reflect the fractals, marks and trace found in nature as well as the fragility of the environment. When all the pages are put together, arranged in some form they become monumental and sublime – as there is too much information to experience at one time. I have also aimed to reveal the landscape as eroding and impermanent as well as growing and renewing.

The pages were then pinned to the wall, as shown below, and the viewer is invited to interact with the work. They become what, as previously mentioned, Bennett calls an “assemblage”, an ad hoc grouping of diverse elements, of vibrant materials of all sorts including our participation and interaction with it. An assemblage is an ecology in the sense that it is an interconnected series of parts, but it is not a fixed order of parts, for the order is always being reworked in accordance with a certain ‘freedom of choice’ exercised by its actants. It is this natural process, working in the environment, that I have endeavoured to use in my work.

The pages are worked in series of seven and inconspicuously numbered in that order. In the installation below, the pages are displayed randomly (not in the order of production) to reflect the symbolic device within Borges’ short story.

I therefore agree with Bennett as she puts forward the idea of nature “as a pure plane of immanence upon which unformed elements and materials dance.” This idea certainly encompasses the notion of sublimity – the infinite and the possibility of becoming. The Book of Sand will never be finished and will always remain in a state of creative and active becoming. My research as practice is not bound by the chronological or geographic limitations of a PhD. It is a life-long process of constantly renewed critical enquiry, in response to chance and changing circumstance, informed by new encounters.

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369 Bennett, Vibrant Matter, 23.
370 Bennett, Vibrant Matter, 97. Bennett calls an actant a source of action that can be either human or non-human; it is that which has ‘efficacy’, can do things, has sufficient coherence to make a difference, produce effects, alter the course of events. viii. She depicts non-human bodies as actants rather than as objects. 10.
371 Bennett, Vibrant Matter, 117.
Fig.95: Bärbel Ullrich *The Book of Sand* Installation View, HR Gallop Gallery, Wagga Wagga, May 2017. Each unit H19cm x W28cm x variable. Also see appendix 3 for installation photograph

Details below:
Conclusion

I agree with the argument in the field of Environmental Humanities that the end of ‘nature’ as a conceptual category might just be the beginning of a more sustainable and ethical engagement with our non-human or more-than-human world.\(^{372}\) And like ‘nature’ – the conceptual category of the ‘Sublime’, needs to be put in a more contemporary ecological context that involves not only visual and material aesthetics but a new attitude to our environment and our relationship within it.

Brady suggests that:

> The admiration we feel for nature through an aesthetic form of valuing can feed into attitudes of moral respect for the places we find sublime.\(^{373}\)

The ideas about the sublime certainly need re-interpreting in our contemporary context. This doesn’t mean that past ideas are irrelevant. But, how can they be aligned with our present environmental crisis?

I aesthetically value, respect and care for the property, THE SITE, and my immediate lived environment. Therefore, I agree that sublime beauty can support moral value, as Brady argues.\(^{374}\)

Being alone in the bush is an intense experience. It is both admiration and anxiety – something may happen. I feel that the role of fear also engenders a respect for nature. This experience is even more intensified – a global anxiety – when I see images of human destructiveness on the environment. Added to this is the consequences of global warming, terrorism and destruction of environments due to war and ecological disasters and wasteful consumption. This creates a sense of doom – where humanity has not acted soon enough and will bear the consequences.

I agree with Brady as she concludes that “The sublime is not only a fascinating aesthetic category, it is also one of having real moral significance.”\(^{375}\) For me, the moral significance is how we place ourselves in relation to nature – a meaningful relationship between humans and other parts of nature - of respect, ecological stewardship and without an attitude of domination. That we respect our place and space, not only in our immediate lived environment, but on this planet. The following chapter will discuss ideas of place and space and how they engage our relationship to the land/environment.

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\(^{373}\) Brady, *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy*, 203.

\(^{374}\) Brady, *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy*, 201.

\(^{375}\) Brady, *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy*, 206.
Chapter 6
The Book of Lunar Cycles

On Place and Space

When we speak about ‘place’ or ‘space’ we are speaking about culturally changing ideas, about our relationship to the environment, land and nature. What does ‘place’ mean and what does ‘space’ mean? They are linked to new philosophies of nature and ecological thought which ground our moral values and social action.

Timothy Morton states that:

> Coming up with a new worldview means dealing with how humans experience their place in the world. Aesthetics thus performs a crucial role, establishing ways of feeling and perceiving this place.376

I agree with Simon Schama when he says that human perception and nature/landscape/place are indivisible. Ideas of place are invariably connected to culture. He states:

> For although we are accustomed to separate nature and human perception into two realms, they are, in fact, indivisible. Before it can ever be a repose for the senses, landscape is the work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock. ... Even the landscapes that we supposed to be most free of our culture may turn out, on closer inspection, to be its product. 377

‘Landscape’ is the environment visually perceived through cultural and ideological lenses. It is permeated with incongruous meanings. As such, I refuse to be labelled as a landscape artist.

As my work is site related, I find it necessary to discuss concepts of place and space and their interrelationship. ‘Place’ can be generally defined as a point on a map or a set of coordinates. It can be a large or a small place. ‘Space’ can also be defined generally as an attribute of place, a condition or experience of a place; the distance between objects.

I propose that the imagination, my imagination, plays an important role in responding to place and space. As Gaston Bachelard states that the imagination is a major power of human nature. He says that “the imagination is ceaselessly imaging and enriching itself with new images.”378

As Etienne Gilson states in the forward:

> Bachelard distinguished between two forms of imagination, the formal imagination and the material imagination, and the main point was that he found them both at work in nature as well as in the mind. In nature, the formal imagination creates all the unnecessary beauty it contains, such as the flowers; the material imagination, on the contrary, aims at producing that which, in being, is both primitive and eternal. In the mind, the formal imagination is fond of novelty.

picturesqueness, variety and unexpectedness in events, while the material imagination is attracted by the elements of permanency present in things.\textsuperscript{379}

The meanings, concepts and perceptions about ‘place’ change through time and within the dominant cultural, political and economic ideologies. Part of my research has been to investigate ideas about the notion of ‘place’ and ‘space’ and what they mean aesthetically, experientially, psychologically and culturally. For me, the idea of ‘place and space’ is both physical and psychological.

**Place as national Identity**

Landscapes are culture before they are nature; constructs of the imagination projected onto wood, water and rock. \textsuperscript{380}

Notions about ‘place’ mentioned in books and writings about Australian Art and Australian artists still echo the need for Australia to invent some sort of identity based on the ‘uniqueness’ of the Australian landscape.

Australian cultural and art history has a rich evolving tradition in landscape painting. Anne-Marie Willis raises questions about the nature of land within Australian art and art history, particularly how images of land are addressed on a national basis, and how they become part of the concept of ‘nation’ and ‘national culture’. Willis critically examines the methods through which ‘privileged art objects’ become canonised. Rather than asking ‘What is distinctive about Australian art?’ Willis examines how visual imagery becomes enmeshed in processes of construction of national identity and ways in which narratives of Australian art history have operated strategically to construct national culture.\textsuperscript{381}

The history of Australian landscape painting plays an important role in the ‘conceptualisation’ or idea of national identity; it has become a ‘cultural myth’ that continues to appeal to us. The images of landscape have had a powerful psychological appeal where the depiction of distinctive characteristics has been fused or combined with the ‘discovery’ of an identity for the nation.\textsuperscript{382}

There is no real Australia waiting to be uncovered. A national identity is an invention. All notions of identity are an intellectual construct, neat, tidy, comprehensible – and necessarily false. The have all been artificially imposed upon a diverse landscape and population and a variety of untidy social relationships, attitudes and emotions. When we look at ideas about national identity, we need to ask not whether they are true or false but what their function is, whose creation they are and what interests they serve.\textsuperscript{383}

Willis believes that the idea of ‘nation’ is an unstable concept behind which stands no solid and singular reference point. Nation is considered as sign, as a series of modes of appearance that are always entangled in a variety of discourses\textsuperscript{384} and landscape painting is a dominant discourse.

\textsuperscript{378} Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, xiii
\textsuperscript{380} Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, 61.
\textsuperscript{381} Anne-Marie Willis, *Illusions of Identity*. The Art of Nation (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1993) 62.
\textsuperscript{382} Willis, *Illusions of Identity*, 62.
\textsuperscript{384} Willis, *Illusions of Identity*, 10.
The conflation that occurs between landscape and nation is questioned in Willis’s book. There has been a compelling and dominating national narrative of the progressive discovery of the nation’s character through the efforts of its artists. Willis is against the assumption that nation can be discovered rather than being something that needs to be constructed.  

