

A vertical lightning bolt strikes down from the top of the frame, branching out as it descends. The background is a solid, vibrant blue. The lightning bolt is bright white with a yellowish-gold glow, creating a stark contrast against the blue.

**LANDSCAPE TOO**



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Designed by Daryl Prondoso

# LANDSCAPE TOO

## A MOP Project

Curated by Carla Liesch and Hayley Megan French

This booklet has been compiled to accompany the exhibition Landscape Too, a MOP Project hosted by AirSpace Projects in Marrickville, 3-19 April 2014.

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## Introduction

*Landscape Too* brings together artists and writers from Alice Springs, Sydney, Toowoomba and Townsville to consider the idea of landscape, as it pertains to an experience of being in Australia. Location in land, location and dislocation in the landscape of Australia is a continuing source of contention, urgency and discovery for contemporary artists. The idea of landscape is hence one that calls forth both doubt and wonder, particularly working in the unsettled intercultural ground of Australia. It prompts the question; what is it we are responding to when we consider landscape?

*Landscape Too* follows on from the exhibition *Out of Site* held at Articulate Project Space in 2013. The artists in *Out of Site*—Carla Liesch, Distanciation., ek.i, Emma Hicks, Emma Wise, Hayley Megan French and Richard Kean—were closely linked through collaboration, ARI committees and shared experiences of Australian landscape. The dialogue surrounding the conception and exhibition of the work became a significant aspect of the artists' engagement with these ideas. It is out of this exhibition then that *Landscape Too* was conceived as a project with two outcomes, an exhibition and a collection of texts, offering an opportunity to record more of the ideas and conversations surrounding the project. The artists and writers in *Landscape Too* live and work in different parts of Australia, enriching this discussion through many different approaches and experiences. The submissions in this booklet serve to offer a contextual frame to the idea of landscape.

The idea of the frame has been an important element in our relationship with landscape. Without a sense of boundary, comprehensive space is often bewildering and threatening. However, once we place ourselves within a space, a landscape is framed by our own subjectivity. Rather than a gilded rectangle framing an image these texts seek to find cultural, emotional or embodied frames for our understanding of landscape. The landscape and the frame both continue to exist here through a collection of essays, poems, conversations and speculative writing.

The artists and writers in this project acknowledge the problems with landscape, heavily laden with historical definition and complex social and cultural relations. There is a tension in many of the works and texts, a questioning of our relationship to a particular experience of landscape and how this could be represented in an artwork or text.

The problem with landscape is thus that landscape represents to us, not only our relationship with place, but also the problematic nature of that relationship—a relationship that contains within it involvement and separation, agency and spectacle, self and other. It is in and through landscape, in its many forms, that our relationship with place is articulated and represented, and the problematic character of that relationship made evident.<sup>1</sup>

The Australian landscape is also reflective of what Australian writer and researcher Ross Gibson refers to as the narrative construction of Australia<sup>2</sup>—and inherent in this, our relation to that narrative and our role in its continued construction. The very idea of Australia was recently on display in the National Library of Australia’s exhibition *Mapping Our World; Terra Incognita to Australia*.

Our very existence was envisaged, and then refined over centuries to allow for new ideas and discoveries.<sup>3</sup>

We are reminded in the National Library’s exhibition that the idea of a great southern landmass—to balance those of the known world in the north—emerged from the human imagination long before the Europeans discovered Australia. The role of imagination in the narrative construction of Australia has always been integral and is reflected in the speculative blurring of the real and unreal that has characterised an Australian understanding of landscape.

The first text in this booklet, *Sojourn in the Labyrinth* by Richard Kean introduces imagery of mapping and time, “I step from the boat to the shore. The waves lap at my feet and there I see that the map is forever being redrawn, a line infinitely divisible.” Kean then reminds us that the act of mapping is an act of ownership over the land—a narrative that is written and rewritten over and over.

The potential to re-map and re-mythologise the land through the landscape tradition in Australian art is an idea taken up by Jonathan McBurnie in his conversation with Ron McBurnie. Discussing their different approaches to drawing the Australian landscape, this conversation highlights not only notions of colonial and post-colonial Australian art that trouble this field, but also questions how to continue working in light of this complex history. Jonathan McBurnie finishes with the provocative question—Is this simply a cultural cringe associated with self-imposed political correctness and

willingness to avoid anything remotely colonial sounding? One method it seems artists and writers in this project use to address this discomfort—indeed Jonathan McBurnie uses in his work—is the blurring of the real and the unreal as a way of negotiating the necessity and impossibility of the idea of landscape.

This is evident in the text from ek.1 (Emma Hicks and Katie Williams) *Make it real (one more time)* which blurs the real with the unreal. The text begins with the real, drawing lines from their filming notes and outtakes, then weaving through quotes from scripts of Australian horror films—Picnic at Hanging Rock and Dead Calm. There is a slippage between a matrix of ideas as the words of their source material and an almost stream-of-consciousness record of their experience are intermingled, leaving it for the reader to make it real, again, through their imagination.

In the conversation with Kate Beckingham, *Landscape as Elsewhere*, the artist discusses her practice of manipulating images of landscape to place the viewer in a space where what is real, and what is not, is not easily defined. Moving away from the perceived limitation of the photographic frame—one which inherently separates the viewer from the image—Beckingham is becoming more interested in creating an overall experience for the viewer, drawn from her own embodied experience and memory. Working from her home in Sydney, Beckingham sees the natural landscape as being elsewhere from the space of the urban landscape. The natural landscape, then, already holds a sense of imagination and memory that a new constructed reality can be projected into.

There is a similar sentiment in the excerpt from Saskia Beudel's book *A Country in Mind: Memoir with Landscape. Continuum of landscapes* speaks of an experience of driving through the heterogenous desert landscape of Walungurru in the Northern Territory, and the impossibility of recording the complexities of this environment in an image. Instead, Beudel documents this space through the memories it recalls for her. The landscape that is constructed for the reader then, is unbound by space and time.

There is a desire in many of these texts to translate or recreate an immersive experience of landscape for the reader. Alice Buscombe's short poems seem to recall a single moment of being in a landscape—a written snapshot noting sounds and the slippage of her footing. Buscombe's poems, interspersed throughout the booklet, have a calming rhythm that draw us back into landscape through the natural rhythms of the landscape itself and then our movement within it.

Gemma Messih also draws from an experience in-landscape in her excerpt from *The distance between us*—a poetic response to the Icelandic landscape during, and after, returning from a residency in 2012. Messih speaks as both the subject and space; the subject is not separated from its environment, it is consumed by it. The distance between is at once vast, and non-existent. There is a sense of the sublime in this slippage between the subject and nature, and we are left grasping to contemplate such forces beyond ourselves.

