Immaterial Land and Indigenous Ideology: Refiguring Australian Art and Culture

by

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I am the author of the thesis entitled *Immaterial Land and Indigenous Ideology: Refiguring Australian Art and Culture*

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ABSTRACT

Through an examination and critique of western notions of ideology, particularly those based on Louis Althusser’s account of ideology grounded in imaginary conditions of existence, my research aims to propose an alternative way of thinking about ideology and ontology. My argument relates specifically to art and culture and will demonstrate through theoretical argument and practice, how Indigenous art and culture allow us to conceive of an alternative understanding of ideology. The purpose is to attempt to overturn the condition of amnesia that persists in Australia with regards to culture. I will elaborate an alternative framework of ideology based on Indigenous culture and grounded on the relationship between culture and Land and posit a materialist ontology that suggests a way to resolve the opposition between the “real” and the “imaginary” as they are understood within an Althusserian framework. My argument is underpinned by the crucial premise that an Indigenous ideology is grounded upon the notion of “Country” (Land) and its inextricable relation to culture.

My research is comprised of a written thesis and a body of artwork. My practice is an attempt to demonstrate this framework and at the same time reveal the dynamic of what constitutes contemporary Aboriginal art practices. I use drawing as an immersive and embodied practice and work in the form of charcoal on paper and on a large scale. The works are specifically landscapes that attempt to demonstrate the crucial role of “Country” (Land) and its importance to the foundations of Indigenous ideology and culture. By emphasising the process of drawing in tandem with the conceptualising of an analytical framework, a new way of looking at art and cultural practices will emerge.
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INTRODUCTION

Philosophers may urge other philosophers to ground their thought more thoroughly, but this is merely a metaphor and assumes (once again) that the ground itself can be taken for granted. (Carter 1996: 3)

Western thought has always attempted to strip away appearances in order to uncover an essence or truth. By doing so, it removes us further from this possibility. As Paul Carter suggests, Western philosophy is no different to the bulldozers clearing the ground (Carter 1996: 3). This desire to uncover has reverberating effects in relation to the formation of culture and identity. In Australia, we have an inherent amnesia in relation to ground, the physical and metaphysical ground. This has had wider ramifications in relation to how Australian identity and culture is constructed, especially in relation to Aboriginal culture and ideology.

By opposing a western notion of truth, an Indigenous conception of art and its worldview provides an alternative framework or lens through where to view Australian culture and ideology. The most vital aspect of Indigenous ideology, in an Indigenous framework, is that all aspects of culture do not stand-alone. For example, art does not exist in isolation from life and culture. Art plays an important role in cultural life. The inseparability of art from cultural life is what I refer to as the “real” that an Indigenous framework elaborates; the cohesion between all aspects of living and practice. Through the material process of making artwork, and the reflective analysis of the experience of making as well as of the
completed works, my research attempts to articulate and demonstrate the
derelationship between life, memory, culture and art.

**Ideology and Amnesia**

The aim of my research is to propose and elaborate a way of thinking about
ideology in terms of an Indigenous worldview. In order to do so, it is necessary to
unravel and critique western notions of ideology especially those based on Louis
Althusser’s elaboration of ideology as being based on an imaginary condition of
existence (Althusser 1971). I have selected an Althusserian ideology in order to
conduct a comparative analysis within an Indigenous framework. In this context,
Althusserian ideology is an exemplar of representationalist thinking that continues
to be dominant and endemic in western representationalist thinking. My analysis
identifies and defines how this notion of ideology contributes to an amnesiac
condition in Australia, one that underlines understandings of culture. By
identifying this gap, I provide an alternative framework of ideology based on the
“real” and integrated conditions of existence that operate in an Indigenous ideology
and culture and its conception of art. It is this alternative framework that can
provide a new way of looking and thinking about how ideology and art can be
reconfigured in their relationship with culture. My research operates within this
space, not only as a theoretical argument, but also through artistic practice. It is
within this space that I emphasise the importance of Land (“Country”) in order to
demonstrate a “real” alternative ideology that is not based on the imaginary.

In this research project I examine the role of art and its effectiveness in the broader
discourse of culture, arguing that art, in an ontological sense, not only contributes
to but *constitutes* culture and identity. This crucial role of art is evident in an examination of both western and Indigenous ideologies. Further by scrutinizing how some ideologies, and in Australia, Indigenous ideologies do not attain the same value as accepted modes of thought, because they are not within the parameters set by western thinking. I argue that this further precipitates amnesia, an inherent forgetting about Australia’s past and cultural history. The notion of amnesia is vital since it is framed as not only the act of forgetting, but also as a condition that perpetuates the consequential apathy that prevents memory from being put into practice. With apathy, the level of value attributed to the “other” decreases. My practice has the crucial role of refiguring the notion of value in terms of presenting an Indigenous ideology as an alternative to western notions of ideology.

I have confined my argument to thinkers that elaborate a dominant ideology as well as others such as Andreas Huyssen, Martin Heidegger, Barbara Bolt, Estelle Barrett, Karen Barad and Karen Martin, who present alternatives to it. It is within the scope of the exegesis/practice that the illumination of an alternative framework may operate. I will draw on Huyssen’s work that investigates the relationship of memory and representation constructed by narratives of the past focusing on the issue of memory and amnesia in a postmodern culture. Although his investigation is about the constructions of memory and narratives of Germany in relation to the ‘changing status of memory and temporal perception in contemporary consumer culture’ (Huyssen 1995:17), it holds significance for this exegesis. By extending on Huyssen’s amnesia, I uncover not only a representationalist thinking about art and culture, but also reveal the act of forgetting and devaluing Indigenous culture
and thinking, which representationalist construction permit. In this light, amnesia, representation and value are intrinsically linked and as such, their relationship has continued to have an impact on contemporary Australian art and culture. My research examines the impact of such a relationship on contemporary Australian culture and attempts to construct an alternative perspective.