Those artists whose work can be seen to contribute to a definition of national identity will be the most valued and made the most prominent by cultural historians. Willis is interested in what these representational signs exclude, my interest lies in what these images reveal about our culture’s perceived attitudes towards the relationship with the land. They are mostly about real estate, colonisation, domination and control.

Willis states that:

One’s nationality is part of one’s identity, trying to think of oneself without any nationality is quite difficult. National identity is conceived of as the distinctive characteristics of a people, but in a double movement ‘the people’ are encouraged and incited, within the operations of nationalist discourses, to become what they are named as ... The population is called upon to identify with the figural representations of nation: to merge their individual identity with the national identity.

Many contemporary writers agree that the ‘land’ or the Australian bush had to be controlled and conquered for financial gain and profit, which led to destructive consequences. This idea saw nature as a material resource to be exploited for money rather than a spiritual domain. Watson believes that this frontier mentality where man has dominion over the land is starting to yield to developments in science where farmers are finding that the values of conservation sit well enough with their own.

The content and modes of presentation of ‘national identity’ are now largely the province of commerce and tourism where large corporations have the money and resources to generate images of ‘nation’. This process of construction of ‘nation’ is synthetic where national identity is deployed as part of an international process of commodification in which selective fragments of geographical sites, cultures and peoples get configured as resources for the tourist industry and used to generate economic activity and foreign exchange.

Visual imagery is clearly a major mechanism for the production of appearances of national identities, but of course visual images never act in isolation, they are always embedded in texts, intertexts discourses and social practices, whether this is literally as illustrations in books, or in the spatial text of the museum or art gallery which provide a frame for reading art work. … One of the most popular thematics in the writing of art history in Australia is the proposition of artists learning to see the Australian landscape with ‘Australian eyes’.

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385 Willis, Illusions of Identity, 11.
386 Willis, Illusions of Identity, 13.
387 Willis, Illusions of Identity, 20-23.
388 Winton, Watson, Flannery, Main
391 Willis, Illusions of Identity, 24-25.
It seems to be necessary for our Australian landscape to be seen as unique, distinctive and different from England and Europe, the Americas, Asia, or Africa. The landscape tradition has been used to discover and establish this unique national Australian identity.\textsuperscript{393}

Landscape as a foundation for national identity promises an essence grounded in place, a revealed truth. Yet this cannot be, for landscape exists only as a series of signs within a complex tapestry of cultural constructions of place. There is no single referent, no final point of reference in the ‘real’ landscape, the images are buried and emerge out of shifting sands of cultural reference that extend well beyond the shores of our continent.\textsuperscript{394}

Our ‘land’ is problematically perceived as being mostly uninhabited as people are predominantly urban dwellers and the artists who painted the landscape were often (white male) city dwellers. Thus, their connection with ‘place’ and the environment becomes romanticised and ideological – they depict the ‘view’ that is desired to be seen. The view becomes a romanticised or picturesque escape from city living.

Although my work has aimed to have an ‘Australian’ flavour, such as the leaf litter on the ground composed of bark and gum leaves, iconic of the Australian bush. I have also aimed it to have surpassed this ‘typical Aussie imagery’ to one of a more universal nature – mythical, spiritual and symbolic.

\textsuperscript{393} Flannery sees this as a huge conflict – the Australian ‘unique’ identity built on the ‘unique’ landscape, flora and fauna but being destroyed for commercial gain rather than being protected. Flannery “After the Future”, 3.

\textsuperscript{394} Willis, Illusions of Identity, 64.
Fig. 96: Bärbel Ullrich photograph at THE SITE.

Fig. 97: Bärbel Ullrich photograph at THE SITE.
Fig.98: Bärbel Ullrich from *The Seven Books of Tears*, 2016-2017, mixed media, H800cm x W variable,
**Place defined by language and differing cultural perspectives**

Language is an important element in constructing cultural meanings about place.

Heather Goodall states quite poetically:

> Floods and rivers have created the land on the floodplain, and water is the continuing shaping force. Language fulfils a similar active and creative linking between the land, the waters and all the people involved. Like water, the creative role of language is never simple. It may not run clear and transparent, nor give a direct reflection. It might be as obscure as muddy water and it might refract and distort rather than simply transmit ideas and feelings. Nevertheless, not only records people’s empirical observations of the countryside, it offers some evidence, like bubbles on the surface, tracing out the creative ways people have tried to make sense out of their relationships with their environment within their social and cultural contexts.  

Especially, the word ‘landscape’ suggests a view which is remote and painterly – a product of the world of art. Landscape suggests a place, a view and the languages therein. It also projects the world and imposes values on it.

I would agree with Bonyhardy and Griffiths who maintain the idea that language and landscape mould one another. Landscape, and by extension ‘place’, does not just shape language; the land itself is transformed by words, phrases and ways of telling. Bonyhardy and Griffiths state that a ‘sense of place’ is used a lot and that this embrace of ‘sense of place’ has usually been predicated on the places in question being worth valuing according to some external standard.

> ‘Sense of place’ has largely been championed by outsiders keen to encourage the residents of a particular place to appreciate where they live. But ‘sense of place’ is not that simple, because locals may value what others deem valueless. ...‘sense of place’ now invites the question: whose place?  

For Indigenous Australian peoples the land is the creation of ancestral beings who journeyed across it. Through their actions they created features of the landscape, and they left behind them, songs, sacred objects and practices that commemorated their creative acts. They also left behind in the ground spiritual forces which are released by ritual and ceremony. This process of spirit conception connects people to place and provides continuity between ancestral beings, social groups and land. Thus, the features of the landscape are signs, both of people and of the embodiment of spiritual forces.

Landscape and ‘place’ for Indigenous Australian peoples becomes symbolic and mnemonic to establish continuity between past generations and the present. Aboriginal place names refer to ancestral action at the time when the form of the earth was set forever: they signify the spiritual force that lies beneath the surface of the earth. This force has the capacity to produce the present in the form of the past, to enable new trees to grow, new people to be born. Spiritual continuity is constructed and place, place names, are integrated within a process that acts to freeze time. The past is a referent for the present and the present is not so much

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produced by the past but reproduces itself in the form of the past. This is the process that attaches the people to land and ‘place’.399

In the case of ancestral Europeans, the historical process, focus and human relation to ‘place’ and land is quite different. Landscape or ‘place’ is given a value by its place in history and by its economic potential, though aesthetic and environmental factors too can come into play. European place names record the actions of human agents who played a role in transforming the country and opening it up for future development. Place names leave behind certain images, visions and events which change meaning or loose meaning over time just as land use, the attachment of people to land or ‘place’, and the people attached change over time.400 New political, cultural and economic forces come into play over time giving the meaning of ‘place’ a fluid and even an illusionary dimension.

**Place as a personal attachment**

My definition of ‘place’ is based on my immediate local environment – The eucalypts are prolific with many varying species in the dense mountainous bushland environment, whereas the land surrounding the dwelling is lightly wooded including eucalypts and a variety of European deciduous trees. It is multicultural 401 in an ecological sense and it is ‘home’ – a safe and relatively non-threatening place to live unlike the ‘untamed’ Australian bush can be.

The process of connecting to this environment is from years of hard work transforming a bare, depleted and blackberry infested tobacco paddock into a parklike environment. The idea of the surrounding bushland being pure wilderness is a fantasy that fuels my imagination even though every remote or inaccessible corner shows some evidence of past human interference.

Childhood memory also connects me to this environment. The love of the bush and the feeling of being alone and immersed in the environment, an inward spiritual place of peace and solitude. It is this inward being, connecting with self and centre and being at oneness in the environment that makes this ‘place’ sacred to me.

My work uses images and materials from the environment which give specific reference to the shapes, forms and rhythms of that particular place, **THE SITE**. I have aimed at developing this work by the inclusion of universal and archetypal symbols which are overlayed or imbedded in the imagery. I hope to give the work a sense of the spiritual and the mysterious.

In this sense ‘place’ becomes psychological and cultural as well as physical. It is about inhabiting and interacting with the environment and where one lives, ‘home’. Place is also about memory, belonging and connection. It is not necessarily about a connection by birth (as in traditional Aboriginal culture) as many Europeans (and other migrants) have left their place of birth and are making a home elsewhere. They physically and conceptually transform this new ‘place’ often by bringing memories of the old past and place with them. We tend to be more nomadic in that ‘places’ are bought and sold and we move on and the settle in another place due to family, health or economic reasons.