The idea of being in-landscape is also considered by Chris Williams in his essay *Analogue Landscape and Digital Ecologies*. Williams speaks of the ‘inhabiting effect’ of ecology, rather than the possible ‘distancing effect’ of landscape. For Williams, it is in the indelible relation of organisms and their environment that we can frame a more meaningful participation in landscape. From this perspective, Williams questions how the qualities of a given landscape, physical and metaphysical, might be heard; and further, how might a landscape then sound? There follows a beautiful interplay between the song of an image and the image of a song—a cyclical relationship which is explored through the sound work created by Williams for the video *Sometimes there’s two*, included in the exhibition.

Similarly to Williams, Ally Bisshop works both in and out of Australia, spending her time moving between Sydney and Berlin. As Australian philosopher Jeff Malpas has suggested, the place and meaning of landscape is often brought into salience through journey and return.<sup>4</sup> Hence we often find the movement back to Australia, or back home, significant to our perspective on landscape. Bisshop’s *A Conversation in Four Acts* considers different perceptions of light—a recurring obsession in the experience and representation of landscape in Australia—and our reciprocal relationship to the rhythms of the sun.

The artists and writers in this project have been asked to respond to experiences of a landscape that we all continue to shape and move in. What ensues is a conversation between the works, the artists, and the texts, an engagement with different embodied experiences and imaginings of what landscape means in Australia today. The final text by Luke Strevens, *Welcome to Australia, now in HD*, considers the place of Australia and our place in it, in relation to the common and often more romanticised image and politic of Australia’s mythological landscape. Strevens offers examples of contemporary Australian cinema such as *Snowtown*, *The Boys* and *Romper Stomper* as more accurate

representations of a landscape that a majority of Australians experience on a day-to-day basis. *Landscape Too* then, is less about the construction of an image or what lies within a frame and the colonial subtext of this gesture, and more of an exposition of why it is vital to continue engaging with these ideas. As Ross Gibson observes, the place of Australia—encompassing a nation, a dream, and a time— is one that we can imagine ourselves in relation to.<sup>5</sup> The texts and works in *Landscape Too*, hence come from a desire to understand the place we inhabit both physically and imaginatively.

We all carry about with us both horizontal and vertical perspectives on the spaces that mean something to us. In a sense, we are all navigators.<sup>6</sup>

## Endnotes

- 1 Jeff Malpas, “Place and the Problem of Landscape,” in *The Place of Landscape*, ed. Jeff Malpas (Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2011).
- 2 Ross Gibson, *South of The West; Postcolonialism and the Narrative Construction of Australia* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992).
- 3 Martin Woods Susannah Helman, “Terra Incognita to Australia,” in *Mapping Our World: Terra Incognita to Australia* (Canberra, ACT: National Library of Australia, 2013).
- 4 Malpas, “Place and the Problem of Landscape.”
- 5 Gibson, *South of The West; Postcolonialism and the Narrative Construction of Australia*.
- 6 Peter Sutton, “We are all navigators,” in *Mapping Our World: Terra Incognita to Australia* (Canberra, ACT: National Library of Australia, 2013).

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*Carla Liesch is a Sydney-based artist undertaking a Masters of Fine Arts at Sydney College of the Arts. Hayley Megan French is a Sydney-based artist and PhD candidate at Sydney College of the Arts. Carla and Hayley have been collaborating since 2011.*



after three days  
the body feels heavy  
continue walking

-

*Alice Buscombe*

## Sojourn in the Labyrinth

Human being seems inherently labyrinthine. Experience is quantified by words. Words quantify things. The desire to quantify, to throw a homogenising glowing white sheet over everything, making the perhaps unknowable mysteries illuminated and known, is the grand project of humanity (but who really knows?). Einstein invented a theory of relativity. It was calculated that everything should be relative to the velocity of light, the speed of that illuminating substance. Time robbed of its independence. Time and space and space/time robbed of its independence. Relativity is wrong. The apple fell. We took a bite. We were kicked out. Newton used math to tell of a similar experience. Now an Apple can tell you anything. But like anything since our self-consciousness, it is just another brick in the wall of the labyrinth. Another cipher. Another image. Another filter coloured by desire. Another other.

These days, human being sits upon its pyramid. With the help of its big toe and thumb, propping itself above the oceanic silence of the All, it pulls up root and rock and tries to improve them. It sits, in its head, above Nature. Human being is still like an animal. But it is not. Instead of urinating on a tree, which it will sometimes do on the drunken way home, it would rather place a stone, or a fence, or some ink, to manage the ins and outs of its bid for territory. As if it could really own anything. As if the lines of its map really can divide the indivisible. As if black and white can really mean anything. But we can always play pretend. After all, what's the difference? Everything is *All* anyway, including the labyrinth.

I step from the boat to the shore. The waves lap at my feet and there I see that the map is forever being redrawn, a line infinitely divisible. How can you contend with that, with such playful infinity? What is the point in trying to own such a thing? Who would dare? The Japanese farmer, Masanobu Fukuoka, describes this attitude to knowledge as discriminating. The arrogance of human being keeps breathing in itself, never exhaling, never dying. Presuming always that it knows better than...always indulging in its self-importance, its make-believe.

The sky above the land; the sea below the sky; always are things being described, related *too...*till death do we part, our art as a fart in the wind. I sink, therefore I am.

*Richard Kean is a Sydney-based artist (in such contexts)*



## **Conversation with Ron McBurnie**

### **By Jonathan McBurnie**

**Jonathan McBurnie:** In the last few years, you have been making en Plein-air drawings in many different places. What brought this on? Was this a conscious decision made in order to get away from the studio environment, or a way to make work while abroad?

**Ron McBurnie:** There were a couple of factors involved, the first related to the amount of time I was stuck in the studio working on the large landscape etchings. When I began the outdoor work I enjoyed getting outside as well as allowing myself the opportunity to complete a work in a couple of days rather than a month. I also enjoyed the company of others and being outdoors again after quite an absence from it. It became a very enjoyable thing to do. The last factor that led to my working outdoors was working with Euan Macleod, who had been working en Plein-air for some years before. It's something we did when he came up to Townsville or when I went down to visit in Sydney.

**JM:** Thinking of that afternoon I joined you and Robert Preston for some Plein-air drawing recently, and of you and Euan going out and finding places to draw, does company change the experience for you?

**RM:** In some ways the company has an effect on the way I work and the experience itself. Euan tends to work really quickly and there is an energy and immediacy in the way he works. He usually completes three to five works to my one so I always feel compelled to work faster in his company. Bob Preston and I work at a similar pace so there is no pressing rush to finish a work in one session. The last work we did in a raintree park in Townsville took us 8 different visits to complete.

**JM:** How have the drawings you made in the European countryside differed from the Australian drawings?

**RM:** The first of the recent major drawings I made in Europe were in 2009 while on a residency in Southern France. Before that time I was using a more painterly approach to en Plein-air, however as I was not able to carry too many materials, I brought

fountain pens and a little acrylic paint plus a box of watercolours (which I had not used for ages). These drawings were, for me, the beginning of a different approach to drawing, a little more like what I was doing in etching where the use of line is carried from the needle to the fountain pen in drawing. I also began to use sepia and dark brown inks to hopefully give the drawings a classical feel. Black seemed to be a little too harsh for the landscape I was working on in Alayrac.