I argue that although Indigenous ideologies (including art practices) may not attain the same “constructed value” within established narratives, they provide an alternative to the continual deferral of meaning that was exploited in postmodern discourse about art. The notion of “value” is a problematic one, because though it is important to the status of Indigenous ideology, it still remains a construction within a western system that has created this construction. “Value”, for the purpose of this exegesis is defined as a set of criteria that judges something that then is considered to be of worth or held in high regard. This criterion of value is based on the notion of quality that has changed throughout western history. “Value” in Australian society is constructed through and by western ideology in which “value” and ideology are intrinsically linked, since ideology has been formed out of what is valued, and is self-perpetuating where, for example the significant aspect of a formed Australian identity is based on the concept of “otherness”. Edward Said investigates the notion of “otherness” in his book *Orientalism*. He states:

> The orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also a place of Europe’s greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilisations
and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of the deepest and most recurring images of the Other. (Said 1979:1)

Otherness is vital to the construction of identity and power. In Said’s framework the Orient is defined by the occident. However there is an unequal exchange, since the west defines the construct of the orient and therefore has power over it. This relationship is one of dominance.

There is no foundation to this formulation of cultural dominance as both the orient and occident are constructions. Said illuminates this further by arguing that the terms “orient” and the “west” have no ontological stability as they are constructed by human effort (Said 1979: xvii). By investigating the construction of “otherness”, I argue that otherness is crucial to the foundations of Australia. However, Indigenous people do not even earn the status of “otherness”. The assumption of terra nullius\(^1\) ensured this in its negation of Indigenous inhabitants and a refusal of entering into a treaty with them.

This negation is the cause of amnesia, which will be investigated in order to demonstrate its consequence on art discourses in contemporary Australia. The effects of amnesia can be understood through what I call a process of “tranquilisation”. This term refers to the apathy and lethargy towards culture and accurate history that most Australians have without knowing they are experiencing it. Drawing on Ian McLean’s White Aborigines (1998), I will explore how these

\(^1\) A Latin term derived from Roman law meaning “land belonging to no one”. In the context of Australia, colonisation was justified through Terra Nullius. It was believed that Aboriginal Australians did not exercise any sovereignty over land, although unwritten legal codes did exist amongst traditional owners groups.
processes of “tranquilisation” have affected or defined “Australian identity” and culture. The discourses of “post-coloniality” and the formation of Australian identity as being based on “antipodes” and “otherness” will provide context for this discussion. In his exploration of the formation of Australian subjectivity, McLean provides a useful opening:

Further, the psychology of representation and its staging in allegory and other symbolic forms, along with an understanding of the concepts which inform western thinking about identity, are important in my discussion. Implicit in my argument is the persistence of age-old Western meta-narratives of identity which continue to stage our politics of identity, which are constituted as much by the constructions of forgetting as by memory. (McLean 1998:vii)

McLean considers the notion of “Antipodes” as being crucial to the foundation of Australia:

Transportation, as it was called, constituted a legally sanctioned salvation in which the condemned were exiled to the Antipodes- at first Virginia and then New South Wales. (McLean 1998:14)

The crucial point that emerges is the idea of the construction of memory in relation to the formation of “Australian subjectivity”. This relationship establishes the creation of imagined identities in Australia, especially by defining itself against its other. The complication or problematic fact for Australia is the non-existence of an
“other”. In contemporary Australian society the notion of “other” is always moving in order to stabilize the notion of terra nullius. If Aboriginal culture had the status of “other”, it would be recognised as a cultural contestant and this would be a step towards confirming the imagined other. By exploring this path, I return to the vital concept of amnesia.

Within the context of this research, value becomes synonymous with “dominant ideology”. Furthermore, ideology and identity are linked to western concepts of value, and identities in Australia have been formed out of this construction of “value”. I assert that quality in this framework is relative. A more useful understanding of value would be based upon the “real conditions of existence” that Indigenous cultural ideology presents. In this exegesis, I argue and attempt to demonstrate that Indigenous culture is a valued discourse only in so far as it resides within pre-constructed value. I also aim to demonstrate that an Indigenous worldview constitutes another structure of value. Although there are different cultural notions of value, this research project concentrates on the need for an acceptance of Indigenous ideology as a valued philosophical and cultural paradigm within a western framework and that Indigenous ideology operates by itself and apart from the western construct. I further contend that an Indigenous conception of art and culture must be acknowledged as a crucial factor in determining cultural identity and an understanding of how Indigenous ideology contributes to an “Australian identity”. It is through my argument that the “real” and the “immaterial”, the “imaginary” and the “representational” in an Indigenous

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2 Australian identity is used here in context of an attempt to enable a collective and cohesive foundation to cultural identity in Australia through the provision of an Indigenous identity.
worldview operate concurrently and it is this inter-relatedness that can re-assign value and therefore overcome the dilemma of amnesia. Through my practice I demonstrate this inter-relatedness which will be articulated through formal analysis, materialist interpretation and discussions of subjective agency. Through this analysis, what becomes vital to my argument is the material process of making the work as an experiencing and re-experiencing of Country through practice. It is this position of material process that informs this research in terms of demonstrating the inter-relatedness of Country as subject to its real effects on the body, artist and viewer. This also demonstrates the immersive practice that underpins Indigenous ideology.