401 Watson says that the bush for European Australians has always been multicultural, not only in the planting of species from every other continent, but in the naming of native species. Don Watson, *The Bush: Travels in the Heart of Australia* (Australia: Penguin Random, 2014) 71.
As most Australians are either city or urban dwellers, the notion of ‘place’ connected to the bush or the outback can only have imaginary, romantic and ideological connotations as most people do not have the experience of living in such harder conditions. The general notion of ‘place’, broadly used, can only be experienced or sold through the media and tourism, and, such the word ‘place’ echoes hollow in cultural discourse.

A ‘sense of place’ then becomes an abstract term with complex ideas, it can only be given true meaning or significance on an individual, personal and experiential level. And since it is so artificially constructed, maybe we shouldn’t use it!

My connection and ‘spiritual belonging’ to this place is also overshadowed by the pervading presence of previous Indigenous ownership and dispossession. A large rock marks the place where the two creeks meet – it has markings of unknown origin on it.

**Place as spiritual belonging for non-Indigenous peoples - self and memory**

The idea of spiritual ‘belonging’ to a particular place as a ‘white’ person – not of Aboriginal descent nor of colonial descent – but a migrant to this country can seem to be a little problematic. Peter Read asks the question “What conceptions of belonging will they [Australians of every variety] bring to this divided land, how will they place themselves in relation to the Indigenous past and present?” He also questions how can we non-Indigenous Australians justify our continuous presence and our love for this country while Indigenous people remain dispossessed and their history unacknowledged. Read expresses his anguish about this as “all of us are in place and out of place simultaneously.”

The feelings and senses of belonging of non-Indigenous Australians through memory, cultural and personal association are explored by Read. He says that belonging is formed of many elements, it is physical and personal and spiritual belonging is diverse and complex. The message for me is that we need to build our own understanding and “find the confidence in our own physical and spiritual belonging in this land, respectful of Aboriginality but not necessarily close to it.”

Mandy Martin and Tom Griffiths hold that true belonging carries responsibility for present and future. Ethical belonging implies the protection of the land Australia from this moment. Belonging is not just a matter of sharing land but finding acceptance of people’s cultural and social difference. Belonging ultimately is personal.

Self and memory are important elements of creating a personal sense of place. Many of us have travelled, lived in and experienced a number of ‘places’ both in Australia and overseas. Non-Aboriginal people have also experienced the sense of loss and dispossession of their homelands due to economics, migration, war and the need to take refuge in another place.

Glen Skien in his altered postcard installation says that “postcards have a way of negotiating the relationship between self, memory and place that corresponds with our experience of maps.” He says that they convey “a certain European sensibility continually striving to connect

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406 Read, *Belonging*, 204.
407 In Read, *Belonging*, 221-223.
and inscribe the self with place." His comments on ‘sense of place’ are not unlike the ideas conveyed in Read’s book about belonging.

The complexity of a community’s or an individual’s sense of connection to place is not measurable by any simple analysis of the spatial dimensions of their everyday experience. In order for place to disclose meaning, what is required is a spirit of reflection that binds self-narratives equally to both the present and the past. It is possible that formal accounts of colonial history can be re-negotiated through a blend of personal and historical narratives that maintain a consciousness that defined territories were already mapped, named and described. For non-Indigenous Australians, the potential for more meaningful connections between ‘self’ and ‘place’ will require approaches to mapping that creatively negotiate both the historical and the reflective self.

This idea of negotiation between self and place is very important. For me it means the continual hard work of land management, controlling introduced pests (flora and fauna), tree pruning and planting, mowing (but not to the extent of creating a golf course!). It is not to be perceived as an aim to control the ‘wild’ nature, but a give and take procedure where nature can still express its own creative forces. These processes create meaningful connections to the ‘place’ in which I live. They are part of my sitting, looking and contemplating of THE SITE.

On Space

Space in our conventional awareness is basically felt as distance, the empty interval separating objects. Our notion of space depends on our notion of time, which is necessary to measure distance.

The ideas/concepts of space in connection to ‘place’ are also complex and multivalent in both the physical and experiential interaction with place as well as its transferral to the ‘representational’ mode.

In European pictorial traditions, the sense of space is about the relationship of objects to each other and distance – near and far. This is represented by the mathematical system of linear perspective where objects converge on one or two vanishing points. A visually convincing system producing a 3D impression or illusion of space and distance. This is also supported by the use of aerial perspective where objects in the distance are not as clearly focused as the objects in the foreground and the colours are more subdued.

I agree with Wylie who believes that Western culture is hardwired into this way of seeing and that perspective has authority as a scientific vision which gives the detached eye mastery over space. Perspective also represents a view of land that is non-threatening to humans, it is framed, controlled and conforms to cultural standards of ‘beauty’. We are invited into this space but at a safe distance!

Paul Cézanne in one way broke away from this tradition by acknowledging that the representation of space was an illusion. He wanted to draw attention to the picture plane, a key element in painting, as well as representing the landscape by creating his own pictorial

408 Glen Skien, MYTHO—POETIC (Catalogue, Gympie Regional Gallery, 2015), 16.
409 Skien, MYTHO—POETIC, 16.
system where all objects are broken down into small planes or facets and are connected and interrelated in a non-hierarchical system where near is not more important than far.

Colour in Cézanne’s work, is also used to create space – a restricted colour scheme where the cool blues recede and the warm ochres advance. Harmonies and movements are created where the eye of the viewer is forced to go around the picture plane but not into it. The viewer is cut off from ‘entering’ the painting and is confronted with the push and pull of near and far space relations where the sky is as solid as the mountain which is as solid as objects in the foreground. The spatial play is on the surface of the picture plane. A paradox is created as the work is at once an abstraction, a break away from traditional representation, and a re-presentation, atmosphere is both created and removed.

Without denying the brilliance of Cézanne and his contribution to modern art and the tradition of landscape painting, his main concern was the formal elements of painting. As such he was a detached viewer in the landscape and it was analysed in a very objective, scientific way.

The challenge was for me to break away from this traditional Western way of seeing where objects in the landscape are fixed in a particular point of view. To subvert this tradition, I have needed to think about ‘space’ differently. Here again, I have drawn influences from Indigenous Australian culture and approaches to spirituality.

Space, in our conventional awareness, is basically felt as distance, the empty interval separating objects. our notion of space depends on our notion of time, which is necessary to measure distance. Hence most of the words which we use to describe space, such as long and short, are also used to describe time.

Aborigines do not perceive space as distance. Space for them is consciousness, and, like consciousness, space is divided into two modes. The perceptible, tangible entities in space are like the conscious mind, and the invisible space between things corresponds to the unconscious mind. The term unconscious is misleading: the unconscious mind is always conscious; it is a continuum of dreaming.412

Space for the Indigenous Australians, as I understand it, encompasses different levels of experience - the physical, spiritual, psychological and mythical. It has been my aim in my work to create an alternate space that breaks from European conventions. I have aimed to create a ‘spiritual’ space or perspective in my work.

**On the Idea of perspective**

The idea of space can also be perceived or understood in a different way. Classical ontology sees space as a positive network of straight lines. The belief that calculated perspective would allow classical artists to represent nature/landscape more accurately. This form of perspective presumes an idealised observer from whom vision emanates. It is an ideal view, imagined as being seen by a one-eyed, motionless person who is clearly detached from what he/she sees.