I am not really sure if the drawings differ a lot from Europe to Australia. That's for others to decide. I usually just try to choose a subject or landscape that I can do something with and am able to enjoy looking at for a long time. I am always hoping that the landscape area I choose to work from will give up its secrets to me so that they will come through in the drawing. In the large *Oberon Tree*—a drawing made from a study of a tree in Oberon New South Wales—I was making a conscious reference to the prints of 17<sup>th</sup> Century Dutch and Flemish artists. I respond to work from certain periods in European art history. I feel part of it. I collect it. I feel quite comfortable making reference to it in my work.

**JM: Do you see your drawings as an extension of your landscape-oriented etchings, specifically the Romantic Series etchings?**

RM: I think the drawings are an extension of the landscape etchings but they are a little more related to the reality of what I am looking at. They are really studies of particular places and wouldn't exist without being in a place and responding to it. I have not as yet taken them to the next level as I do in the etchings which are often a distillation of several images and studies. The etchings usually pay specific homage to particular historical artists and their work in the imagery as well as through the specific mark making, whereas most of the drawings have a slightly more spontaneous approach.

**JM: In terms of the Australian landscape, and considering the notions of colonial and post-colonial Australian art, do you see yourself as a part of the landscapes you draw and etch, or as an outsider looking in?**

RM: I definitely see myself as part of the landscape rather than someone outside of it; but I also think that to draw landscape one needs to sit a little outside of it so that it can be abstracted enough to be transferred onto the paper. I definitely feel a sense of

place in some areas I go to and draw frequently. This feeling may not be the same as those described to me by my indigenous friends but I certainly have several important places in the landscape which I keep going back to visit or to draw.

Although I do feel very connected with the landscape I work in, I see my own work as well as my ancestry, as being firmly rooted in a European tradition, Scottish and English. I am proud of it. I am aware of the current interest in the Asia Pacific region but I keep being drawn back to a white European tradition which I continually draw my inspiration from. I know this is probably not a fashionable position but I am comfortable with this and over the years have learned a lot about it.

**JM:** That is interesting—I think of what first got me really thinking hard about landscape, which was a comment this guy made back in third year painting about how boring landscapes are, and I just thought ‘this guy must be crazy’, and it really made me want to make some really out there, ‘me’ landscapes. It took a while to get that going properly, but I really enjoy that feeling of contributing to a tradition that is particularly interesting here in Australia. People see it all as this uncool ‘colonial’ thing, but in a way it is bigger than that—yes, the colonials made landscapes, but the Aborigines have been making landscapes in many forms for eons. I think every culture has a relationship with the land they come from. For example, some of the colonials brought this very English, pastoral sensibility to the Australian landscape and it came out all weird and neither here-nor-there.

Are there any artists that didn’t quite get the whole landscape thing right that have had an influence on you? I always enjoyed the weird Bosch approach to landscape. Gary Panter’s *Dal Tokyo* comic strips and Russell Crotty spring to mind as well...

**RM:** I might have to think on this question for longer and pick a few of my favourites out. I agree with what you have said about the importance of landscape. If you lived in cities all your life I can see it would not be very important. There is definitely a strong landscape tradition in this country. It’s all around us if we just take time to look at it a little.

Apart from the Influence of Fred Williams and Lloyd Rees from Australia there are a number of artists for whom I have great admiration in regard to their landscapes. These are Samuel Palmer—mainly the early drawings and paintings as well as his etchings—Edward Calvert, the paintings of Adam Elsheimer, etchings of Hendrik Goudt and the engravings of Hendrik Goltzius, and Agedius Sadler. Presently I am looking at the watercolour landscapes of English artist Edward Burra. This guy was such a strange but interesting painter, as were others of the same period like Carel Weight whose landscapes were a little more urban and contained those almost falling figures. Edward Burra is someone I would like to learn more about. I like the paired down minimal quality of many of his pure landscape works.

**JM: What kind of spiritual connotations does the Australian landscape have for you personally, if any?**

RM: There are certain places I sometimes go to where I can say, “I am at peace in this place. I could die here.” Those places are very spiritual for me. I also think that the Australian landscape has a certain sense of loneliness, isolation and toughness because of its size. That sense of isolation and vastness is for me quite spiritual and exciting. Maybe these are more romantic notions in my mind.

**JM: One notion I have been interested in is the idea that through the process of colonisation, the vast unknown, *Terra Australis*, was reduced to a smaller Australia, no longer hypothetical but known. Through this process, the land was measured, surveyed, mapped, and quantified, and thus lost its mythical aspects to colonials, and this doesn't even cover the implications on Aboriginal culture, which is a whole other enquiry. For me, part of the appeal of making landscapes of Australia specifically, is the idea of re-mythologising the land. Does this idea appeal to you?**

RM: I don't so much see what I do as re-mythologising the land as re-mythologising the landscapes I make from the land. Blake did this by presenting his own mythology about England. I think the land is what it is. I think that as you say about *Terra Australis* [being] reduced to a smaller Australia on paper, in maps, in books; I am in agreement.

But when we are going out into the landscape and seeing it and drawing it and walking through some of its remote and vast parts, it is quite a different experience to breaking it up conceptually.

Those of us who live in the suburbs or in cities live in measured and mapped environments. I agree that we have transferred these elements of many parts of the landscape but I still believe that many parts are open, untamed, unmapped, wild. These aspects are what interest me about the landscape itself. When I am drawing it though, I am trying to understand it, make it mine, fit it into my own structures, my own ways, create myths from it, fit it into my tradition. But it doesn't need me, and exists of itself.

**JM: That's a really nice idea that appeals to me as well: that the land, the country, will still be here long after us, and will continue to grow and change. Who or what was it that got you first thinking about landscape in terms of artistic practice, if you can put your finger on it?**

RM: Landscape has always been in my work from the very beginning. My mum painted several landscapes of one of the farms we lived on. I lived on farms from the age of 5. I worked on the land making fences, feeding animals, milking cows, finding cattle and bringing them home so I saw a fair bit of the land. My Dad also sold school buses so we would travel to different parts of the country with these show buses to show them to prospective clients. I saw a lot of country that way and still travel by car quite a lot and really enjoy the places I drive through. I began to make drawings of old trees when I was at high school. In regard to landscape as part of my artistic practice, I think it's always been part of my work. Many of the first paintings I did at college were all about living and working on the farm. Landscape has always been there but often inhabited by figures.

Whether figures inhabit the spaces I draw or not doesn't alter the fact that I am conscious of the different types of landscape I am making or drawing ideas from. Even in the *Rakes Progress* or the early suburban etchings I am looking at my own environment or places I have visited. The en plein air works are just extensions of these early works, often devoid of figures because there are no people in the places we paint or draw.