**Indigenous Thought, Land and Country**

So what is Indigenous thought? Indigenous thinking and ideology are grounded in “land”. “Land” is the premise of Indigenous ideology and culture. Here lies the essential difference between the two cultures. Notions of land in a western sense relate to agriculture, are non-existent in Aboriginal society. With agriculture, comes the segregation of land, the propagating of crops and the herding of cattle. Settlement and the construction of dwellings follow. In a traditional Aboriginal society, movement with land or “Country” is essential, and the segregation and “taming” of land is absurd. This fundamental difference between two cultures is vital to our understanding of the constructions of value within contemporary Australia and its past, which has affected the reception of anything Indigenous. These constructions express the various conceptions of ideology with regards to cultural practices. This can be understood in terms of western ideology and cultural practices being based on the notion of the representational whilst Indigenous
ideology and cultural practices are based on a *methexical* relationship. *Methexis* is the performative action that brings something into being and existence. (Carter 1996: 84)

My research therefore poses the following questions:

- How can we claim that Australian art is effective in constituting cultural identity if the dominant view and ideologies of the broader cultural arena does not acknowledge Indigenous art within the framework of Indigenous thought and ideology?
- What is ideology and how does it contribute to amnesia?
- Can a model of art and ideology that has previously and currently holds no value, be acknowledged in order to create a resolution to the problem of ideology and therefore identity and culture in contemporary Australian art and society?
- Can “land” or Country, as it is realised in Indigenous art and ideology and as the foundation of Indigenous culture act as a stable premise for Australian identity?
- What has this conception of “land” got to do with the notion of value and the effectiveness of art in the wider culture?

The aim of this project is to present a model of art and ideology that attempts to achieve the following:

- Open a dialogue in relation to Indigenous culture while valuing its alternative construct of ideology;
• Recognise the importance of an Indigenous framework and way of thinking in relation to cultural identity in Australia;

• Recognise the ontological premise of art within the context of a postmodern anti-aesthetic;

• Create an alternative understanding and a new way of thinking about ideology and art that will overcome what I have described as the amnesia of Australian culture.

As previously discussed, value and ideology are related, and this relationship also defines the parameters of a “postmodern” anti-aesthetic (Jameson 1991). Postmodernism’s only value is within an ideological paradigm that is constructed out of Modernism. Postmodernism claims to be emancipatory, as opposed to Modernist ideology being avowedly imperial, perpetuating the narratives of the west. However, because of its implication in theories of ever-deferred meaning, postmodernism negates the notion of subjective agency, and has also led to the misappropriation of Indigenous art and culture. This compounds the negation of “otherness” and perpetuates ongoing amnesia. It is through and beneath this discourse that a Marxist/Althusserian concept of ideology operates.

By looking at the effectiveness of art within a postmodern paradigm, but also as an alternative to it, I present a model of culture and identity that is more stable. This alternative framework resolves the differential meanings within the dynamics of discourses that contribute to Australian identity, as those outlined by McLean’s discussion on Antipodes (1998). I explore the relationship of Heidegger’s elaboration of ontology to art in The Origin’s of the Work of Art, in order to
establish a broader understanding of the effectiveness of art. In this research, I argue that Indigenous art acts as a pathway to defining the relationship of ontology to art. Through the exploration of “forgetfulness” that Australian art history has with regards to its Indigenous past, I provide a different way of understanding art through an alternative ideology and paradigm. However, in order to achieve this, a critique of contemporary Australian culture and its history, an investigation of western discourse as it relates to art is necessary. Western discourse and ideology are both the framework and object of this critique; and non-western (Indigenous ideology, land, art and culture) is presented as an alternative.

Within this investigation, it is necessary to locate my writing and practice within a complex dynamic. By applying the parameters of an imagined “post colonialsity”, and since such a critique is still formed within the habitus of colonialism, can post-colonial writing, critique or construction of Indigenous culture be a legitimate one? As Balwant Jani observes: ‘If we have to decolonize historical writings, we have to disengage our minds from the western notions of history’ (2001:17). Although this statement is made with reference to the British colonisation of India, it is also relevant to colonisation in Australia. I claim that in order to value Indigenous ideology, we have to disengage from established narratives, scrutinise them and overturn them to reassign value. Jani states further:

A decolonized mind is open to alternatives; it constitutes itself from alternatives and is therefore truly representative. The greatness of a decolonised mind lies in the acceptance of an alien language; its dynamism lies in reshaping it; its variety lies in producing literatures
in it; its superiority lies in being able to represent the ethos of a heterogeneous group against the parochialism of the colonist’s language. (Jani 2001:17-18)

Within the context of Australian society, the only legitimate writing and practice in relation to culture and identity would be about this construction itself and the amnesia it precipitates. It is necessary to interrogate these constructions in order to create a dialogue that doesn’t remain embedded in age-old narratives. We need for example, Teresa de Lauretis’ notion of an “elsewhere space” that opens up a discourse. Although this is in relation to gender, the same can be applied to the construction of race and identity (de Lauretis 1987). It is in this “elsewhere space” that I can operate. In order to present a “real” alternative ideology this research investigates the relationship of art, ontology and culture as a means of resolving the trap of deferral that an “open discourse” threatens to create. This “real” ideology is an Indigenous conception of what I will term, “cultural ideology”. “Cultural ideology” as I use the term, is ontological. It is in this ontological space of cultural ideology that I make artwork in order to reaffirm the cohesion between life, art, land, practice and memory, which is opposed to an ideology constructed within an Althusserian framework.

The difficulty of moving between two modes of thinking, a western and Indigenous mode, presents different conceptions of the world that are separate. However, it is within this movement between the two that creates a kind of *shimmering* that allows the argument and illumination to come through. It is this space that this exegesis operates in order to find a different discursive mode of unfolding and
mapping out of the argument; similar to the revealing process that underpins storytelling. In this light, the exegesis manoeuvres as a *methexical* practice in itself.

**Country, the Real and the Immaterial**

The aim of my project is to situate my own practice in an alternative understanding of art and “Country”. The works I have produced relate directly to Country. The analysis of the works expounds upon this relationship and reconfirms the theoretical inquiry. The making of the work, the work themselves and the viewing of the work, act as a form of real experience and subjectivity. By producing these drawings of Country, I attempt to relate Country to a wider audience through a practice that is based on my own immersive relationship to Country. It is out of utmost respect for Country that I do this in the Acknowledgement section of this exegesis.