Perspective makes a god of the spectator, who becomes the person on whom the whole world converges, the Unmoved Onlooker. Perspective gathers the visual facts and stabilises them; it makes of them a unified field. The eye is clearly distinct from that field, as the brain is

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separate from the world it contemplates. Despite its apparent precision, perspective is a generalisation about experience.\footnote{Robert Hughes, (updated & enlarged edition) The Shock of the New (London: Thames & Hudson, 1991) 17.} 

Together with this rationalised understanding of space, there was a rationalised understanding of time, and, in Renaissance painting, there was the illusion of a complete unity of time and space. Divorced from the earlier Medieval attempts to juxtapose symbols drawn from the natural world and the idea of a continuous, cyclic narrative, this geometrically devised construction created a totally artificial space in which one could locate oneself within a seemingly logical and tangible sequence of time.\footnote{Sasha Grishin, John Wolseley, LAND MARKS (North Ryde, Sydney: Craftsman House, 1998) 9.}

I agree with the contemporary idea is that nature is a “visual field” and a “dense tissue of relationships”.\footnote{Coole and Frost, \textit{New materialisms}, 106.}

For the rationalist, depth is deduced from 2D height and length. For the phenomenologist, it is integral to the embodied experience of living among things. When the body moved around space, it does not perceive things with the relative sizes objective calculation would predict. It does not inhabit a flat, geometrical, fully determinate plane but a milieu, an \textit{umwelt}, that remains ambiguous, indeterminate, and resonant with an expressive significance that affects the body’s perception of spatial relations.\footnote{Coole and Frost, \textit{New materialisms}, 204.}

\section*{Place and space - personal and cultural experiences}

Place and space can also be given meaning through personal and cultural experiences. The different modes of experience include knowledge, sensorimotor, tactile, visual, conceptual, emotion and thought. Yi-Fu Tuan asks what is the meaning of space in experience, and what is a place? He says that “Place is security, space is freedom”. Space is more abstract than place and what begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value.\footnote{Yi-Fu Tuan, \textit{Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) 3-7.} This for me is also true, as I get to know the ‘place’ of this land, I can experience the space that is presented through the particular place, \textit{THE SITE}. This idea of space is contingent and contextual to times of day and psychological/emotional/experiences.

Tuan says that “Place is a type of object. Places and objects define space, giving it geometric personality.”\footnote{Tuan, \textit{Space and Place}, 17.} He states that:

\begin{quote}
Objects and places are centres of value. ... An object or place achieves concrete reality when our experience of it is total, that is, through all the senses as well as with the active and reflective mind. Long residence enables us to know a place intimately, yet its image may lack sharpness unless we can also see it from the outside and reflect upon our experience. Another place may lack the weight of reality because we know it only from the outside – through the eyes as tourists, and from reading about it in a guidebook. It is characteristic of the symbol-making human species that its members can become passionately attached to places of enormous size, such as a nation-state, of which they can have only limited direct experience.\footnote{Tuan, \textit{Space and Place}, 18.}
\end{quote}
It is insightful for me to consider the ideas about space and place from the perspective of human geography and the difference between experiences of space and place. These ‘experiences’ also contribute to a person’s connection to place and sense of belonging. Space for me is depth, surface and ambiguity. It is physical, psychological, emotional and experiential. Distance can be perceived but cannot be experienced unless one walks through it.

The specific area from which I am working has many spatial contrasts. Position, connection, movement and orientation are created by the tracks and small cleared areas. The bush itself is compressed, inaccessible and overcrowded – it takes extreme physical effort to move through this place and at once one can become disorientated. Thus, the psychological experience can be very uncomfortable and alienating. Whereas the tracks through the bush leading back down to the open woodland areas gives one a sense of security.

Traditional Australian Indigenous peoples could read the space of the bush or the desert; we need maps and tracks to negotiate it. Space for me is also represented by the silence, an outer perceptible space as well as an inner psychological space– my thoughts and emotions.

When one is out there alone, internal and external space can create anxiety, tension and even fear. The question is how can this complex concept be conveyed or represented? Maybe it cannot.

The water, rocks, tree ferns and impenetrable bush surrounding THE SITE, define it as a ‘place’ and a ‘space’. It is symbols drawn from these images that I have used to create a sense of a specific place in my work as seen in the photograph below.
Fig.99: Bärbel Ullrich photograph at THE SITE.
'The Australian Bush'

I would argue that the ‘national iconic’ images of the Australian landscape are images where the bush has been controlled and conquered. The dominant narrative or story of landscape painting begins with the first settlers who made records of this ‘strange new land’ - its flora, fauna and inhabitants.\textsuperscript{420} Colonial artists, such as Eugene Von Guerard and Nicholas Chevalier, produced views of the new settlement seen through the veil of the picturesque and the Romantic, an English way of seeing the land and an English style of painting the land. The artists of the Heidelberg school of painting are ‘the heroes’ who saw and painted ‘the real Australia’.

The intentions of these artists were not to depict a national culture but their vision was directed by an ideology of man’s struggle and conquest over a hostile or difficult environment and humans’ survival in this environment. Ideas of beauty no longer lie in wilderness but habitation.

Don Watson confirms these ideas to say that the reality is that farmers and settlers have had a fear of the natural environment and efforts were made to tame and destroy forests to survive.\textsuperscript{421} Removing the bush, conquering the bush and turning ‘neglected wilderness’ into a ‘dynamic farming community’ is a worthy project. The bush is a dreaded place and a perfect paradise, it is where some Australians live and where others will never go.\textsuperscript{422}

The Australian Bush is both real and imaginary. Real, in that it grows in various unmistakable bush-like ways, and dies, rots, burns and grows into the bush again; real, in harbouring life. Imaginary, in that among the life it harbours is the life of the Australian mind. It is, by many accounts, the source of the nation’s idea of itself. ... the bush is a social construct as well as an ecological one: as much as the things that grow and live there, we define it by the people who inhabit it.\textsuperscript{423} The bush never stops adapting, both as an environment and as a mental construct. It is impervious to its own destruction.\textsuperscript{424}

I have witnessed this process from a personnel perspective. Without total destruction and devastation, chemical and mechanical abuse – the bush cannot be tamed or controlled. And to accept this, humans and the environment need to live in mutual respect and cooperation, giving a space for both to coexist.

Place as ecology, biodiversity, conservation and sustainability

Nature is often seen as a troublesome opponent. Profitable production, it is assumed, requires force and monological relations of power. Unfortunately, the ecological disordering of farmland has not evoked widespread critique of the complex economic and cultural dynamics driving quests for mastery over rural places and the natural forces of the land.\textsuperscript{425}

In contemporary discourse on ‘place’, ‘country’ and landscape, the key words enmeshed are ecology, biodiversity, conservation and sustainability – there is a growing concern due to climate change and the rapid extinction of many species, especially the smaller mammals.

\textsuperscript{420} Such as the works of S.C. Gill.
\textsuperscript{421} Watson, The Bush, 5.
\textsuperscript{422} Watson, The Bush, 68-70.
\textsuperscript{423} Watson, The Bush, 66.
\textsuperscript{424} Watson, The Bush, 91.
\textsuperscript{425} George Main, Heartland: The Regeneration of Rural Place (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2015) 52.
Tim Winton argues that Australia has the worst record of mammal extinctions in the world. Since European settlement 27 species have disappeared entirely and 1500 birds, reptiles, plants, amphibians and mammals are currently vulnerable or endangered. Marsupials, the creatures unique to the continent, are in perilous decline and many of the smaller species are gone for good.\textsuperscript{426}

Watson argues that we need a relationship with the land that does not demand submission from either part that is built more on knowledge than the hunger to possess and finds the effort to understand and preserve as gratifying as the effort to exploit and command."\textsuperscript{427}

The impact of colonisation to present farming practices is a significant factor in contributing to ideas of place, ecological decline and the visual changes in the landscape. George Main compares the Wiradjuri systems of tending local ecologies and incorporating social and spiritual concerns to the destructive farming methods of the white settlers who saw the biologically diverse living systems as ‘chaotic and disordered’.\textsuperscript{428} Main talks about the displacement and destruction of aboriginal people, the white ideology of mastery over nature and the continued ecological destruction of rural farming lands due to repeated cultivation, mechanisation, use of chemical and industrial farming methods driven by globalised market forces. The destructive dynamics of the modern farming framework, which positions humanity above and in control over rural terrain and other species, is the cause of mounting ecological disorders.\textsuperscript{429}

Regeneration of rural places requires perceptions of people as constructive members of biological communities. People may care for local ecologies – enable natural diversity, connectivity, strength and productivity – and be nourished in return. Responsive, careful relationships require intimate knowledge of places. Western notions of a firm divide between people and the rest of nature impede dialogue and empathy. Feelings of belonging and connection to the vibrant life of places are denied.\textsuperscript{430}

The regeneration and enduring health of rural places and agricultural regions requires fresh narratives and perceptions to undermine and replace inappropriate and destructive traditions of thought and culture.\textsuperscript{431}

Main says that beliefs, attitudes and cultural processes underlying the disordering of local ecologies may be challenged and dismantled. Alternative stories and realities are possible.\textsuperscript{432} He talks about the Aboriginal idea of the land constantly singing a song to you to explain how it works and how you can operate in harmony with it. You just have to listen.\textsuperscript{433} The message about ‘our place’ in the book is not all negative but is one of hope as people reconnect, listen to, and cherish the land with a renewed sense of spiritual belonging.