JM: It is often remarked that the European landscape tradition is in trouble, an unfashionable reminder of Australia's colonial period. Is this simply a cultural cringe associated with self-imposed political correctness and willingness to avoid anything remotely colonial-sounding? Exhibitions like *Landscape Too* will hopefully enable a more robust examination of these ideas.

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*Jonathan McBurnie is a Sydney-based submerging artist and  
PhD candidate at Sydney College of the Arts.*

*Ron McBurnie is a North Queensland artist based in Townsville.*

## Make it real (one more time)

It mostly looked like things I had seen before an image of the dock. The water. The sky before a storm. Birds screeching louder and louder. *Everything begins and ends at exactly the right time and place here.* You know objects don't just fall from the sky. What is it called when you remember something, like a bolt of lightning right between the eyes? Must be something magnetic. We are magnets for mosquitos right now. The one on my neck keeps going back for more. Every second turns to minute to an hour. I can feel the wind picking up. My sleeve is moving. I think my hand is twitching, I am not even sure anymore. The camera doesn't blink. Behind me an umbrella flies off and hits the cameraman. He lets out a yelp. Go find the balance, steady, concentrate. Focus, Breathe in, Breathe out, Left right, Up, down. This is great, you've got real fish in there. Move back on your line. Send me a picture. Wide awake. Dead quiet. What day is this? Feels like Thursday. One of those days with an R in it. Life can hinge on the smallest thing. Do you read me? Look at the face from, like, behind. From the back see what's holding it up. The camera's rolling. Forget the vibe. Lose that. Drop the veil.

—  
*ek.i is Sydney-based collaborative duo Emma Hicks and Katie Louise Williams.*

# Landscape as Elsewhere

Kate Beckingham

## A conversation in two parts.

### Part one: Email

**Carla Liesch:** What is it you are responding to when you address landscape in your practice?

**Kate Beckingham:** I use the landscape in my practice as a starting point for manipulation. I see empty landscapes as a type of base camp—the hard work hasn't even begun yet. My time spent photographing or collecting within a landscape is a real, bodily experience that then leads, or maybe not, in to my core investigation: exploring the tensions that can exist between the real and unreal.

**CL:** You have alluded to me previously that you do not think about your work specifically in relation to landscape. Could you expand on that?

**KB:** Maybe I used to approach the landscape in my work more explicitly, but now I see it as more of a balance point as the spaces around my work shift between the real and unreal. That the work has its genesis in landscape is just one element in this ongoing shifting. The elements I draw from my initial time within natural landscapes are generally pretty distant from the realisation of the work. Usually it will be a thought I had while walking or something about the way a rock sits. There is never a direct line from what I see in my real time spent in the landscape and what then appears in the constructed space of the work.

**CL:** So is the site you use as a starting point the 'real' that you then project the 'unreal' into? How do you construct the unreal?

The time spent in landscape is another thing. Maybe more like a memory that then feeds the creation of both real and unreal elements in the final work.



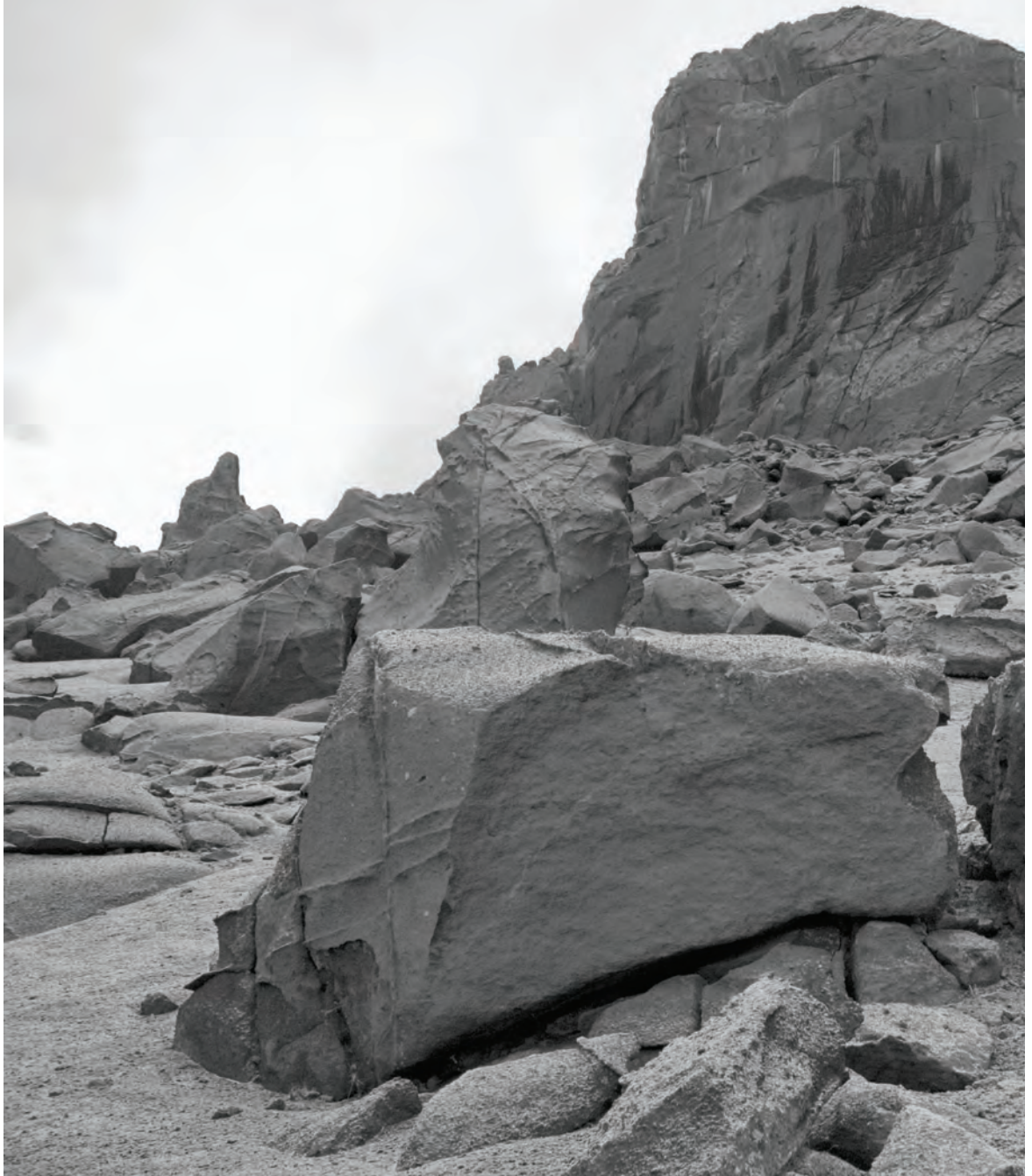
When I talk about the unreal I am talking directly to work that is created digitally using digital images or images taken from the Internet. They do not exist until I activate them through making the work.

**Hayley Megan French:** Thinking about the real and unreal, as artists working in Australia, is the landscape we inhabit physically the same as the landscape we inhabit imaginatively?

