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Plotting the field: Art as Problem-solving

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In/Stead, Issue IV looks at works in process by poets, playwrights, philosophers, animators, installation – artist, and literary critics. In all cases the writers engage in a dialogue between the art and the reflection upon that art.

This issue of In/Stead through the perception of film, visual arts, radio broadcasts, theatre and creative writing (poetry and prose) focuses on the creative and discursive processes of works in progress. There is equal interest in aesthetic constructions as there is in the content of the stories told; in each case writers are attuned to the provisional nature of knowledge and the breaking down of fixities whether related to specific disciplines (history/fiction) or definitions that confine and narrow understanding of the world we currently view and experience. The articles in this issue challenge directions of thought and ask whether the confrontation of voids, diasporas, delicious luring obscenities, violence against humanity and against nature itself reaches a point of stasis or whether it is legitimate to claim that direct, uncomfortable venting of the human potential to violate, to embrace or to be lured via art and arts discourse, promises something other than 'the end of the world'.

Ecologies of Mind and Matter: The Past, the Present and into the Future

Historicizing and Poeticizing Nature: Reclaiming the Echoes of Lost Voices
Patrick Van Der Werf & Josephine Scicluna

Radio Play & Sonic Poem

Patrick Van Der Werf and Josephine Scicluna in their projects 'Under the Forest' and 'Ladyswamp' deal with two locations that are nevertheless linked by the flow of water from the upper catchment of the Tarwin River, to the river flats near the South Gippsland coast. These two works, created in collaboration with musician/ sound artist Tom Kazas, are the first outputs of the ongoing Lyrebird Project, so named in acknowledgement of its major inspiration, a text of folk history called The Land of the Lyrebird. The two pieces deal with locations that are represented poetically without losing the actuality of its haunting geography. The pieces are also united by a sound design that acknowledges the need to subvert the actual sounds of location in the reproduction of location in poetic terms. The works represent the sense of disconnection the settlers immediately have from any historical continuity or prior ownership.

These two audio works embody the presence of location via poetic means; the flow is from erosion to silt: of land becoming water, becoming land. The emphasis then is on the idea of the event in Deleuze's conception, as it is introduced in The Logic of Sense (1969), with its emphasis on the idea of 'becoming' rather than being. Cliff Stagoll describes Deleuze's idea of becoming as the 'pure movement evident in changes between particular events' (in Parr, 2005: 21). This doesn't refer to the phase between two different states but rather the dynamic nature of change itself, which doesn't have a particular aim or 'end-state' (ibid). Both stories can be framed as 'enduring forms of acts of placement predicated on displacement' (Carter, 2009: 3).

In the play 'Under the Forest' the search for the remains of the lost teenager, Caleb, becomes a process of coding the land with meaning, a way of making difference that can be talked about. But it's a search
Outside categorical thinking that emerges from false divisions.

Fact and fiction but those between the past and the present and the 'compossibilities' when one gets possible past. Her article in this issue is a fascinating excursion into not only the blurred lines between connections between past and present than if we accept the view that the past as presented is the only possible past. Murray’s work demonstrates that we are forced to think more about possible other categorical thinking that: 

The Lady of the Swamp by Richard Shears inspired poet Josephine Scicluna’s ‘Lady Swamp’. The article explicates the sonic poem created in relation to this strange tale of two sisters who in 1907 purchased a homestead on 1,100 hectares of land and attempted to run a farm. Eventually it became swallowed by swamplands. Like ‘Under the Forest’, Scicluna’s poem has an eerie and foreboding tone. It tells the story of not only a farmland transforming from land to swamp but also that of the survivor of a family who attaches herself to her world. One of the sisters became an invalid and the heart-ache and endurance they experienced is enacted in a poem that imagines the mind of the surviving sister as well as metaphorically representing the impact of drainage channels silting up (resulting in the farmland being flooded in the winter months). In the poem, Margaret, the surviving sister, wades through the swamp to get provisions. In the actual events of this story, Margaret disappears mysteriously in 1952, two years after the death of her sister. There are rumors of murder. In 1978 the skeletal remains of a woman 60 - 70 years old are discovered in Tarwin Lower, South Gippsland, however the coroner deems the evidence insufficient to confirm the identity of Margaret. The case is closed (Shears, 2008:183).