The creative work and my approach to practice explore the relationship of abstraction to representation, hence it is in the space between the real and the immaterial, that the drawings are constructed. The process makes the work vital to my argument that Indigenous cultural ideology is one based on immersive experiences. By examining the process of making these drawings I demonstrate not only the drawings relationship to Country as well as my own. This immersion can be felt by the experiencing and re-experiencing that happens when viewing the drawings. It is through the entire process from commencing the works to the analysis and reflection of them that attempts to demonstrate the notion of immersion into the real and the immaterial in which reflection and analysis
engender a real immersive re-experience. My practice is crucial to my argument that posits an alternative ideology based on the real.

**Overview of Chapters**

In Chapter One I focus on elaborating the framework of western thinking in terms of ideology and proceed to hypothesize an alternative framework. This chapter investigates and recasts ideology in terms of material conditions. At the outset I analyze Althusser’s definition of ideology in order to expose its own false consciousness, which, in his own framework, is founded and premised on imaginary relations to existence. This permits me to introduce the notion of amnesia, which, I demonstrate, is a result of such false consciousness and ideology. I take up Huyssen’s definition of amnesia in order to reveal how a western framework of ideology not only has an imaginary relationship to existence but also embeds an amnesiac conditioning within its own constructed framework. Martin Heidegger’s explanation of the relationship between art and ontology provides an opening to an understanding of an alternative framework. To extend and develop upon Heidegger’s ontology, I employ Bolt’s account of a radical ontology that sees the image as having ‘real material effects’ (Bolt 2004), a conception that has resonances with the radical material beliefs of Indigenous culture. Bolt utilizes and extends Carter’s *methexis* as a way of configuring the performative act of the image. *Methexis* is defined as that action which encompasses a performative act that is not individualized (Carter 1996) and has a direct relationship to the group as experience in Indigenous culture. By elaborating this ontology and *methexis*, I will provide an alternative “ground” and understanding of ideology by presenting how ideology in Indigenous culture is not based on the imaginary conditions of
existence but is grounded in the “real”. Art practice is crucial to demonstrating the inter-relatedness between the real and the imaginary and is therefore crucial to the mode of research chosen for this project.

The aim of Chapter One is to set up, through an examination of the relationship between art, ontology and ideology in Indigenous Australian culture, an alternative understanding of “cultural ideology” and ontology. In doing so, we may re-cast the notion of ideology, materialism and ontology through their basis in “land”. The western notion of “land” denotes an object to be owned. Drawing on Carter’s ideas concerning metaphor and layered meaning as they relate to ideology, I provide a counter-argument and demonstrate that Indigenous cultural ideology involves an ontological relationship, the cohesion between life, art, Country (land), practice and memory rather than an imaginary relationship to existence. Aboriginal “cultural ideology” is the “real” world. I employ Karen Martin’s (2008) framework of “Relatedness Theory” to elaborate this trajectory.

Whilst Chapter One focuses on the theoretical framework of “Country” as an alternative to the imaginary, Chapter Two analyses my own trajectory of practice in the wider context of art practice, in both an Indigenous and non-Indigenous arena. My argument is substantiated through critiquing the work of artists Imants Tillers and John Young in the context of their work perpetuating a cultural amnesia. This line of inquiry announces the relationship that art practice can have with an imaginary relationship to existence and demonstrates the gap in western ideology that I have discussed in the first chapter. The separation of life, material process, the imaginary and cultural production is based on a western representationalist
view of art as representation. I then present an alternative framework through a discussion and analysis of the work of Kathleen Petyarre and Rover Thomas in order to shift our thinking in relation to art, and to elaborate that Aboriginal art is not “representationalist”. I extend my argument further by closely examining the work of artist Badger Bates, a Paakantyi man from Wilcannia, far west New South Wales. Although it is within scholarly conventions to refer to an artist by their surname, it is important that I refer to Badger Bates as “Uncle Badger”. This is important as it is a sign of cultural respect and demonstrates the reciprocal relationship I have with him. In Aboriginal society the term Uncle is used to demonstrate respect and the importance that person has within the community, and it is within this framework that I use this term.

I will examine how Uncle Badger’s work operates through a material practice that produces ontological effects through its articulation of immateriality. An examination of Uncle Badger’s practice demonstrates this alternative framework of ideology which clearly refuses the binary between the material and the metaphysical, showing how ideology operates within both realms concurrently. His work engenders an ontological framework and revolves around extracting images and revising techniques from the ancient traditions of his ancestors, to be created in contemporary form. Although Uncle Badger works in various media, I will focus on his lino prints. The implications of re-casting ideology through Indigenous artistic practice will be examined in light of how Country grounds the metaphysical into the material. The spiritual or “immaterial” nature of Aboriginal culture operates as a continuum: material practice and the imaginary created by the reality of Country. The important concept in this alternative framework is Country.
Country is the basis of Indigenous ideology and it specifically constitutes and is constituted by the relationship between memory, life and culture, which are embedded in Land. Indigenous art practices manifest this trinity. Within this framework, the immaterial is materially constituted by the real material conditions of existence, where the immaterial itself, becomes a reality. This “immateriality” in Indigenous cultural ideology is manifest in the real existence of Country and ever continuing cultural practices. A critique of the established framework that governs the works of contemporary Australian artists Imants Tillers and John Young serves to highlight the alternative framework that is presented by the practice and works of Uncle Badger Bates. In doing so, my reflexive practice articulates the argument that an Indigenous ideology, worldview and practice is based on the methexical and the “real” as opposed to a western conception based on representation and the imaginary.

