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Introduction

This article presents the trans-disciplinary encounters with and perspectives on embodiment of three creative-arts practitioners within the Deakin University research project Flows & Catchments. The project explores how creative arts participate in community and the possibility of well-being. We discuss our preparations for creative work exhibited at the 2012 Lake Bolac Eel Festival in regional Western Victoria, Australia. This festival provided a fertile time-place-space context through which to meet with one regional community and engage with scales of geological and historical time (volcanoes, water flows, first contact), human and animal roots and routes (settlement, eel migrations, hunting and gathering), and cultural heritage (the eel stone traps used by indigenous people, settler stonewalling, indigenous language recovery). It also allowed us to learn from how a festival brings to the surface these scales of time, place and space.

All these scales also require an embodied response—a physical relation to the land and to the people of a community—which involves how specific interests and ways of engaging coordinate experience and accentuate particular connections of material to cultural patterns of activity. The focus of our interest in “embody” and embodiment relates to the way in which the term constantly slides from metaphor (figural connection) to description (literal process). Our research question, therefore, addresses the specific interaction of these two tendencies. Rather than eliminate one in preference to the other, it is the interaction and movement from one to the other that an approach through creative-arts practices makes visible. The visibility of these tendencies and the mechanisms to which they are linked (media, organising principle or relational aesthetic) are highlighted by the particular time-place-space modalities that each of the creative arts deploys. When looking across different creative practices, the attachments and elisions become more fine-grained and clearer. A key aim of practice-led research is to observe, study and learn, but also to transform the production of meaning and its relationship to the community of users (Barrett and Bolt).

The opportunity to work collaboratively with a community like the one at Lake Bolac provided an occasion to gauge our discerning and initiating skills within creative-arts research and to test the argument that the combination of our different approaches adds to community and individual well-being. Our approach is informed by Gilles Deleuze’s ethical proposition that the health of a community is directly influenced by the richness of the composition of its parts. With this in mind, each creative-arts practitioner will emphasize their encounter with an element of community.

Zones of Practice–Drawing Together (Jondi Keane)

Galleries are strange in-between places, both destinations and non-sites momentarily outside of history and place. The Lake Bolac Memorial Hall, however, retains its character of place, participating in the history of memorial halls through events such as the Eel Festival.
The drawing project “Stone Soup” emphasizes the idea of encounter (O'Sullivan), particularly the interactions of sensibilities shaped by a land, a history and an orientation that comprise an affective field. The artist’s brief in this situation—the encounter as the rupture of habitual modes of being (O'Sullivan 1)—provides a platform of relations to be filled with embodied experience that connects the interests, actions and observations produced outside the gallery to the amplified and dilated experience presented within the gallery. My work suggests that person-to-person in-situ encounters intensify the movement across embodied ways of knowing.

"Stone Soup". Photograph by Daniel Armstrong.

Arts practice and practice-led research makes available the spectrum of embodied engagements that are mixed to varying degrees with the conceptual positioning of material, both social and cultural. The exhibition and workshop I engaged with at the Eel Festival focused on three level of attention: memory (highly personal), affection (intra-personal) and exchange (communal, non-individual). Attention, the cognitive activity of directing and guiding perception, observation and interpretation, is the thread that binds body to environment, body to history, and body to the constructs of person, family and community. Jean-Jacques Lecercle observes that, for Deleuze, “not only is the philosopher in possession of a specific techne, essential to the well-being of the community, a techne the practice of which demands the use of specialized tools, but he makes his own tools: a system of concepts is a box of tools” (Lecercle 100). This notion is further enhanced when informed by enactive theories of cognition in which, “bodily practices including gesture are part of the activity in which concepts are formed” (Hutchins 429) Creative practices highlight the role of the body in the delicate
interaction between a conceptually shaped gallery "space" and the communally constructed meeting "place."

My part of the exhibition consisted of a series of drawings/diagrams characterized under the umbrella of "making stone soup." The notion of making stone soup is taken from folk tales about travelers in search of food who invent the idea of a magical stone soup to induce cooperation by asking local residents to garnish the "magical" stone soup with local produce. Other forms of the folk tale from around the world include nail soup, button soup and axe soup.