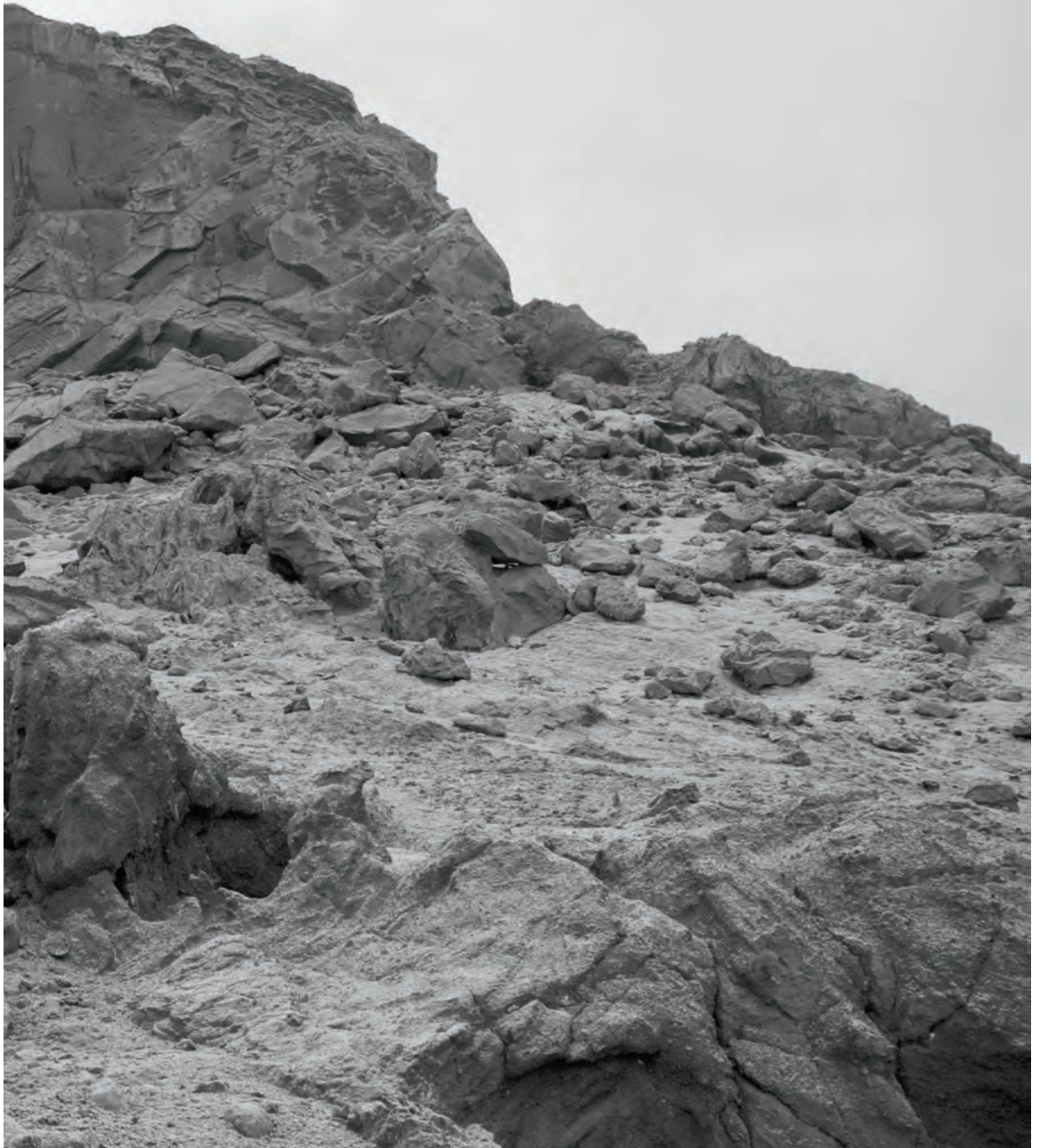
**KB:** I think I definitely inhabit landscape imaginatively because I'm always either thinking about leaving the city and entering the landscape or remembering past trips—either as a source for art-making or just general day-dreaming. The time that I am actually within landscape pales in comparison to time spent elsewhere. It's interesting though, how I don't consider the urban landscape that surrounds me on a daily basis in the same way I consider the natural landscape. The landscape, then, is something that exists 'elsewhere' or imaginatively.

**HMF:** Having recently completed a residency in Iceland, has the experience of being out of Australia affected the way you see or work with landscape in Australia?

**KB:** I think so, but not in really obvious ways. The Icelandic landscape is SO different from the Australian landscape that I paid close attention to everything while I was there: the smells, the sounds, the difference in light from the sun. And there was always this weird feeling of being simultaneously up high (like, literally on top of the world) and also being very low and being dwarfed by these epic rocks and mountains. Whereas before, when I would seek out landscapes in Australia, I would only really look at them in a visual way. That sounds weird but I would only consider them visually as something to be photographed and not really concentrate on background noise or scents or anything. I think this is now reflected in my work. Since I have been to Iceland, my practice is continuing to shift away from a purely photographic base and has started to become about creating an overall experience.



*An example of a place where the artist has experienced struggle (2013)*



## Part two: In conversation

**HMF:** Kate, you mentioned that you realised in the past that you have viewed Australian landscape quite photographically, as an image. Do you have any ideas as to what might have caused that separation, between you and the particular landscape you are working with?

**KB:** It's only because I used to work purely with photography. I would go on drives specifically to seek out landscapes to photograph.

**HMF:** So what changed in Iceland then?

**KB:** It was knowing that I was only there for a short amount of time. Realising that it was so different, I had to try to take it all in. So I started to pay more attention to the sound and the general feeling and experience rather than view the space around me as something to be photographed. But also when I was in Iceland, everything was so beautiful, and so big. Eventually after a couple of times going out specifically to work, I realised my usual method was not working and I would not be able to replicate the grandness and the sublime nature of Iceland. So I became much more focused on what I was doing, what I was hearing and seeing and looking at, but without any real intention of 'a work', or using the actual photograph. Bringing it back to Australia, it's different again because I take the Australian landscape for granted. I can always just get in the car and go. If I don't get what I am after I can always return. Whereas when I was in Iceland there was a sense of immediacy. I knew I was only there for a short amount of time and had travelled so far with a lot of anticipation. That is what shifted. And maybe I have brought that back now into my practice by moving even further away from the photographic.

**HMF:** Just into your practice or also into your experience of landscape in Australia?

**KB:** I wouldn't say I have been in the landscape in Australia since coming back. I don't count Sydney. Landscape is elsewhere in Australia, for me.

**HMF:** I really like that statement. Landscape is elsewhere.

**KB:** It's something you plan to go to. I am going to get some nature. I am going away. I'm going. It's not, I'm in it. I don't feel like I am in landscape in Sydney, in my daily life. So between getting back from Iceland and now, I wouldn't say I have interacted with the Australian landscape. Landscape is like this other place, for me, in Australia. It is definitely somewhere I go to work, not to experience.