By adopting a practice/exegesis mode of research I intend to demonstrate a clear link between the experience of making the work and re-living this experience in the work as cultural productions. In Chapter Three, I substantiate the theoretical and practical frameworks discussed within my own practice, elaborating how the process of making the work demonstrates this trajectory. I employ Barad’s materialist reworking of performativity to illuminate how my practice offers a reconfigured “real” in order to propose that my research methodology is a means of asserting the notion of the “real” in relation to materiality. The process of the work is discussed and analysed to validate my approach in relation to the framework presented. Through this process I pose a number of questions:
• How does the method/process work as an inquiry method to demonstrate the main intention of the exegesis?
• What were the significant breakthroughs through the process?
• Where did I experience and illuminate the relationship between materiality/process in the work?

In demonstrating how my practice corresponds to the alternative framework presented, I create a new set of criteria for creating, thinking about and analysing art practice and work which entails the collapse between the representational and the ontological that I engender through an immersive practice, which further demonstrates the interrelationship between life, memory, culture and art as formulated in an Indigenous ideology.

In Chapter Four, I provide a closer analysis of my practice through the new criteria for thinking about art. In doing so I question the following raised issues in this research. What did this mode of inquiry reveal that could not have been revealed via any other method of inquiry? (Bolt and Barrett 2007). I argue that each work “is what it is” and ask: How do these works compose a “real materiality” and “real immateriality” and how do they directly overcome amnesia? In this chapter I also discuss the works through a formalist lens in order to explain how they are methexical and articulate memory. This relates to an Indigenous conception of ideology and practice. In this discussion I provide an analysis of how the work relates to me as the maker and the primary viewer before discussing how the works engage and construct the viewing audience. Finally, I suggest how the artworks I have produced for this project relate to each other. In doing so I look at how these
works engender a similar viewing as I have experienced in their making, that is to say, I examine how they operate *methexically*. I propose that the works can help to reframe how we look at the world in relation to experience and embodiment.
CHAPTER ONE

IDEOLOGY, REPRESENTATION AND AMNESIA

Material Representations

Dominant western philosophical discourse grounds its thinking in an ideology that has little relationship to the existence of everyday living. The fundamental problem here is that a binary is created where ideology and lived experience have an ephemeral relationship. Historically, western philosophical discourse has involved a pursuit to represent an ideology of existence that is empirically and scientifically grounded. It is this line of thinking that has established a western framework. Such a framework is confined by the limitations of western ideology and representation as it does not accept other forms of metaphysical beliefs. How can such ideology be grounded when it remains an ideology that has not dealt with the problematics of representation? The critical issue at stake here is the notion of ideology itself. Althusser states: ‘Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence’ (Althusser 1971: 163).

In his exploration of ideology and the state, Althusser examines the means of production as a reproduction of labor power in its submission to the ruling ideology. In doing so, Althusser present a “new reality”: “Ideology” (Althusser 1971: 133). It is in this context that Althusser claims there is a ruling ideology that unifies the diversity of production. His argument is based on the following premises:
• Ideology has no history: it does not have a history of its own as its history is external to it;

• Ideology is a pure dream.

Althusserian ideology can be related to Freud’s notion of the unconscious and formulates the view that ideology in general, has no history; it is eternal like the unconscious. From this, Althusser claims that ideology itself does not correspond to reality.

However, while admitting that they do not correspond to reality, i.e. that they constitute an illusion, we admit that they do make allusion to reality, and that they need only be ‘interpreted’ to discover the reality of the world behind their imaginary representation of that world (ideology = illusion/allusion). (Althusser 1971: 162)

**Ideology and the Subject**

The vital point that Althusser arrives at from the formulation that ideology = illusion/allusion is that humans transpose and represent reality to themselves in an imaginary form. Challenging this is vital to any attempt at redefining ideology, as in this framework, ideology becomes a construction of imaginary representations. Althusser further argues that humans construct themselves through an alienated representation since the conditions of existence around them are alienating. The crucial part of this argument is founded on the idea that the relationship that humanity has to its own reality is like ideology itself. Humanity in Althusserian terms has no history. Within this dilemma, Althusser moves on to claim that
‘ideology has a material existence’ which exists in its practice or practices and therefore, this type of existence is material (Althusser 1971: 165). Within this materiality, ideology itself is made possible by subjectivity as ‘Ideology interpellates individuals as subjects’ (Althusser 1971: 170). This is vital to Althusser’s understanding of ideology in a material existence as having no history as it is manufactured by and manufactures the subjects themselves. However, we must acknowledge the separation the subject has in relation to ideology in this framework. This separation is the reason why the subject has to constantly interrupt itself with questions about its illusory practices in order to attempt to resolve the split between subject and existence. However, this further adds to the separation due to the nature of ideology itself within this framework. I propose that opposing this split or separation is the notion of Land (Country) as it is given in an Indigenous framework in which there is no need for interpellation as there is no existing separation between the subject and ideology. In this instance, Land can take on the subjective position, which is the fundamental basis of an Indigenous ideology. “Land” or more widely termed, “Country”, assumes a subjectiveness. This agency of Country is opposed to the way in which objects are represented through a western framework. In an Indigenous worldview, Country informs people of their identity and it is Country’s active role of informing us of our whole belief system that relays its importance to culture. It is the reciprocal relationship that people have to Country and its relatedness that demonstrates Country as subject.

For Althusser, the existence of ideology is premised by the subject and for the subject. This construct is crucial to an understanding of ideology in western terms.
If ideology is an imaginary relation to reality and has no history, which is an aspect of material existence itself, then humanity itself has no relationship to its own reality and history. Not only does ideology represent a false consciousness, the ideology of humanity does itself operate as false consciousness.\(^3\) On the basis of the Althusserian relationship between ideology, subjects and the real conditions of existence, the notion of an amnesiac condition presents itself.