Participants were able to choose from three different types of soup (communal drawing) that they would like to help produce. When a drawing was completed another one could be started. The mix of ideas and images constituted the soup. Three types of soup were on offer and required assistance to make:

1. Stone soup—communal drawing of what people like to eat, particularly earth-grown produce; what they would bring to a community event and how they associate these foods with the local identity.
2. Axe soup—communal drawing of places and spaces important to the participants because of connection to the land, to events and/or people. These might include floor plans, scenes of rooms or views, or memories of places that mix with the felt importance of spaces.
3. Heirloom soup—communal drawing of important objects associated with particular persons.

The drawings were given to the festival organizer to exhibit at the following year's festival.
"Story Telling”. Photograph by Daniel Armstrong.

**Drawing in:** Like taking a breath, the act of drawing and putting one’s thought and affections into words or pictures is focused through the sensation of the drawing materials, the size of the paper, and the way one orients oneself to the paper and the activity. These pre-drawing dispositions set up the way a conversation might occur and what the tenor of that exchange may bring. By asking participants to focus on three types of attachments or attentions and contributing to a collective drawing, the onus on art skills or poignancy is diminished, and the feeling of turning inward to access feeling and memory turns outward towards inscription and cooperation.

**Drawing out:** Like exhaling around vowels and consonants, the movement of the hand with brush and ink or pen and ink across a piece of paper follows our patterns of engagement, the embodied experience consistent with all our other daily activities. We each have a way of orchestrating the sequence of movements that constitute an image-story. The maker of stone soup must provide a new encounter, a platform for cooperation. I found that drawing alongside the participants, talking to them, inscribing and witnessing their stories in this way, heightened the collective activity and produced a new affective field of common experience. In this instance the stone soup became the medium for an emergent composition of relations.
Zones of Practice–Embodying Photographic Space
(Rozalind Drummond)

Photography inevitably entails a certain characterization of reality. From being “out there” the world comes to be “inside” photographs—a visual sliver, a grab, and an upload, a perpetual tumble cycle of extruded images existing everywhere yet nowhere. While the outside, the “out there” is brought within the frame of the photograph, I am interested rather in looking, through the viewfinder, to spaces that work the other way, which suggest the potential to locate a “non-space”—where the inside suggests an outside or empty space. Thus, the photograph becomes disembodied to reveal space. I consider embodiment as the trace of other embodiments that frame the subject. Mark Auge’s conception of “non-places” seems apt here. He writes about non-places as those that are lived or passed through on the way to some place else, an accumulation of spaces that can be understood and named (94). These are spaces that can be defined in everyday terms as places with which we are familiar, places in which the real erupts: a borderline separating the outside from the inside, temporary spaces that can exist for the camera.

The viewer may well peer in and look for everything that appears to have been left out. Thus, the photograph becomes a recollection of what Roland Barthes calls “a disruption in the topography”—we imagine a “beyond” that evokes a sense of melancholy or of irrevocably sliding toward it (238).