**HMF:** And that for you is to do with nature, because you want to have some kind of experience or connection to nature?

**KB:** Yes, because even in previous work—and now shifting away from photo exclusively—the work is still about experience, it is still about trying to create a new experience for the viewer or trying to recreate an experience that I have had. Because of this elsewhere-ness of landscape, it is a nice starting point. I can find places with no people quite easily, so it is like a blank canvas I can project my intentions onto and get a bounce back for the work. So in the end it is either, this is what I did in a landscape and this is your experience in the gallery; or using the blankness of the natural landscape to create an experience in the here and now, in the gallery, for the viewer. So that's why I seek out landscape, because of the emptiness it allows.

**HMF:** I also wanted to mention that I like that connection you made between landscape and day-dreaming.

**KB:** Yeah again it's that whole 'elsewhere' feeling. It's something that I plan to go to, or remember going to. People speak of the urban landscape, but for me, it has already been projected onto, and filled. When you go into the natural landscape, it is fresh. Saying the natural landscape can be manipulated sounds potentially problematic, but I think for my work—which is also about perception and time, and being within space—to leave one place and go elsewhere, even in that action there is enough to work with, something has already happened.

**HMF:** But you often make the work in retrospect.

**KB:** Yes definitely.

**HMF:** So there's also the movement back.

**KB:** Yes, in taking what has happened in my act of going out to make work and then coming back to make the work, there is a difference there.

**CL:** At the end of your Masters of Fine Art you were working with constructing imagined spaces. Has your work then developed to include more real spaces in the final product, rather than concentrating on the imagined space?

**KB:** Yes, I'm more interested in exploring the space between the unreal and imagined, and the real. I think it is a more interesting space for me now, to try and place the viewer within a site where things aren't easily defined, or there is a sort of element of delayed understanding. It allows the audience to shift their bodies as well, they move around the work, not immediately understanding what parts are 'real' and what parts I have constructed (or imagined). But, what really interests me is that, while the audience is moving between states, they are doing so in the space of the gallery, in real time. What the work is about is no longer as important to me as what happens around it. Thinking of the work I made for Alaska Projects, what was most important was the time spent between the two images.

**CL:** Could you explain that work?

**KB:** The Alaska work was called *An infinite number of paths between two points*. The work showed two photographs mounted behind a thick acrylic, placed on shelves. The works were facing away from each other so that while you could see elements of both, you could not see both images simultaneously. One work showed a digitally created mass, and the other image showed a sculptural form that was replicating that virtual mass. So the idea was that the viewer would have this moment of consideration: which one is real, which one is not real? They recognise that the works are a pair, they are definitely aesthetically similar but there are elements of the real and unreal in both. Ultimately then, the work happened as the viewer shifted between the two.

During my masters, I was much more concerned with what was happening within an image-space, within the constructed frame. Now I'm more interested in what happens around the work, when you are viewing it.

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*Kate Beckingham completed her Masters of Fine Arts at Sydney College of the Arts in 2012 and recently undertook a residency in Iceland.*

## **‘Continuum of landscapes’**

**Extract from Saskia Beudel, *A Country in Mind: Memoir with Landscape*, UWA Publishing, Crawley, 2013, pp. 307–310.**

In Walungurru a couple of mornings later the new slab at the base of the fuel pump was dense with graffiti that had been etched into concrete when it was still wet. As the storekeeper filled our tank, Alan commented on how rapidly the graffiti had appeared. ‘The little bastards, they can’t leave anything alone’, the storekeeper replied, refastening the padlock on the metal cage enclosing the pump. In the background an old woman crossed a bare piece of ground between the store and a row of houses, trailed by numerous dogs. The dogs erupted into a snarl of fighting and high-pitched yelps. The man went across with a tired unhurried gait, thin and hunched bonily at the shoulders, throwing stones to break up the dogs. ‘Okay’, he said, leading us into the store in the same tired way.

Then we set off for the second time. Not far out of Walungurru lay a rusted wheelless vehicle by the side of the road, its tailgate angled partially onto the road, which the track had grown around in a curved deviation. I asked Alan to pull over so I could take a photo of the abandoned car. There was something about it that appealed to me, I’d been noticing it as we passed to and fro. It was a Toyota troopy with a buckled roof, rusted into camouflage patterns of oxides, pale blues and greens, no windows, one door twisted off, and upholstery stripped back to metal frameworks. I was reminded of a piece of video art I’d seen at Documenta in Kassel, Germany, in the early nineties. Made by a German artist whose name I can’t recall, it used set destination points as a way to record a particular location. From inside a car, the camera was pointed up a suburban street, presumably by the artist, to settle on the farthest point in the distance that it was possible to reach by road. The journey to this point was recorded from inside the car as it travelled. Once the end of the street was reached, a new vista was selected, which the car then journeyed toward, and so on. Any material recorded was thus, to some extent at least, predetermined. As I watched, the banal views of urban and suburban streets with their parked cars, driveways, rooftops and treetops, slowly began to take on intrigue and resonance. Glimpses were afforded, in passing, of almost motionless streetscapes, devoid of people, that all seemed permeated by German wintry



greys and solid-brick browns. The whole thing began accumulating a sombre and elegiac air. The car was cruising the streets, so the views were translated at cruising pace, and lopped by the frame of the car door window, or the point where this window joins the front windscreen. The views were thus doubly or triply framed, by the camera, and by the viewing apertures of the car. It was the year that Jeff Koons's *Puppy* was displayed outside the main exhibition building, and other exhibits included a number of industrial-scale installations. But these unobtrusive streetscapes, made slightly tremulous because shot through a layer of glass, lingered unexpectedly with me over the years.

Much of my experience of the Sandy Blight Junction Road was similarly at cruising speed dictated by the state of the track – how eroded, how difficult to detect, how deep the sand, how rocky or steep, how close shrub thickets pressed against the car's sides. Here at the northernmost reach of the Sandy Blight Junction Road, next to the derelict Toyota, I decided to photograph every abandoned vehicle we passed along the way. The vehicles would become reference points to trigger the taking of an image. This was partly a response to how difficult desert landscapes are to photograph. Neither the scale nor the wealth of geological, topographical, or ecological detail readily lends itself to the picture frames provided by the camera. Author Jonathan Raban refers to an American landscape that similarly evades the camera – the prairies of eastern Montana. His camera is inept in the wide-open spaces that lack conventional framing devices, and he complains of the 'congenital tunnel vision' of the camera lens, quipping that his photos always end up looking like 'a hundred perfectly exposed snapshots of a badly maintained golf course'.<sup>1</sup> The country we were travelling had plenty of potential framing devices. Instead, it was the very heterogeneous character of the place that meant my photos never seemed to do justice to their complexity. Just as I began to get a sense of one swathe of landscape, it would abruptly alter – its soil, form, and vegetation. ...