In contrast to us changing and defining the land/place is the notion that the land defines us, not unlike the Aboriginal connection to land/place/country. Winton describes how the land

\textsuperscript{427} Watson, The Bush, 372.
\textsuperscript{428} Main, Heartland, 6.
\textsuperscript{429} Main, Heartland, 81-82.
\textsuperscript{430} Main, Heartland, 260.
\textsuperscript{431} Main, Heartland, 261.
\textsuperscript{432} Main, Heartland, 181.
\textsuperscript{433} Main, Heartland, 238. This also supports the idea of land and place as being alive and the interconnection of all things.
defines us and talks about his relationship to the land. He also acknowledges that the earth is our home and the dirt beneath our feet is sacred. Winton says that Australia the place is constantly overshadowed by Australia the national idea, Australia the economic enterprise. He says that it was through surfing that he came to understand nature and the landscape. “By submitting, and by waiting. Waiting sharpens the senses.”

Winton is also concerned about the ecosystem, its complexity, fragility and its collapsing state. He also believes we have to listen to the land. He says that “the land speaks to many of us, and like any long-suffering parent it yearns for a little recognition. But not everyone is paying attention.”

This supports my idea that the dominant belief system or mythology about the land and our place in it, or, ideas about nature need to be changed. Winton believes that humans have never quite managed to give up the idea that we are at the centre of the universe and masters of all we survey. We are used to seeing ourselves as the pinnacle or reality. He thinks that maybe deep-down people everywhere yearn for connection, to be overwhelmed by beauty and need to silently acknowledge our smallness in the face of grandeur.

The notion of place also needs to take on not only a national but a global perspective. We need to question how much progress has been made towards sustainability. Tim Flannery maintains that the relationship Australians have with the land and their ‘place’ is destructive and parasitical:

> We live in a country where many people appear to have turned their backs on nature. Fuck the environment. Fuck action on climate change. Money – big money – that’s the only thing that matters now, and everyone and everything holding back the flow of cash needs to get out of the way. Whether it’s fertile farmland, marine sanctuaries, important nature reserves or even national parks – in Australia all are increasingly negotiable, so long as the money is right.

As well as being critical, he also is positive about our future in this Australian ‘place’ and believes that we can achieve great things by adjusting our beliefs, values and practices and engaging with nature and listening to our land. He believes that Australian species should become an important focus of our conservation efforts as they are unique and are found nowhere else on earth. For Flannery, conservation of the full spectrum of living things is not a project for half a nation, but it’s a project for a planet and he believes that Australia can play a vital role in realising it.

From a global perspective, Flannery maintains the idea that we have to save the planet and humanity from catastrophe. He states that “it is not so much our technology, but what we believe, that will determine our fate.” This again supports my idea for the need of a new

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444 Flannery, “After the Future”, 77.
mythology or belief system that sees the earth as a living organism where everything is interconnected and land is sacred. If we continue to believe that the earth is a resource to be exploited for monetary and material gains, we will be responsible for destroying the planet. Flannery believes that the deep interconnectedness central to the Gaia hypothesis presents a profound challenge to our current economic model, for it explains that there are both limits to growth, and no ‘away’ to throw anything to.

For Flannery, the superorganism of Earth, Gaia, is dependent on biodiversity to keep it habitable. He believes that the first requirement is a dramatic reduction of greenhouse-gas emissions, but that alone will not ensure our success, for the Earth system has been damaged by our activities, and that damage must be repaired. He asks how much damage has been done? He takes a positive view that we can change the growing climate crisis and that “we are capable of many things, but our beliefs do have a way of turning into self-fulfilling prophecies.”

I will argue that our positive beliefs, transformed into artworks, will inspire people to become more aware of the sacred nature of land.

**On Experience**

I have chosen our property under Mt Bogong as a specific site for my work as it fits into Watson’s ‘multicultural’ definition where the bush is so many different things, there is not one bush but many different bushes. There is about twenty acres of ‘tamed’ and ‘developed’ land (no farming) with planted native and exotic trees originating from many different continents. This area could be described as open and developing woodland in need of constant maintenance and ‘control’, and, even then the threat of bush fire is a constant in summer. Alongside is about 90 acres of ‘natural’ bush or wilderness adjoining the Bogong National Park. It is in this wilderness above our property that a few people have perished. It is this ‘place’, this area of bush that attracts me and stimulates my awe and imagination. As Winton suggests, places exert “active and unpredictable power” where “things have their own secret histories and inner lives.” The place exerts a primal energy which seems ancient and timeless yet the land is always in a state of constant flux, destroying and renewing itself. As such **THE SITE** or this place can also be a metaphor or microcosm of a larger place, the Australian landscape and even the Earth itself. Even though **THE SITE** has characteristic and features specific to place, I have aimed to reflect these in my work as well as imbuing the work with universal qualities.

I have developed knowledge of this place, the experience of the space and a sense of spiritual belonging by walking through the bush on many occasions, through many seasons and different times of day.

Peter Simmons discusses the concept of walking for engagement with the natural environment and a connection with nature to experience place and space. He discusses the focus:

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447 Flannery, *Here on Earth*, 257.
450 As previously mentioned, wherever I go into the bush I find evidence of prior human occupation or intervention.
on the bodily experience of walking, where walker consciously and unconsciously engages and interacts with discernible and indiscernible features of the places through which they walk. The interaction is much more than contemplation led by the eyes. Multiple senses are alert, and the feet play an important sensory role. Walking is described as a co-creation, a discourse between internal bodily rhythms and the rhythms and features of place. ...[the suggestion] that in some circumstances walking may help people develop affinity with place, and that in some circumstances people will be acted on through walking and readied for personal change, which may be an enhanced engagement with natural environments more generally.452

For a holistic connection with land/nature and a sense of spiritual belonging to place the divisions between humans and nature need to be broken down—this can be achieved not only through arts practice where the artist ‘collaborates’ with nature to produce the work but also through walking. Simmons presents the notion that walking in natural environments can influence a walker’s relationship with natural environments. The potential for one way of knowing about the natural environment that is socially and bodily available to most humans is walking.453

Walking is “a multisensory interaction of internal and spatial rhythms” and a “multisensory experience of immediate locale, and a coproduction between body and place.”454 Thus walking can produce a sense of place as well as a connection and direct experience with the spatial environment—it stimulates multiple senses, sound, smell, imagination and can even stimulate anxiety—being alone and isolated in the bush.

Simmons distinguishes through his research three different kinds of walking and three different modes of interaction with the environment. The ‘purposive’ type of walking is habitual and disengaged as the walker has the purpose of reaching the destination. The ‘conceptual’ type of walking is about interpreting and seeking information which can be linked to ‘looking outward’ where the walker is perceiving detail, seeking and interpreting information. It is also about ‘reflecting inward’ where the walker is thoughtful and reflective and takes time for thinking and idea generation. The ‘discursive’ kind of walking creates an affinity with place—participation through half-conscious exploration using sensorial experience and engagement. The walker is adjusting her/his own internal rhythms to the material rhythms of the place. This type of walking can be linked to the ‘embodied experience’ mode of interaction with the environment where the walker is connecting the body with place—the body acts and is acted upon through the journey.455

Therefore, the experience of walking through the bush is not only mental and physical but encompasses a notion of time connected to this journey—a different experience of time that is disconnected to everyday routine.

454 Simmons, “Walking”, 26. 34.
455 Simmons, “Walking”, 32-34.
On time

Time in our modern world has become our captor. The essence of time has been reduced to a mere quantity, a numerical measure of seconds, minutes, hours, and years. We never seem to have sufficient time, yet when a little time is given to us, we waste it. Time’s qualities have vanished. For us, time has lost its inner nature.

In other societies, time is the energy of the Universe... chaos theory shows that it is possible to reconnect ourselves with the living pulse of time.456

Creative people experience a time quite different from that measured by a clock. Chaos theory replaces time’s arrow, a straight line, with “an endlessly complex figure of fractal dimension which reveals new patterns and intricacies.” The linear time of our mechanistic world is no more than a convenient delusion concealing “a living vibrant time within the interior curling details of a fractal.” Thus, in chaos theory, time has a fractal dimension.457

When we are willing to enter into a fractal dimension, our experience expands into time. We explore time’s nuances and act according to our own internal rhythms.458

Time’s rhythms range from the fast ticking of the atom to the expansion of the entire cosmos. Time unfolds within the geological processes of Earth, the changes of the seasons, the life of a fly. Each system contains its own measure of time and, as systems connect into environments, time becomes even richer and multi-dimensional.459

Seeing time as a measure of process in touch with its environment accords more directly with our experience than seeing time as the equal interval ticking of a mechanical clock.460

Creative people, and we are all creative, need a great deal of time (as measured on the clock) in which they are simply’ doing nothing’. To the outside world, they appear to be daydreaming or simply fooling around. But inside, they are connecting to the time of the work, to its subtle rhythms and fractal structures. ...Creativity may therefore demand long periods of apparent inaction. But it can also pour forth with amazing rapidity so that a tremendous amount gets done.461

Chaos theory shows us that it is possible to reconnect ourselves with the living pulse of time – when we are in the process of creating art and working with the environment, this is what we do – immersing in creative time.