**Perpetual Amnesia**

For Andreas Huyssen, amnesia is produced in the context of the fading of generational memory. Huyssen uses the creation of the museum as a precursor to our obsession with memory, where the museum becomes a larger metaphor for holding culture and experience in everyday life. This is demonstrated by our efforts to restore the things around us and record our daily life through technology. Hence the metaphor of the museum becomes a paradigm for contemporary culture. This obsession does not solve the onset of amnesia, because categorising cultural productions and memories within the metaphor of the museum promotes an amnesiac condition. Our obsession with the past through the safekeeping of memories in institutions produces a false sense of capturing memory, because what is fundamentally locked away remains so. By safekeeping memories we forget that they are in fact there. Huyssen looks at the issue of representation in relation to temporality and memory:

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\(^3\) In this exegesis I am using the term false consciousness in a similar way to an eastern conception where consciousness is determined by an individual’s relationship to the real and in this case the real being the ontological. The argument here is that the subject’s relationship to the real is based on representation. Generally ideology represents “false consciousness” as it is predicated as the ontic as opposed to the ontological.
It does not require much theoretical sophistication to see that all representation—whether in language, narrative, image or recorded sound—is based on memory. *Re-*presentation always comes after, even though some media will try to provide us with the delusion of pure presence. But rather than leading us to some authentic origin or giving us verifiable access to the real, memory, even and especially in its belatedness, is itself based on representation. (Huyssen 1995: 2-3)

The key point here is that amnesia threatens to consume memory itself as it is based on representation. As with ideology, memory, in this sense, has little relationship to our conditions of existence. This dilemma of amnesia sealing the fate of memory and forgetting is stated by Huyssen in the following: ‘It will have sealed the very forgetting of memory itself: nothing to remember, nothing to forget’ (Huyssen 1995: 9). However, Huyssen does recognize the tenuous crevice between the past and the present as one that is alive. It is within this dynamic space that culture and memory can be inter-related and through artistic practice, can be reintegrated back into living memory. It is this dynamic space that Indigenous cultural production utilizes in bringing cultural memory into consciousness:

The past is not simply there in memory, but it must be articulated to become memory. The fissure that opens up between experiencing an event and remembering it in representation is unavoidable. Rather than lamenting or ignoring it, this split should be understood as a
powerful stimulant for cultural and artistic creativity. (Huyssen 1995: 3)

It is in the postmodern space where art and ideology and their meanings are deferred. This implies not only a condition of amnesia, but further perpetuates amnesia. Postmodernism in art demonstrates yet another mode where ideology is based on an imaginary relationship to existence, because it is also predicated on representation. How can we conceive of a different mode of thinking that does not involve this separation or split?

One option is to consider Teresa de Lauretis’ notion of an “elsewhere space” in which she presents another type of space where reality, ontology and culture co-exist. Although her “elsewhere space” is theorized with reference to gender, I would argue that the same can be applied to the construction of race and identity. By looking for the blind spots in the margins of hegemonic discourses, de Lauretis wants to create spaces within the “power-knowledge apparati.” She states:

The critique of all discourses concerning gender, including those produced or promoted as feminist, continues to be as vital a part of feminism as is the ongoing effort to create new spaces of discourse, to rewrite cultural narratives, and to define the terms of another perspective- a view from “elsewhere”? (de Lauretis 1987: 25)
De Lauretis is referring to the space that is not represented within existing representations. It is within this space that we can operate to create an alternative materialist cultural ideology not predicated on the fissure between discourse and representation. This space of lived and situated experience is not embedded in “false consciousness” and imaginary relations to real existence. The relationship of art, ontology and culture, in an Indigenous mode of living, acts as a means of resolving the trap of deferral that this “open discourse” threatens to create, by presenting a “real” alternative ideology. This “real” ideology is an Indigenous conception of what I will term “cultural ideology”, and has a connection to the real social world as real and ontological experience.

“Cultural ideology” is ontological and opposes to the notion of the ontic as elaborated by Heidegger in his discussion of the work of art and truth in relation to art. The ontic is in the realm that Heidegger refers to as “arts business” (Heidegger 1971: 40). This is a place where the ontic relates to our everydayness and our experience, as it is mediated by ideology. The ontic as the realm of everydayness, removes the work of art from its origins. In this sense, the ontic moves us further away from “Being” and from the ontological or the real conditions of our existence. The ontological refers to the world of reality that is masked by the veil of “everydayness”, the ontic. The ontological is the space where the work of art opens up for itself. This can be understood as the space of “cultural ideology”, which being ontological, refers to the cohesion between life, art, land, practice and memory. This relationship presents an alternative to the notion of ideology put forward by Althusser and Marx.
Empirical Ontology

Western modes of thinking about art are preoccupied with relating ideology to art and vice versa. This obsession within the history of western art is premised on a desire to accurately represent a stable ideological basis whilst moving between the binary of the material and the metaphysical. How can this be achieved if there is a predicament with ideology itself? In dealing with this dilemma within the discourse of art, Heidegger presents an alternative through his notion of ontology, and by exploring art’s potential for revealing “truth”. For Heidegger art operates in the realm of Being.

Heidegger views art ontologically rather than aesthetically. Art in the ontological sense is where art opens up a space for itself in order to articulate its function of demonstrating value and truth. This space is one where art does not have an imaginary relationship to existence. Opposed to this notion is the idea that art is established on aesthetic material principles based on perception. This perception is predicated on the imaginary relationship that ideology has to real existence. Within his work, *The Origins of the Work of Art* (1971), Heidegger paradoxically articulates his notion of art within the space opened by Immanuel Kant. Heidegger provocatively asserts ‘Matter is the substrate and field for the artist’s formative action’ (Heidegger 1971: 27). This strategic intervention intended to move us out of preconceptions about art and take us to the understanding of art as “revealing” by its own nature. Matter, understood in this sense, extends out of the comprehension of matter according to Aristotle. In contrast to Plato’s idea of art as

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4 Empirical Ontology refers to the “real” being based on lived experience as opposed to theorised ideology. This relationship between the real and lived experience is the basis of an Indigenous cultural ideology, an ontology grounded in reality that creates an alternate space to present a radical materialist ideology.
mimesis, Heidegger proposes that art practice is the movement of potential to the actual of substances as presented in Aristotle’s fourth book on Metaphysics (Brentano 1975). He utilizes this dynamic to demonstrate the revealing nature of art. This resonates with the dynamics out of which Indigenous cultural practices operate.