When we think deserts, we readily bring to mind open stretches of almost undifferentiated space. But it is a desert of complexity that I mostly think back on – a desert of micro-topographies and entanglements of detail. At first I thought it was my own lack of familiarity with this landscape that made it difficult to grasp. But when I began to read arid zone ecology I realised I was grappling with what arid zone ecologists recognise as some of the defining characteristics of the uniqueness of Australian deserts, as compared to other well-studied deserts of the world – their very unpredictability, both spatially and temporally.

## Endnotes

1 Jonathan Raban, *Badland: an American Romance*, Picador, London, 1996, pp. 60–62.

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Saskia Beudel is a novelist, essayist, and non-fiction writer who first trained as a visual artist. Saskia is currently a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the University of Sydney, based at Sydney College of the Arts.

sun beating  
chasing shade  
rocks underfoot  
scrape and squeak

-  
*Alice Buscombe*

## V

Everything is bigger and deeper than you know and realise.

Everything is okay.

I can feel you deeply and I think that you can feel me too.

I feel a great and devastating sense of loss when I look at you. Somewhere between my collarbone and the centre of my chest I feel something alive and warm, swelling. It feels as though it is trying to climb up through my throat and out of my mouth. In these few unconscious moments my mind asks how and why, then, as I become aware of my body's reaction I blame my eyes for overwhelming me. Ever since I was young this nervously warm feeling has overtaken my body whenever I stare at certain things. I wonder if this psychological turned physical feeling made its way into the world would it cascade out in clear language or would it stumble through a series of grunts?

I have been watching you for so long, attempting to remember and make sense of every movement, trying to piece together those that are missing in between. It's likely that you have no idea that I have been here for so long. I look at you, I put myself around you; you change me, the way I relate to people and myself, but you remain the same, largely unmoved by my presence. I like to think that we are together but I have come to realise that you don't need me like I need you.

I am not the only one, the only one trying to connect with you, the only one trying to feel you.

You keep putting up walls – keeping us at a distance. The walls you erect change daily. Sometimes they are silent and calm; other times they are violent and cause bodies to relocate. I can feel your power. Your unpredictable nature excites me as much as it scares me.

Messih, *The distance between us*, 2013

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*Gemma Messih is an emerging artist based in Sydney. Messih holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree (First Class Honours) from The College of Fine Arts, UNSW (2013).*

## Analogue Landscapes and Digital Ecologies

Landscape is a paradox for me. The word 'landscape' always betrays more than it defines. I don't think we consider, and therefore do not talk of something as 'landscape' until it has already become more than just landscape. It is not, until it is more than it is. The act of naming becomes part of an act of exaltation. Landscape, is landscape already once transformed; transformed by human imaginative interrogation, or emotional investment, and so any discussion is at once a discussion of the thing before the word, (the physical?) and everything which makes the word inadequate (the metaphysical?).

This means that every landscape is both imaginative and physical, not one or the other, or one without the other. We cannot speak of 'loci' without the 'genius loci,' because to speak of Place is to bring life to the Spirit of Place. Any self-abnegating approach to the contemplation of landscape must partially destroy that which it attempts to discover. There is, literally and metaphorically, no landscape in which 'we' are not indelibly present.

And so we are forced from a perspective on landscape to a broader idea of an 'ecological perspective.' Ecology can acknowledge that the viewed is incomplete without the viewer for it concerns itself with organisms in relation to their environment(s), taking seriously the contribution of both. Rather than the possible 'distancing effect' of landscape, we could speak of the 'inhabiting effect' of ecology. It puts landscape into a helpful framework for discussing our meaningful participation 'in landscape.'

I have recently had two powerful, if different, experiences which I understand 'ecologically.' I have returned to Australia after a long period away and moved - near beach and bushland - to the central coast. I am also learning to program sound, creating work within the max/msp/jitter environment. In both cases I have been confronted with new landscapes: physical and metaphysical.

Musically, there are two powerful discoveries I have come to in exploring programming. The first is it allows me to be both bound to and unbounded by the theory of sound; to refigure my sonic thinking from first principles in a very practical way. In some senses programming can be quite abstract for me, though ironically it makes the properties of sound far less abstract. Further, while the principles of sound ground the programming,

the realities of sound as we know and can experience it in the analogue world are removed. If you can imagine a sonic behaviour you can turn it in to a real sound, even if it doesn't - shouldn't - exist in the 'real world.' More tantalising still, it doesn't even need to be a sonic behaviour. In the digital world we play directly with is and os, like atoms, and the components of a program have infinite possibilities for appropriation and re-appropriation. There is something almost evolutionary in the way that the parts of programs may move from one program to another across disciplines. New species emerge in different environments, bound by their phylogeny, but distinguished by their form and function.

In this environment imagination literally builds physical entities from scratch, and out of, as good as nothing. My trepidation about the inadequacy of the word landscape has no traction here. The blur between what is real and what is not dissolves, or becomes an arbitrary and uncomfortable imposition. The separation of physical and metaphysical is so close that it becomes negligible as the two intermingle.

Once you have built something which is not 'real', it is returned to the 'real world.' In the case of working to image, deciding what an image might 'mean' in sound is an exciting task, particularly because the sound comes to 'mean,' in image too. While the sound might be conceived separately, and may be controlled or restricted by different aspects of the image, they both make and unmake one another in the moment of performance, with no hint of this separation and hierarchy.

The other discovery has been the power of understanding sound and music as 'behaviours' rather than fixed sonic events. In composing with pen and paper (the 'analogue' way), I am, ideally, attempting to create definite and immutable sounds whose form can be reproduced within a tolerable range of variation from performance to performance. 'Form' is a classical compositional principle. Implicit in this classical idea, however, is fixed form, and while there are ways to avoid this, it is a strong paradigm, which has less practical necessity and historic imperative in a digital ecology. Form can be considered something much deeper, more structural, and need not be a superficial identifier as it has often been.

In writing a program for sound, I develop some sort of algorithmic idea, then I 'watch, with my ears' how it behaves when I leave it alone. I refine the behaviour of the algorithm according to what I hear, and what I don't. In one sense I have complete control, but in a much more satisfying way I am also at the mercy of this imaginary landscape of my own invention. I imagine standing in a small secluded part of a beach to the south of where I live. The headlands create a very particular acoustic there, which deliberately or not is exploited by different choruses of cicadas, sounding in waves - how apt - in the summer months. Slightly moving your head will reconfigure the performance, and focusing your attention on different parts of this ecstatic cacophony will change the song being sung. There are also two songs. The first is the song itself, and the other is the image of that song, distorted and enhanced by the space it inhabits.

I have long felt that listening can meaningfully be a much broader and deeper activity than seems intuitive, and as a musician it certainly is for me. While it might seem obvious that first and foremost we are seeing a landscape, I am invariably more interested in listening to it. I don't mean this exactly as I do in the previous example, where the cicada song is literally the environmental sound, but rather in how the qualities of a given landscape, physical and metaphysical, might be heard. I have also already suggested that we don't really ever know landscape in the uncomplicated way implied by just seeing or just listening. We are more deeply invested in it than any approach which limits itself to sensory perception, or constrains sensory perception to the purely real and physical.