Time’s arrow and time’s cycle create a dichotomy which is also connected to place and space. Time’s arrow sees history as “an irreversible sequence of unrepeatable events.” Each moment occupies its own distinct position in a temporal series or sequence moving in a linear direction. Time’s cycle presents events as having no meaning “as distinct episodes with causal impact upon a contingent history,” having no direction and no differences from the past to the future.462

457 Briggs and Peat, Chaos, 126.
458 Briggs and Peat, Chaos, 127.
459 Briggs and Peat, Chaos, 133.
460 Briggs and Peat, Chaos, 135.
461 Briggs and Peat, Chaos, 140.
Time’s cycle is about the repeating cycles of nature and the hidden pulses of time. This can be represented by the cycle of the moon - symbolically depicted as a circle in my work - and the changing light from dawn to dusk. The constant flux and flow of nature creates subtle nuances. My time-lapse photography piece, *Seven Months*, demonstrates the significance of these on place and space by showing the changing effects of light and shadows.
Fig. 100: Bärbel Ullrich Seven Months, time lapse photography, digitally presented. 2016-2017.
Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that concepts of 'place' and 'space' have been linked to the construction of an Australian national identity by the canonisation of certain artworks that reflect the stories wish to be told or perceived as the 'real' Australia. Landscape has become a cultural construction and a commonly perceived and reproduced commercial commodity that is promoted as 'natural representation'.

Language also has a role to play in defining place and space where they are valued according to some external standard. By using European pictorial conventions to depict place and space, the viewer feels in immediate control, viewing from a safe, non-committal vantage point. They may perceive the beauty of the land by non-challenging conventions when in actual fact these images are a product of subtle propaganda. And for what reason – to promote pride in a country which is 'unique' while many species are going extinct and the land is being destroyed by human greed.

Place, space and time can be experienced on many different levels. From a loose 'definition' to experience, which is culturally attuned or personally informed. As the context changes, so does the meaning. With the on flow of new contemporary perspectives and theories that point to an ecological stewardship, things may be changing. Hopefully not too slowly.

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463 This has also been discussed in chapter 4.
Chapter 7
The Book of Growth and Decay
On Conclusion(s)

And then …. I knew my relationship to THE SITE was tentative. It was a two-way relationship where nature also needed her own space. I felt like an invader at this moment. It was time for me to leave.

In the introduction of this exegesis, I had identified five separate yet interconnected ideas/concepts/concerns for the 100 Prayer Mats for Gaia, project that I wanted continue to explore and extend into new areas of research and knowledge. One of which was the need for a new myth to heal the planet. A myth to be inclusive of all nations and all living and non-living things – the interconnection of life on earth. This was based on the notion of Gaia, a new way of looking at humans and their relationship to the land and nature on a global perspective. Joseph Campbell believed that the image of the Earth from space will be the symbol for the new mythology to come and this was the symbol I had used extensively in the above project.

I now have come to realise that a new all-inclusive mythology that is a belief of all peoples is ideologically and ontologically impossible. What is necessary is a 'Global Mindshift' towards a new ecological way of thinking including the importance of the notion of ‘Gaia’. This Global Mindshift will come from a cultural perception and a heightened awareness which transforms the way people think and behave in regard to our responsibility as carers for the planet in an as yet unknown future.

This Global Mindshift will influence the way images of land are constructed in art encompassing not only aesthetics but ethics. It will also replace the ontological perception of the world that underpins the European pictorial tradition of representing land/landscape where mankind dominates nature. As such, there can be no real representations of nature –it’s all in the mind and our shifting cultural perception of ‘reality’.

The European psyche moved to differentiate itself from the rest of life on Earth about 800 years ago where the seeds of the scientific and mechanical perspective in which we have been living began to take shape. Nature became objectified and externalised and with it grew the idea of humans as fundamentally separate individuals with their own inner life. The view that humans participate in the intimate workings of nature was denied which implied that matter was indifferent and nature must be external to us; ‘Man' had become the measure of all things in the Renaissance.465

Today there is a continuing shift and change as to how we perceive our relationship to the non-human world. The image of our blue planet seen in space is an image that represents and influences this changing shift in perception. It is a subtle mental shift, the reorganisation of the entire way in which we conceive of our world. This image offers us a perception and an

associated conception of an interconnected world – a world organic, seamless, fluid and whole.\textsuperscript{466}

Wholeness, as is my central theme and the central theme of mystical revelations the world over,\textsuperscript{467} is an idea that needs to be re-encompassed and re-contextualised in this Global Mindshift. It is through the emerging disciplines of ecology, eco-feminism, eco philosophy and environmental humanities, that thinkers and artists today are pursuing new ways of engaging with the non-human world.

My work is not representational in an isomorphic sense but is still a new material form that stands for and is a sign of the land/environment on the one hand but also aims to transcend this material form in meaning, myth and symbolism. Thereby, expressing a personal spiritual dimension.

Rather than representing land or nature, my work can be seen as spiritual evocations of the life force and energy of land/nature, the place, its agency and power. It has aimed to achieve a mystical, metaphysical quality rather than a ‘realistic’ quality.

The following ideas/processes/factors and engagements have not only informed my work and research but have been utilised and have led to spiritual evocations of the landscape:

- Idea that the landscape exists in my psyche as it does in physical reality.
- Physical immersion in the landscape.
- The search for personal spirituality and ‘belonging’.
- Collaboration with nature to produce artworks.
- Notions of ‘reality’ in depictions of landscape that are inadequate depictions of ‘truth’.
- Physical mutability of landscape mirrored in the prints and canvas works.
- Idea of permanence and impermanence.
- A serendipitous connection to contemporary land-based artists who have similar philosophies and processes.
- The landscape is in flux – a dynamic space both personal and universal.
- Contemporary ideas on ecological thinking.
- Inviting the viewer to engage and participate in the work in the exhibition space.
- The use of printmaking to get beyond ‘representation’ and respond to the agency of the land by recording different layers and imprints from the land. An effective way of searching for a spiritual connection with space and place.
- The use of stitching and cloth as a major methodology as it is linked to care, bandaging, repair and femininity.

\textsuperscript{466} The Gaia hypothesis was born out of this image. Briggs and Peat, \textit{Chaos}, 145.
\textsuperscript{467} Briggs and Peat, \textit{Chaos}, 145.
The use of Artists books to immerse the viewer in a tactile engagement with the environment and uncovering layers of the land. The book as a form of storytelling.

The following challenging question arises out of these processes. Who or why is the work for – myself, the viewer or the cultural databank? Or, why even do it?

**The Work as Missing Information (New Knowledge)**

Chaos theory is about being unable to predict and control. In chaos theory it is acknowledged that there will always be missing information, a limitation to our knowledge, a hole in the data. Our data-gathering abilities can never be sufficiently extensive to know all there is to know about complex systems let alone the world. “Paradox and limitation appear inherent to our human thinking and existence.” But Chaos’ [art’s] most timeless lesson maybe that it re-enchants us with the mystery.468

What ‘missing information’ lies hidden at the end of our own century? We all possess a ‘blind spot’, a blind place, an absolute gap in our information-gathering abilities in the retina of the eye.

Chaos tells us that the missing information is the window to the whole. In the pit of uncertainty looms our access to creative possibilities. ...A theory is a mental projection onto the infinite complexity of nature – one that emphasises certain nuances within the flux.469

In this sense, this project can never be complete or have a final conclusion. Humanity constantly changes its relationship to and perception of land, nature and the environment. The land itself is changing; human intervention, ‘progress’, ecological disasters, climate change and wars. New chunks of missing information will surface as new questions need to be asked.

It's been a long and fruitful journey for me, but, I feel like I have not got to the end; just the beginning.