In this article Scicluna explains how she has dramatized excerpts from the historical account. It is, we learn, a poetized history. The word ‘silt’ dominates and is used to dramatize the agonizing demise of the sisters, of the changes they endure and the decay that sets in. This poem speaks to hauntings of indigenous people who have been run off the land by white occupation. There is therefore the loss of the land to the indigenous people and the fermenting endurance of the sisters who could not finally manage the land on a practical level and certainly could not control nature’s revenge against farming techniques that returned the farmland to the swamp.

Scicluna explains how her poetic rendering of the story tried to imagine a shift in Margaret Clement’s consciousness as she made her ritual wade through the swamp to and from the homestead, decaying on its island plateau. Scicluna writes: "Her sense of place was imagined as formed by the movement of her legs, loose, in the swamp. The image of seepage is called to mind; Clement’s movement became a metaphor for this accretion. The notion of pathways (or orientations) suggested here, as formative of our sense of place, takes inspiration from a particular derivation of sense of place theories, as described by Paul Carter: one in which ‘sense is associated with [the] French sentier: mobile, where place is static, sense of place emphasizes qualities of orientation and, pathmaking’ (2009: 3)."

The Blurring of Fact and Fiction Virginia Murray

Virginia Murray in her article ‘Appropriating History: Scriptwriting – On the Beach ….’ also like Van Der Werf and Scicluna is inspired by historical accounts; in Murray’s case the historical view was embodied in the dystopic film On the Beach, starring movie stars of the 1950s (Ava Gardner and Gregory Peck). It was filmed in Melbourne which was represented as the only place occupied after an atomic bomb has destroyed the rest of the world. Murray notes: ‘There was to be a deliberate blurring of the boundaries between fact and fiction. In this way my work was close to ‘drama-documentary’, which is historically accurate and stays close to the historical event, in this case the original film, but ‘fills in’ the emotional landscape of factual material with fiction’. Murray is speaking about a film script that she has completed recently and notes that her pathway was inspired by Gilles Deleuze’s theories of cinematic time-image, not only as methods of investigating concepts of rationality and unreality, but also in the rich narrative possibilities they offer. She writes that there were films that also inspired her approach to narrative. Murray cites the film 12 Monkeys (dir. Terry Gilliam, 1995) and its inspiration, La Jetée (dir. Chris Marker, 1962), where a character haunted by a killing he witnessed as a child returns from the future to discover he is the murder victim. For Murray these movies spring to mind as examples of theory informing and enriching narrative. She writes: “12 Monkeys and La Jetée employ the notion of the crystal, where virtual and actual time, subjective and objective points of view are indistinguishable from one another. In these films the character experiences two different times simultaneously; he is child and adult simultaneously but it’s impossible to tell one time from the other, the real from the imaginary, because they conflate. In developing my narrative, I knew I wanted Nora [the protagonist] to go back to 1959 and encounter herself as a child.

Murray’s script plays with time; she is driven by a desire to perceive new connections between past and present. In this article she explores how this might occur and re-examines her film script explaining how this was implemented. Her script creates new characters to add to those who were actors in the film On the Beach and the period during which the film was produced is re-envisioned. She explains in her article how the past can be used to make the present more meaningful? Murray notes that her research into the past brought into focus that what returns will be different from what was once there. She argues that: “History appears to be now more than before a chance selection of occurrences that could just as easily not have happened as happened then our engagement with the past and its infinitely possible variations becomes more exciting”. The writing of her film script reflected the ways in which there are many possible pasts. Murray’s work demonstrates that we are forced to think more about possible connections between past and present than if we accept the view that the past as presented is the only possible past. Her article in this issue is a fascinating excursion into not only the blurred lines between fact and fiction but those between the past and the present and the 'compossibilities' when one gets outside categorical thinking that emerges from false divisions.
Violations Against Nature: Race, Sex and Lost Moral Centres

Race and Dislocation Dirk de Bruyn

In Dirk de Bruyn's article 'Returning a Dislocated Child's Body to the Scene of a Crime', De Bruyn desires through the process of his art-making to connect past with present, and also to connect the local with the global. Here the creativity of the artist is likened to that of the migrant, requiring ingenuity and resourcefulness.