Art, for Heidegger, exists as a sanctuary that stands in, building over the void of nihilism, as it is the ‘setting-into-work-of-truth’. In his search for essence, Heidegger examines the “thingly” character of objects. He points out that if a thing is let be, it will come to the senses, as it is ‘self-revealing’ (Heidegger 1971: 69). Because we don’t access the bare sensation of sound, what is close to us is the “thing” in its non-essential form. In such a relation it is not the thing in itself, but a representation of the “thing”. So we can say that the problem lies with perception and it is here that Heidegger proposes art’s ontological function. The aesthetic perception and function in this instance removes us further from the “truth” and can be paralleled to the notion of ideology being predicated on subjective temporality.

Heidegger proposes the concept of form and matter, and the removal of the characteristics of the usefulness from the thing thereby defining the “thing-being” as consisting what is left over. This examination also portrays art as a preserving tool of truth of “essence” or “being”. For Heidegger, art is seen as an origin or essence, a happening of “truth”. His notion of “standing-reserve” is one where things come forth from concealment (Heidegger 1977: 17). Meaning is concealed in “standing-reserve” and acts as a potential where art can create a pattern of movement in a visual order to reveal true meaning, becoming an actual. In this
instance, art’s function is about revealing the true nature of things by its strategy of isolation. Isolation in this instance refers to the way that art isolates an essence of the “thing”, by focusing on the thing itself. Through its isolating properties, art preserves the true nature of things making them accessible to be embedded into memory through practice (Heidegger 1971: 69-71).

The ‘self-revealing’ nature of art proposed by Heidegger has important implications for my argument as Indigenous cultural practices do not operate from a formal academic perception of aesthetics and a restricted western ideological basis. The dynamic force created by the movement of revealing as described by Heidegger is the premise for arguing an alternative mode of ideology as realized by Indigenous practices. In such practices the notion of standing-reserve could be viewed as a metaphor of the notion of “Country”, where all things are extracted through memory and practice.

However, this movement/happening that Heidegger discusses is still confined to western modes of ideology. Western ideology, as defined earlier, operates through a mode of representation. Therefore, art becomes a representation. In her discussion of the performative potential of art Barbara Bolt identifies in Heidegger’s ideas a way for artwork to go beyond representation:

For Heidegger, as I have argued, representation traps us in a mode of thought that insists on grasping reality through imposed conceptual structures. (Bolt 2004: 55)
These imposed structures are outside our real existence evidenced by the fact that they exist as constructed representations in an ‘ideological’ sense. Interestingly the premise of Bolt’s investigation lies in the examination of the notion of performativity, where images are not only representational, but are also performative, as they extend themselves to real bodies. It is here that Bolt extends our understanding of the ontological dynamic of art. She observes:

The suggestion that the material practice of art has real material effects and there could possibly be a mutual exchange between the matter of bodies and the image of bodies, has limited currency in western art history and theory. (Bolt 2004: 168)

Bolt recognizes that a new “materiality” in the sense of the metaphysical has little acceptance in western discourses and by presenting the notion of art as being more than just representational, Bolt asks a vital question: How does western culture respond to the challenge that an image just might transcend its own structure as representation? (Bolt 2004: 163). The answer is that dominant western culture cannot transcend representation as long as its constructed ideologies remain bound by the material understood in a limited sense. In reference to art as demonstrated by Bolt, the issue is with representation itself and the ideology of representation can be understood by looking at the term “ideology” as discussed in relation to Althusser. The representational falls in the same category as the imaginary relationship to existence: images represent reality, therefore are imaginary.
Although Heidegger gestures away from the representational relationship, the “new materiality” proposed by Heidegger still operates within a constructed western ideological discourse. Bolt recognizes the limitations within Heidegger’s framework:

Whilst Heidegger’s theorization of the revealing potential of the work of art goes beyond representation, it continues to operate within Enlightenment modes of thought. (Bolt 2004: 188-189)

Bolt also distinguishes the conception of light in Australia to the European conception of light as elaborated by Heidegger. She discusses the blinding glare of Australian light in relation to its other, a softer European light and concludes that ontological experiences are therefore situated. Extending this notion, it is this situated experience of Country that gives Indigenous people a more objective account of the world as a real ontological experience. In Indigenous cultures there is no division between the real and the ideological and no split between memory and temporality to perpetuate a subjective amnesia.

Within the context of Indigenous Australia, enlightenment is experienced not in the terms of “light” but is founded on “Land”. This fundamental difference is a turning point by positing an alternative way of looking at materialism through the introduction of a notion of Indigenous ideology predicated on Country (Land). My argument is in accord with Bolt’s criticism of Heidegger’s conception of light, but also suggests that the notion of “light” used by Heidegger is still within the
framework of a western discourse and because in this framework, knowledge is understood through a metaphor of light. Bolt uses the notion of “glare” to question enlightenment and in doing so replaces the visual metaphor that associates light with knowledge with a materialist ontology derived from practice and the performative. The alternative to this notion of “light” is “Land”. All cultural productions within Australian Indigenous culture are created on the basis of Country. One belongs to Country which provides all sustenance in relation to living and all cultural practices, including “art”. As Bolt observes: ‘In the dynamic productivity of material practice, reality can get into images. Imaging, in turn, can produce real material effects in the world’ (Bolt 2004: 8).