How then could the individual embody such a space? The groups of photographs of Lake Bolac are spread out on a table. I play some music awhile, Glenn Gould, whose performing embodies what, to me, represents such humanity. Hear him breathing? It is Prelude and Fugue No. 16 in G Minor by Bach, on vinyl; music becomes a tangible and physical presence. When we close our eyes, our ears determine a sound’s location in a room; we map out a space, by listening, and can create a measurable dimension to sound. Walking about the territory of a living room, in suburban Melbourne, I consider too a small but vital clue: that while scrutinizing these details of a photographic image on paper, simultaneously I am returning to a small town in the Western District of Victoria. In the fluid act of looking at images in a house in Melbourne, I am now also walking down a road to Lake Bolac and can hear the incidental sounds of the environment—birdcalls and human voices—elements that inhabit and embody space: a borderline, alongside the photographs. What is imprinted in actual time, what is fundamental, is that the space of a photograph is actually devoid of sound and that I am still standing in a living room in Melbourne. In Against Architecture, Denis Hollier states of Bataille, “he wrote of the psychological power of space as a fluid, boundary effacing, always displaced and displacing medium. The non-spaces of cities and towns are locations where it is possible to be lost in a collective space, a progression of thoroughfares that are transitional, delivering the individual from one point and place to another—stairwells, laneways and roadsides—a constellation of streets....” (Hollier 79). Though photographs are sound-less, sound gives access to the outside of the image.
Is there an outline of an image here? The enlargement of a snapshot of a photograph does not simply render what in any case was visible, though unclear. What is the viewer to look for in this photograph? Upon closer inspection a young woman stands to the right within the frame—she wears a school uniform; the pattern of the garment can be seen and read distinctly. In the detail it is finely striped, with a dark hue of blue, on a paler background, and the wearer’s body is imprinted upon the clothing, which receives the body’s details and impressions. The dress has a fold or pleat at the back; the distinct lines and patterns are reminiscent of a map, or an incidental grid. Here, the leitmotif of worn clothing is a poetic one. The young woman wears her hair piled, vertiginous, in a loosely constructed yet considered fashion; she stands assured, looking away and looking forward, within the compositional frame.

The camera offers a momentary pause. This is our view. Our eye is directed to look further away past the figure, and the map of her clothing, to a long hallway in the
school, before drifting to the left and right of the frame, where the outside world of
Lake Bolac is clear and visible through the interior space of the hallway—the natural
environment of daylight, luminescent and vivid. The time frame is late summer, the
light reflecting and reverberating through glass doors, and gleaming painted surfaces,
in a continuous rectangular pattern of grid lines. In the near distance, the viewer can
see an open door, a pictorial breathing space, beyond the spatial line and coolness of
the photograph, beyond the frame of the photograph and our knowing. The
photograph becomes a signpost. What is outside, beyond the school corridors, recalled
through the medium of photography, are other scenes, yet to be constructed from the
spaces, streets and roads of Lake Bolac.

**Zones of Practice–Time as the “Skin” of Writing, Embodiment and Place (Patrick West)**

There is no writing without a body to write. Yet sometimes it feels that my creative
writing, resisting its necessary embodiment, has by some trick of metaphor retreated
into what Jondi Keane refers to as a purely conceptual mode of thought. This slippage
between figural connection and literal process alerted me, in the process of my
attempt to foster place-based well-being at Lake Bolac, to the importance of time to
writerly embodiment.

My contribution to the Lake Bolac Eel Festival art exhibition was a written text, “Stay
with me here”, conceived as my response to the themes of Rozalind Drummond’s
photographs. To prepare this joint production, we mixed with staff and students at the
Lake Bolac Secondary College. But this mode of embodiment made me feel curiously
dis-embodied as a place-based writer. My embodiment was apparently superficial, only
skin deep.

Still this experience started me thinking about how the skin is actually thickly
embodied as both body and where the body encounters, not only other bodies, but
place itself—conceivably across many times. Skin is also the embodiment of writing to
the degree that writing suggests an uncertain and queered form of embodiment. Skin,
where the body reaches its limit, expires, touches other bodies or not, is inevitably
implicated with writing as a fragile and always provisional, indexical embodiment.
Nothing can be more easily either here or somewhere else than writing. Writing is an
exhibition or gallery of anywhere, like skin in that both are un-placed in place.

The one-pager “Stay with me here” explores how the instantaneous time and present-
ness of Drummond’s photographs relate to the profusion of times and relations to
other places immanent in Lake Bolac’s landscape and community (as evidenced, for
example, in the image of a prep student yawning at the end of a long day in the midst
of an ancient volcanic landscape, dreaming, perhaps, of somewhere else). To get to
such issues of time and relationality of place, however, involves detouring via the
notion of skin as suggested to me by my initial sense of dis-embodiment in Lake Bolac.