The question 'how might a landscape sound' might not seem very odd, but 'what music does the movement of the planets make' begins to seem more esoteric so some, and yet different discussions of 'The Harmony of the Spheres' have recurred since Ancient Greece, through Medieval Europe and Sufic Mysticism to name but two traditions. Of course scientific rationalism has changed the purpose of the question, but also offered new ways of answering it.



The Harmony of the Spheres is a cosmological approach to listening, and while this might seem a difficult stance to propose in the here and now, if the earth has a song, our landscapes must have songs too and there is now, more than ever, an environmental imperative to consider how we might, or if we choose to listen, transcribe and invent them. If landscape attempts impossibly to remove us from what it presents, then an ecology, even a digital ecology, might be a new way of re-inventing our analogue landscapes.

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*Chris Williams is a composer from Australia who recently completed a Master's of Music at the University of Oxford. He is currently working both in the UK and Australia, though he finds the light and sound more exciting in Australia (not to mention the mangoes).*

## Act one: Conversation with a blind man.

1. Tell me about the light.

2. What light?

I mean, what type of light? There are many.

Pause

Shall I tell you about the light on a surface, for instance?

Well, *that* light says more to me about the object it is reflecting than the nature of the light itself.

Pause

1. But, the object has its own nature, regardless of the presence or absence of light.

2. Well, in this case, the light defines this object.

1. Yes, but only to those who can see.

Pause

1. Tell me about the other light.

The one I can feel.

2. Ah.

That light is the Sun.

## Act Two: Conversation with a scientist.

1. Is the sun truly a circle?

Pause

2. A circle, did you say?

1. Yes. Or is it just my vision that is circular?

Pause

2. But a circle, as defined, only exists on one plane.

A circle is singular, flattened.

The sun is not flat.

Are you asking whether or not it is a true sphere?

1. No, I'm asking whether the sun is truly a circle.

I can't see it as a sphere. I can't look at it long enough to notice any depth shadows.

Pause

2. No, it's not a circle.

Pause

1. Is it a sphere, then?

2. No, it's a Yellow Dwarf.

## Act Three: Conversation with a lepidopterist.

1. Hello.

2. Hello.

1. The Golden Sun Moth is a medium-sized, day-flying moth.

Pause

I have one in this specimen jar.

Examines jar

2. Day-flying?

You mean diurnal, of course.

1. Oh. Are you a scientist as well?

2. Yes, didn't you read the last Act?

Pause

1. Well, chronotypes, circadian rhythms, they're all quite interesting, really.  
Shows how we are all slave to the sun, in the end.

Pause

2. Can I have another look at your moth?

## Act Four (Final): Conversation with a stranger.

1. Excuse me, please.  
You're standing in my sun.

2. Your sun?  
Ha! The sun belongs to us all.

1. The sun belongs to nobody.  
We belong to it.

Pause

I'd still like it if you moved out of the way.

2. Moves

Is that better?

1. Not really.  
Now you're standing on my shadow.

2. Oh, now you're just being difficult.  
Besides, you could have more than one shadow.

1. Well, that all depends on the time of day, and the angle of light.  
Right now, I have one.

Pause

And you're still standing on it.

—  
*Ally Bisshop is an artist and researcher who splits her time between Berlin and Sydney, and is currently completing a PhD through the College of Fine Arts, Sydney.*

## Welcome to Australia, now in HD

Australia - we have a continent all to ourselves, an incredibly rare attribute to any nation state. It can be a strange and alien place to visitors but for its twenty four million or so many inhabitants, we still call Australia home. Ironically and perhaps very “Unaustralian” - a term typical of the jingoistic nature of political discourse here - the current government that is so very *Australian* would allow the very airline that affects such warmth and nationalism, to falter and sink. We are a country that is increasingly Corporational and cut-throat whilst still singing the positives of mateship and egalitarianism. We also travel far more overseas than travel in “our own backyard”. This perhaps has more to do with the fact that I spoke of initially, not only is the whole continent the same country but it feels as though we are very very far from the rest of the world. So when it comes to viewing our own country - a unique and almost impossibly beautiful place - like sport, we do it most often from the safety and security of our own lounge rooms.

The Western European tradition of categorisation, order, reason and progress can easily be categorised by that most pernicious yet ubiquitous vehicle for viewing the Australian landscape, The Television Screen. We know Australia is a land of sweeping plains, a place where brumbies roam the mountains and camels swelter in the deserts, but how many of us have actually been to the Kimberley, or Alice Springs or Kakadu? We love our country and its stories and myths, but sadly more often than not, they are just that, myths. *The Man from Snowy River*, *Mad Max*, and Baz Luhrmann’s ridiculously extravagant exercise *Australia* continue to reinforce the romantic idea we have about ourselves through the language of landscape, via the screen whether it’s the TV screen or at the cinema. Shaun Gladwell of course, as well as Ben Quilty and others continue to perpetuate the classic Australian rebel male archetype such as Mad Max, in Shaun’s case by film, and in Quilty’s case most recently via “The most honourable Anzac”, even though it is an increasingly outdated, unrealistic and simply romanticised version of ourselves. Perhaps that’s why it is so powerful. Every culture has a Warrior Myth.

Landscape has several meanings of course, in the Fine Arts context, of which most of us are well versed, when you hear the term “landscape” one immediately thinks of a rectangular frame, often golden, holding within it an expansive, sublime image of nature, in all its wondrous tranquility or magnificent truculence. But the term landscape can also be used to describe “landscaping”, or to “landscape” ones backyard with trees and shrubs and making a once unruly piece of nature into a nicely maintained and *ordered* expanse. This is the landscape most Australians (especially it seems Sydneysiders) really think about when they hear the word landscape, an idea that has gained even more traction with shows such as *The Block* and so on.

Perhaps then the finest exemplars of the Australian landscape are our cinematographers - who can forget the surreal and sublime *Picnic at Hanging Rock* seducing the viewer with the vastness and dreamy nature of the Australian bush or conversely the exceeding normality of the Australian landscape in darker tropes such as *Snowtown* and *The Boys*, that show the suburban, coastal and semi rural landscape that most of us actually experience day to day. Last but not least, the final scenes of *Romper Stomper*, an arresting end to a chilling film, but one of Australia’s best – It shows the dark and torn sand cliffs of Point Addis, Victoria in all their malevolent beauty, and the choppy and stormy sea that almost any Australian would have experienced. Even at opposite ends of the continent we can still experience the very same landscape.

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*Luke Strevens is a Sydney-based artist who recently completed his Master of Fine Arts at Sydney College of the Arts.*

hot rock ledge  
an edge against  
the sky

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*Alice Buscombe is a visual artist from Melbourne and has been living and working in the Northern Territory for the past four years.*





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