Dirk de Bruyn's article explores the unspoken racist complicity of post WWII Netherlands with the 1950s White Australia policy in which the 'white' Dutch were considered a good fit for migration. De Bruyn's experiences of dislocation due to his migration to Australia as an eight year old child, and the racism which was made evident by this event, become the catalyst for his installation art as a part of a collaborative project exhibition called The Unwanted Land. This interdisciplinary exhibition with its focus on issues of migration and national and international identities provides de Bruyn the highly charged space for his own narrative to find its dialogic expression. His return to the Netherlands for the exhibition became a means by which he could vocalize and perform what he sees was racist in his early Dutch childhood; he makes specific reference to Dutch language comics which had informed his childhood view of race. This physical return is also the site for the resurgence of long-forgotten details evocative of Chris Brewin's work concerning 'Situational Accessible Memory'. In this article Dirk writes in detail about the installation he created for The Unwanted Land exhibition. It was in many ways controversial and his article deals not only with the multi-layers of the event itself but also with exchanges he has with other participants before the event who challenged his proposed choice of icons to deal with the question of racism. At the core of this article there lurks de Bruyn's psychological awareness that he, in being so young when removed from his country of origin, was in his terms actually abducted. His sense of dislocation has myriad facets.

Violations of the body: Interrogations by Text Neena Balwan Sachdev

Whereas de Bruyn focuses on the disturbing experience of being dislocated from his homeland, Neena Balwan Sachdev focuses on the initial loss of self for the raped victim. Sachdev's 'Individuals become events' explores depictions of sexual abuse in J M Coetzee's Disgrace and Shani Mootoo's Cereus Blooms at Night. The idea of the subject, posed by Deleuze and Guattari, as an assemblage of degrees or intensities which can enter into "composition with other degrees, other intensities, to form another individual" (1987: 279) is taken up by Sachdev as a way in which we might understand the characters in these fictions not as pure victims of rape, but rather as passages of becoming: "Imbued with the characteristics and affects of the unique event of rape, they Further the impact of the act through other becomings in their fictional lives". Sachdev's close analysis of passages from both novels alerts us to the complexities of expression with which these writers present the event of rape. Sachdev argues that the ambiguity and the blurring of voices apparent in the writing of these authors allows for a greater interrogation of the incident by the reader, rather than, as has been critiqued, view these authorial exchanges he has with other participants before the event who challenged his proposed choice of icons to deal with the question of racism. At the core of this article there lurks de Bruyn's psychological awareness that he, in being so young when removed from his country of origin, was in his terms actually abducted. His sense of dislocation has myriad facets.

Lost Moral Centres Anita Jaboor

Whereas Sachdev shows us how to read texts that deal with the violation of the human body in order to discern a 'moral centre', Anita Jaboor intimates that some of the most enduring literature in western culture emerges in a realm in which we are seduced by characters who have lost any connection with an ethical world view. She is not arguing that these works as a whole are working against the grain of an ethical perspective but rather that the construction of characters are deployed to immerse a readership in minds of characters who are devoid of one.

Jaboor is interested in the role played in literary texts by what she terms the 'outsider or enigmatic character'. She maintains that: "Novels that change the world, that get people to re-think the way they might live, that make moral grounds shift and that signal new things to come, rely on the use of an enigmatic/outsider character to carry the message of impending change." This article has multiple aims: it probes the way in which these characters are constructed and analyses the elements of personality selected to dictate the content of this construction; it examines whether the characters are merely subversive and act as a means only of re-addressing flaws in prevailing moral paradigms or whether these characters are not merely some kind of disguised villain whose task it is to uncover the pretensions...
of civilisation, but that they are actually simply calculating, relentless and cruel. The question, she argues, that needs to be answered is why they, in all their horror, not only seduce an audience, but prevail as prime representations of Western culture.