“Stay with me here” works with an idea of skin as answer to the implied question,
Where is here? It creates the (symbolic) embodiment of place precisely as a matter of
skin, making skin-like writing an issue of transitory topography. The only permanent
“here” is the skin. Emphasizing something valid for all writing, “here” (grammatically a
context-dependent deictic) is the skin, where embodiment is defined by the constant
possibility of re-embodiment, somewhere else, some time else. Reminding us that it is
eminently possible to be elsewhere (from this place, from here), skin also suggests
that you cannot be in two places at the one time (at least, not with the same
embodiment).
My skin is a sign that, because my embodiment in any particular place (any "here") is only ever temporary, it is time that necessarily sustains my embodiment in any place whatsoever into the future. According to Henri Bergson, time must be creative, as the future hasn’t happened yet! “Time is invention or it is nothing at all” (341).

The future of place, as much as of writing and of embodiment itself, is thus creatively sheathed in time as if within a skin. On Bergson’s view, time might be said to be least and greatest embodiment, for it is (dis-embodied) time that enables all future and currently un-created modes of embodiment. All of these time-inspired modes will involve a relationship to place (time can only “happen” in some version of place). And all of them will involve writing too, because time is the ultimate (dis-)embodiment of writing. As writing is like a skin, a minimal embodiment shared actually or potentially with more than one body, so time is the very possibility of writing (embodiment) into the future.

"Stay with me here” explores how place is always already embodied in a relationship to other places, through the skin, and to the future of (a) place through the creativity of time as the skin of embodiment.

By enriching descriptive and metaphoric practices of time, instability of place and awarenesses of the (dis-)embodied nature of writing—as a practice of skin—my text is useful to well-being as an analogue to the lived experience, in time and place, of the people of Lake Bolac. Theoretically, it weaves Bergson’s philosophy of time (time richly composed) into the fabric of Deleuze’s proposition that the health of a community is linked to the richness of the composition of its parts. Creatively, it celebrates the identity that the notion of “here” might enable, especially when read alongside and in dialogue with Drummond’s photographs in exhibition. Here is an abridged text of “Stay with me here:”

“Stay with me here”

There is salt in these lakes, anciently—rectilinear lakes never to be without ripple or stir. Pooling waters the islands of otherwise oceans, which people make out from hereabouts, make for, dream of. Stay with me here.

Trusting to lessons delivered at the shore of a lake moves one closer to a depthness of instruction, where the water also learns. From our not being where we are, there.

Stay with me here. What is perfection to water if not water? A time when photographs were born out of its swill and slosh. The image swimming knowingly to the surface—its first breaths of the perceiving air, its glimpsing itself once. The portraits of ourselves we do not dare. Such magical chemical reactions, as in, I react badly to you. Such salts!

Stay with me here, elsewhere. As if one had simply washed up by chance, onto this desert island or any other place of sand and water trickling. Daring to imagine we’ll be there together. This is what I mean by... stay with me here.

Notice these things—how music sounds different as one walks away; the emotional gymnastics with which you plan to impress; the skin of the eye that watches over you.
Stay with me here—in your spectacular, careless brilliance.
The edge of whatever it is one wants to say.
The moment never to be photographed.

**Conclusion**

It is not for the artists to presume that they can empower a community. As Tasmin Lorraine notes, community is not a single person’s empowerment but “the empowerment of many assemblages of which one is part” (128). All communities, regional communities on the scale of Lake Bolac or communities of interest, are held in place by enthusiasm and common histories. We have focused on the embodiment of these common histories, which vary in an infinite number of degrees from the most literal to the most figurative, pulling from the filigree of experiences a web of interpersonal connections. Oscillating between metaphor and description, embodiment as variously presented in this article helps promote community and, by extension, individual well-being. The drawing out of sensations into forms that produce new experiences—like the drawing of breath, the drawing of a hot bath, or the drawing out of a story—enhances the permeability of boundaries opened to what touches upon them. It is not just that we can embody our values, but that we are able to craft, manifest, enact, sense and evoke the connections that take shape as our richly composed world, in which, as Deleuze notes, “it is no longer a matter of utilizations or captures, but of sociabilities and communities” (126).

**References**