Our new developing Mindshift and relationship to the land is providing a way forward particularly in this time of the current ecological crisis. Australian Indigenous peoples say that “I am the Land”. They describe features of the land as parts of one’s body – the land is their body. This is different to the way a European speaks of identity with the land.470

European people (and other migrants to this country) cannot have the same sense of spiritual belonging as Indigenous Australian peoples. But there needs to be a message of hope as people reconnect, listen to, and cherish the land with a renewed sense of spiritual belonging.

The literary works that have informed my artwork are specialised references that relate to the environment and the human connection to the land. The literature covers ecofeminism, ecology, mythology, the Goddess and the feminine principle, religion, spirituality, the sublime, Gaia, Chaos, science and art.

These literary works are important and useful for me to have developed a personal frame of reference, cosmology or philosophy and to develop works of art that directly connect to land.

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and environment. I believe that my artworks have a meaningful content in relation to our contemporary culture and our changing relationship to the land.

My research can only work with knowledge of the past and our contemporary times as points of reference. I cannot see or predict where it will lead to my production of future works – what directions will I take and what experiences or influences will make me choose a particular path?

I wonder what kind of land-based images artists will be producing in 100-200 years' time? Will this planet/ nature/ environment still provide them with inspiration, beauty, belonging and spirituality? Or will it be too late?
Fig.101: Bärbel Ullrich Photograph of WATER from the creek flowing down from THE SITE
REFERENCE LIST


Brown, Marguerite essay Bronwyn Rees Protection in Artview, Nov 2015


Garnons-Williams, Dr Victoria, essay, foreword, by Lyle Rexer. *Renata Buziak: Afterimage.* Queensland Centre for Photography, Brisbane, Australia, 2010.


NGV, Heartlands and Headwaters. catalogue, 11 April-20 September. 2015.


Notes on the following Appendices

The following appendices illustrate the solo exhibitions presented during the PhD and studio-based practice research. The first exhibition *By the Creek* was preliminary work and not exhibited in the following and final exhibitions. The appendices show a variety of work and developments within the work. For each exhibition, I had to make decisions about the presentation due to the restrictions of the space. Much work was edited in the final exhibition but also new work presented. The *Book of Creation* now has seven pages in accord with my theme, whereas only four were exhibited in the Wangaratta show. The following artist’s statement was available at the exhibitions for public information.

Bärbel Ullrich
Artist’s Statement

My interest is in the complexities, layers and mysteries of nature, land and environment. My work explores the notion of ‘place’ and the essence of place – where the land is not only observed but experienced through emotion and intuition. I wish to represent the essence of the place, its form, structure and surface appearance. I do not represent a traditional ‘view’ of the land but aspects of the rhythms, energy and movements in the environment. The details explore the microcosm, fractal patterns, textures, colours and shapes, especially the local characteristics of specific places.

Concepts include time, change, growth and chance. Reference is made to the elemental forces and symbols in the environment – water, wood, rocks, leaves, earth, drought and rain. The order and form in nature and the creative force pervading all nature is of particular interest to me and a focus for the work. The idea of the interconnectedness of all life on earth is my philosophical basis.

My process is to interact with the environment and collect materials from that environment. Processes also include photographing details, taking rubbings from the environment and using materials found in the environment such as dirt, water and charcoal.

Materials, textures and fibres are collected from the environment to create printmaking plates. I like to experiment with the inking process with resulting work showing the details, the microcosm, fractal patterns, textures and shapes of the materials collected.

Some areas of the print often have a photographic quality as the realism of the materials is captured. There is always that element of surprise and unpredictability in printmaking which I enjoy.

I also work by building up layers with overprinting and collaging where a number of plates and techniques may be used to complete one final print. I aim to capture the richness, variety, delicacy and spirit of our fragile environment. The plates themselves are as ephemeral as the materials used to create them and therefore limited prints can be reproduced.
Appendix 1

BY THE CREEK

Mixed media works on paper by Bärbel Ullrich

Wednesday 18th November – Sunday 29th November 2015

GIGS ART GALLERY

Gateway Village
Lincoln Causeway,
Wodonga, VIC
Open: 10am-4pm
Tuesday – Sunday
T: 02 60213073
www.gigs.aug.au

smaller works – 40x40cm

![Image 1]
![Image 2]

![Image 3]
![Image 4]
larger works – H 100cm x W 70cm
Appendix 2

The Seven Books of Genesis

These initial seven artists\textsuperscript{471} books, were created in 2015, as a homage to the Goddess, Gaia and the feminine principle. Initially my research methods and my intentions were to use text in my work from the Christian Bible and subvert these textual references from a celestial male sky God creator to a Female Earth Goddess. Thus, by the use of text and reference to mainstream religion I had hoped to create an alternate story or context that reflects my philosophical basis. As nature is in a continuous cycle of creation, I have matched a biblical quote with the images and theme of each book.

The first book is \textbf{The Book of the Sacred Moon Tree}. The embedded secret text states "And She said let the Earth my Body produce vegetation – plants bearing seed and trees bearing fruit with seed in it."\textsuperscript{472}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{book_image}
\caption{Bärbel Ullrich \textit{The Book of the Sacred Moon Tree} 55 x 55cm variable. Mixed media and collagraph plate. 2015. (note that the collagraph plates are the front covers of the books! – each individual and not to be repeated as in traditional printmaking practice)}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{471} Alex Selenitsch, \textit{Australian Artists Books} (National Gallery of Australia, 2008) 6. Selenitsch states that Artists books without an apostrophe has, in some circles, become the standard name for this activity.

\textsuperscript{472} \textit{GENESIS} 1:11 Then God said "Let the land produce Vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, accordingly to their various kinds.
Fig.84: Bärbel Ullrich *The Book of the Sacred Moon Tree*. (detail) 55 x 55cm variable. Mixed media and collagraph print. 2015.
The image from this book comes from a deciduous chestnut tree in the paddock just below the bush line. The tree was highlighted by a full moon, which I photographed, and made a collagraph plate of this image on box board using glue as the raised drawing. I thought this image was a good example for the representation of the axis mundi.

This plate was then used to print The Sacred Moon Tree series. I had been experimenting with smaller artists books different formats and printing techniques and thought that the collagraph plate itself would make a good front cover as it had built up an interesting patina. It was of a larger scale, which also gave me a larger matrix to work with.

I printed front and back on seven pages of Hahnemule 300 gsm printmaking paper. For the back cover I glued printed cloth on both sides. By gluing muslin on the covers and the pages, assembling, clamping and stitching together outside of the back and front covers I managed to design a creative way of binding the book of this scale and weight. Also, the ‘tails’ of the muslin create a new dimension to the work which also could be considered as pages in their own right.

Included in the book are inserts of smaller prints and photographs which have been sanded back to make the images ‘merge’ or bond with the page.

I am very interested in creation mythologies, and I decided to use the text from Genesis for this first series. As my intention was to work with a series of seven, I decided to use this format and method to create another six books. I could easily appropriate and subvert the text of Genesis to suit images of nature found on THE SITE.

I have noted; these seven books are not in the order of the seven days of creation as told in the bible! This is because of the unplanned, intuitive and serendipitous nature at the beginning of the process.

The second book is The Book of Ferns. The embedded secret text states “And She said let the Earth my Body produce vegetation and as her breath caressed the mountain creeks the ferns grew in abundance.”

There are many varieties of native ferns found on the property, THE SITE, especially dramatic are the large cold climate tree ferns. These ferns appear quite fragile but are in fact suited to survive in the mountain climate. They are a good metaphor for the fragility and sensitivity of the ecosystems around the creeks. The infinite varieties and patterns of nature are well represented by these ferns – chaos and order. These ferns are suitable, although delicate, to ink up and put through the press giving another layer to the work.
Fig. 85: Bärbel Ullrich *The Book of Ferns.* (detail) 55 x 55cm variable. Mixed media and collagraph print. 2015.
In this second book, I have not only used the front cover as a collagraph plate, but I have made another plate from no more gaps spread onto the box board. This was covered with glad wrap and ferns were laid on top and weighted down. These collagraph plates were also used in later works for the final exhibition such as *The Book of Tears*.

Fig. 86: Bärbel Ullrich Collagraph plate

Fig. 87: Bärbel Ullrich Collagraph plate
Fig. 88: Bärbel Ullrich Collagraph plate

Having extra collagraph plates made from the environment, enabled me to overprint images and add extra layers of surface and detail. The above plates were also used to make rubbings on cloth and paper as inserts into the book. They were also used in the third book. The images then, connected the seven books as a thematic whole although individually differing.