Whilst we know that these characters manifest evil inclinations, what is it, she asks, that draws us so successfully into their sphere? As well as possessing the freedom to create their own law, these characters are given an exceptional intellectual capacity. Jaboor references Jonathan Demme's screen adaptation of *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991), which produced Hannibal Lecter, one of film noir's most terrifying and intriguing characters as a notable example. In line with these questions Jaboor analyses Joseph Conrad's Kurtz as a 'hero-villain' (Watts, 1998: 47) in a way that is at once paradoxically a denouement and a celebration of his fall from civilisation. She explores Conrad's elucidation of "the universal parable about the ambiguous nature of humanity", a parable, she points out that has proven powerfully memorable for over a century. This article includes an analysis of the enigmatic character of the judge in *Blood Meridian*, which is similarly to Kurtz, constructed by McCarthy as an intellectually exceptional and violent man who continually violates and shows up the 'lie' of civilisation. This article explores 'ambivalent heroism' as represented in two literary texts outlining their relationship to the archetypal Faustian figure in order to speak to writers wishing to create and cult powerful and lasting literature. Using Conrad's and McCarthy's exemplars, and drawing on dominant characters in popular films, she argues that writers might choose to represent a character whose construction is enigmatically framed and lies outside prevailing ideologies. She leaves us with the tantalising idea that: "It is a fact of modern and contemporary literature that the characters that matter – the ones that attract our attention are cold, clever and destructive. Seductive characters are forgiven their human atrocities as long as they are cultured, duplicitous and angry. We belong to a civilization that will only listen, at least in fiction and film, to those who in seeking power wish only to destroy". And thus the enigma for Jaboor is: that aberrant behavior as represented in literary and filmic artefacts and characterized throughout this article as outside prevailing systems of belief have become inside, and characterize the end of an ethical road.

**Poetics and Shifting Paradigms** Antonia Pont and Christopher Norris

To read Antonia Pont's poems is to be drawn into familiar territories known to the flesh as well as led to less familiar fields of aestheticizing the lure of the obscene. She argues persuasively that poeticizing desire for the obscene is antithetical to what is realized in the more functional, programmatic intention of the pornographic and/or the mediocrity and fixity of the vulgar.

Pornography, more than not, she argues, when too explicit 'does not inhabit this somewhat liminal space of luring, it can fail to seduce the reader with its playful absurdity, hyperbole and promiscuous conceptual couplings, and, instead, repel them'. Pont's work in this collection entails a suite of her own poems that cross boundaries in their representation of desiring practice. In the finest of exegetical reflection upon the work, Pont explicates each of her poems showing how they work outside categories that place what is considered obscene with the vulgar and the pornographic in one box and what is considered endurable and inoffensive in another usually defined as the erotic, the loving, and the intimately sexual. Pont is dissatisfied with these divisions and one will fully appreciate the liberation that comes from this dissatisfaction upon reading her poems. The subject matter ranges across the anticipated players involved in narratives of desire and sex but the poems take you beyond the usual into forbidden yet familiar terrains which have no names or borders and give Pont the right, in a way, to make a call which she actually does in her article:

"I would call on artists to create and contribute to the body of – as I have defined it here – 'obscene' works. As skilled artisans of innovation, artists in various fields could insist on and realize in works the potential for an expansion of the limits of desiring practice and its modes and aesthetics, as opposed to cynical contributions that only amplify and reinforce the inertias of tired, mediocre or vulgar imaginaries".

Whilst Antonia enjoys the art of composing poetry and self-aesthetically and actually within a wild world of flesh and indiscernible intention, Christopher Norris is immersed in the worlds that we wish for, glimpse momentarily but then lose as they move seemingly invisibly from one socially deliberated paradigm to another.

Both Antonia and Norris make proposals to avert cynicism. The antidote for cynicism in Antonia's call to the artist is to reinvent pornography, or to make possible a total luring into obscenity, to make its aesthetic able to operate in a liminal space. Norris, on the other hand, asks for a change of vision to avert the cynicism inevitable in utopia's après-coup: dystopias. Éctopiques, which means displacement and/or an anomaly within a situation, explores this kind of displacement as the dynamic/catalyst for reimagining utopia and redeeming it from its distance from actualization.

Norris's poem engages with an array of thinkers from ancient Greece to the 20th century and historicizes their contributions. It is written in the form of the linked *tercet* or *terza rima*, (invented by Dante and used in the *Divine Comedy*) and embodies a dance of philosophical and aesthetic ways of seeing the world. Subsequently Norris advocates that we redeem the visions of the old utopians who placed utopia "out of sight/ Too far off, long ago, or far ahead", and proclaims that instead we look to the small transcendences which occur in the everyday.

This shift of perspective that Norris presents is impressionistic; it is both captured in and captivated by
In our coordinates of time and space
That gives us the first inkling of a chink
Through which we might just glimpse another place,

One that may vanish at a second blink
Yet lingers as a sense of regions mapped"