The third book is *The Book of Ferns, Moss and Lichen*. The embedded secret text states “And She said let the Earth my Body produce vegetation and in the damp undergrowth of the ferns grew moss and lichen.”

Moss and lichen are two separate species but exist in a symbiotic relationship; a good metaphor for how we should exist with nature and the land. The front cover of the book are the energy lines that represent moss and lichen. I used this to print all of the pages, very subtly and then overprint with additional information. Again, the insertion of prints on paper, prints on cloth and photographic references.

I have also introduced the circle – highlighted by different coloured inks and stitched into the back of the book. This was later to become a dominant symbol in my work. Inserted within this book is also a stitched pocket where I have place seven smaller prints. This adds another layer or level to the multidimensional artists book. Further biblical references are made with the addition of the fragments of paper containing the numbers.

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^474 GENESIS 1:11 And it was so. The land produced vegetation.
Fig. 89: Bärbel Ullrich Small Print inserted in pocket back of page 7. *The Book of Ferns, Moss and Lichen.*

Fig. 90: Bärbel Ullrich *The Book of Ferns, Moss and Lichen.* (cover) 55 x 55cm variable. Mixed media and collagraph plate. 2015.
The fourth book is *The Book of Darkness*. The embedded secret text states “Now the Earth was formless and empty Darkness was over the surface of the Deep and the spirit of the Goddess was hovering over the waters.”

Specific to *THE SITE* are two primary creeks that flow through the property down from the mountain. Water is a significant element to *THE SITE*, it affects the environment in regards to geography, climate, flora and fauna.

Darkness, formlessness and chaos are all elements of the sublime in my work. Water is an archetypal symbol as it connotes creation, birth, life and death cycles.

In this book, I began to experiment with the pages being wider than the front cover. They were then folded to create an extra layer that had to be opened and became and extension of that page. Revealing and concealing new information.

The two images below depict the folded page. Inserted in that page is the text “in the beginning” repeated in charcoal. The third image shows the printed cloth inserts which give a transparent and ephemeral layer to the work – not numbered as pages.

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475 GENESIS 1:1 Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep and the spirit of God was hovering over the waters.
Fig. 92: Bärbel Ullrich *The Book of Darkness*. (detail) inside the folded page of page 1.

Fig. 93: Bärbel Ullrich *The Book of Darkness*. (detail) page 1. 55 x 55cm variable. Mixed media and collagraph print. 2015.
The fifth book is The Book of Scarification. The embedded secret text states “And She said let the Earth be your Mother and what you do to Her will be done to you.”

The images based in this book are from photographs and drawings of what I call ‘tree wounds’, the scarification of trees due to human or natural agency. I find these wounds are often very uncannily and explicitly reminiscent of female genitalia. Rather than solely relying on printmaking, I have used the technique of ‘frottage’ to create images by rubbings off the plate. These charcoal rubbings also connote suggestions of fire and destruction.

The message of the book echoes the warning in James Lovelock’s work. He says that “For each of our different actions there are only consequences.” If the planet is indeed a living organism, Gaia, and She is being damaged by what humans are doing, She will do utmost to protect herself first. As we endeavour to remove harmful life-threatening cancers or diseases from our bodies, She may do likewise if we are the metaphorical cancer.

We have grown in number to the point where our presence is perceptively disabling the planet like a disease. As in human diseases there are four possible outcomes: destruction of the invading disease organisms; chronic infection; destruction of the host; or symbiosis – a lasting relationship of mutual benefit to the host and the invader.

The question is how we achieve this symbiosis when many humans are ignorant of the damage being done to the planet. All looks well and healthy from my little part of the world, but, I realise on a global level, many parts of the planet are suffering from chronic infection. I believe that a new shared consciousness and Eco philosophy is needed for humans to live in sustainable peace with nature. But, how can this happen if we can’t live in peace with each other?

476 No specific biblical reference, but with biblical intonation; the idea was taken from Lovelock.
478 Lovelock, Gaia, xv.
Fig. 95: Bärbel Ullrich Tree Wounds Photographs on THE SITE
Fig. 96: Bärbel Ullrich Photograph on THE SITE. This photograph was used for the design of the collagraph plate on the front cover of the book.

Fig. 97: Bärbel Ullrich The Book of Scarification. (cover) 55 x 55cm variable. Mixed media and collagraph plate. 2015.
The sixth book is *The Book of Leaves*. The embedded secret text states “Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place and let dry ground appear upon which leaves will fall.”

The images of leaves used in the book are gum leaves, specifically the very large Blue Gum leaves, iconic of the Australian landscape but also specific to place.

The circle reappears, the book cover is printed creating embossing on the page, cloth inserts, photographs and leaf prints are included. The ground in this area for me, signifies the landscape and significance of place. It represents the flux, flow and changes of nature on a seasonal basis.

Blue gum leaves have been placed or glued within the book. As I walk through the bush, I am fascinated by the size, shape and tonal colours of these leaves on the ground as they go through the decaying process.

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479 GENISES 1:9 And God said, “Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let the dry ground appear. And it was so.

480 Victorian Blue gum – Eucalyptus Biscostata, a subspecies of Eucalyptus Globulus
Fig. 99: Bärbel Ullrich *The Book of leaves*. (cover) 55 x 55cm variable. Mixed media and collagraph plate. 2015.

Fig. 100: Bärbel Ullrich *The Book of Leaves*. (detail) 55 x 55cm variable. Mixed media and collagraph print. 2015.
The seventh book is *The Book of Shadows*. The embedded secret text states “And She said let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from night and let them serve as signs to make sacred times... The greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night and the moon became Her symbol and power.” 481

As the light filters through the large eucalypts interesting shadows are formed on the ground and on the rocks in the creek which I have drawn and photographed. These moving changing forms in nature comprise the imagery in this book. Also, a full moon creates some very surreal shadows, and the moon represented by a circle is the dominant symbol in this book.

Light and shadows play an important role in the ‘conventional’ depiction of landscape in that they signify a time of day or season of the year. I have tried to depict the light and shadows as form, movement, and most importantly the sensation of energy that is physically experienced when one is in the bush.

Fig. 101: Bärbel Ullrich *The Book of Shadows*. (detail) 55 x 55cm variable. Mixed media and collagraph print. 2015.

481 GENESIS 1:14-26 And God said, "Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years, and let them be lights in the vault of the sky to give light on the Earth. And it was so. God made two great lights - the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars.
Appendix 3

Archetypes and Land: Spiritual Belonging

Bärbel Ullrich

HR Gallop Gallery, Building 21, Charles Sturt University, Darnell-Smith Drive, Wagga Wagga. May, 2017

1. Earth Altar Cloth PLEASE WALK ON ME
2. *The Book of Soil*
3. from the 7 Books of Tears PLEASE TURN MY PAGES

4. The Book of Bark, Rocks, Sticks and Ferns
5. *The Book of Bark and Ferns*

6. *Earth Prints*
7. *Earth Prints*

8. *Seven Rocks*
9. *Moon Scapes*
10. *Moon Scapes*
12. Seven Months
Appendix 4

Archetypes and Land: Spiritual Belonging

Bärbel Ullrich


1. *Earth Altar Cloth* PLEASE WALK ON ME

2. *From the 7 Books of Tears* PLEASE TURN MY PAGES
3. *The Book of Bark, Rocks, Sticks and Ferns*

![The Book of Bark, Rocks, Sticks and Ferns](image)

4. *Earth Prints*

![Earth Prints](image)
5. Seven Rocks
6. *The Book of Creation*
Appendix 5
Archetypes and Land: Spiritual Belonging
Bärbel Ullrich
ARTS SPACE Wodonga, September 7 – October 13, 2018
1. *Earth Altar Cloth* PLEASE WALK ON ME
W186cm x L600cm, mixed media on canvas, 2016-2017.
2. The *7 Books of Tears* PLEASE TURN MY PAGES

H80cm x W variable, mixed media and print on cloth, paper and card, 2016-2017.

4. *Seven Rocks* 53x53cm, print and mixed media on Hahnemule 300gsm paper, 2016.

5. *Earth Prints* 53x53cm, print and mixed media on Hahnemule 300gsm paper, 2016.
6. *The Book of Creation*

7 pages, each page H350cm variable, W180cm, mixed media and print on calico and muslin. 2017.
7. The Book of Sand  

Please turn the pages. Each unit H19cm xW28cm x infinity, started 2017.

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8. Seven Months (at THE SITE)