Bolt’s theorization opens up an alternative way of looking at materiality in relation to art. This alternative provides a way to understand how images in Indigenous cultural practices are embedded in a living and vibrant culture and performativity for the purpose of ritual and practice. Images are real in the sense of the “real” world and in an ontological sense, since the real world (both material and immaterial or imaginary) in Indigenous culture, is ontological. What is crucial here is the notion of Land. Land, and in an Indigenous view, Country is the basis of this ideology. Interestingly, this lineage, which resonates with Bolt’s notion of the “image” transcending representation, has not held much value throughout western thought. This is because western meta-narratives of light and enlightenment were established and have been used to devalue other frames of thought. The situated space proposed here formulated from and by an Indigenous cultural framework is one that builds over the constructed void of ideology and its inherent amnesia.
Bolt elaborates the concept of *methexis* in order to extend her argument of performativity. She draws on Paul Carter’s (1996) elaboration of *methexis* as a principle that can be used to understand the performative nature of Indigenous Australian cultural practices. For my project *Methexis*, a Greek term (and hence a western term) has been garnered to understand the performative power of Indigenous cultural practices. *Methexis* is understood as a sense of action, which encompasses performance that is not individualized, but has a direct relationship to the group and the commemorative act. As Carter observes, it is a performative production or action that brings something into being. Carter observes:

* Methexis was the ‘non-representative’ principle behind Celtic, and Aranda, art, whose spirals and mazes reproduced by an act of concurrent actual production a pattern danced on the ground. (Carter 1996: 84)

Carter’s *methexis* emphasizes a physical ground and it is through this ground that Indigenous practices resonate. Indigenous culture is based on an ancestral history where various aspects of culture are not isolated. For example, there is no distinction between art, culture and living in the mediated experience of human beings. It is through the concept of *methexis* that Bolt proposes a view of art that combines productive materiality and a relationship between bodies and objects. It is in this context that Bolt introduces a radical ontology, stating ‘Matter is transformed in the exchange between objects, bodies and images’ (Bolt 2004: 150). Bolt builds her argument by arguing that materialization is a dynamic of reciprocity
rather than a one way dynamic. In answer to the question ‘How do we experience a work of art as both an act of concurrent actual production and a sign?’ (Bolt 2004: 173) Bolt turns to Charles Sanders Peirce’s notion of semiosis to argue for a relationship between signification and the material world. She observes:

The dynamic object operates as a pressure on, or pulse in, the seeable. The insistence of the dynamic object constitutes a key energy or force in the work of art. Thus, a picture is not just the coded, immediate object. A picture also bears the pressure of the dynamical object. In this way, the dynamic object prevents the picture from being reduced to just a sign. (Bolt 2004: 175)

This force that prevents the image from being reduced to a sign is vital to my elaboration of Indigenous imaging. Bolt’s discussion of Peirce’s categorization of signs as iconic, symbolic and indexical extends on the idea of this dynamic force. The iconic sign refers to how an image looks like a thing, insofar that it is a mirror image. The symbolic sign is such that it “symbolizes” the thing, it is a representation of something, and does not necessarily look exactly like the thing it represents. The indexical sign is where the image creates a dynamic relation between the things it represents in relation to the viewer. In this instance, the image becomes exactly the thing itself, materializing itself by its causal relationship to the referent. This is a crucial point in relation to methexis and the indexical in the analysis of Indigenous ideology and practices which are grounded in Country. However it is important to point out that the above theories of Peirce still operate
within western ideological discourses that are predicated on notions of light and enlightenment. In this sense we are therefore pulled back into ideology as a western construct. The Indigenous relationship to Land provides an altogether different basis for conceiving of ideology and casts a new perspective on the notion of performativity as elaborated by Bolt. The positing of Land as a foundation of all Indigenous cultural practices thus points to a different conception of art – a conception that is “grounded” because we belong to Country.

**Grounded Ideology**

“Belonging to Country” is *methexis* or “grounded practice” and all cultural productions extending from this approach to practice utilize the performative power of the indexical. The premise of “Country” and its definition in an Indigenous ideology is the framework that provides an understanding of how the indexical and radical ontology operate. What is important in understanding this alternate framework is that Country also demonstrates the limits of western ideological discourses in terms of “grounding” its thinking:

What is the ‘ground’ in question which we inexplicably fail to touch? Philosophers may urge other philosophers to ground their thought more thoroughly, but this is merely a metaphor and assumes (once again) that the ground itself can be taken for granted. What is that fundamental surface that seems to inform every dimension of our oneiric, physiological and architectural fantasy but remains, hitherto, metaphorical, metaphysical-ungrounded? (Carter 1996: 3)
Carter refers to this elusive ground where philosophers establish their thinking and inquiry, yet they fail to discover its location both in a material and metaphysical sense. What is this “ground”, this fundamental basis that philosophical inquiry extends from or lays its foundations upon? This ever-escaping basis that eludes us, but is ever present is one that exists within the binaries of western philosophical discourses, moving constantly with apparent instability, and creating a sense of amnesia about our own reality. Within this instability, materialism defines itself, partially real and ephemeral at the same time, eluding our vision appearing sporadically in what Plato refers to as fleeting appearance of Being (Heidegger 1991: 195). Materialism is embedded within the construct of ideology itself which is specifically a western one; therefore any reverberation of a “new materiality” operates from this basis. A question is posed: Can we look outside this construct in order to explore ways of redefining a different type of materiality that western discourse is hoping to find?

Western discourses based on an ephemeral materiality and the construct of ideology attempt to strip away appearances in order to uncover an essence or truth. This action removes us further from the truth. Carter suggests that Western philosophy is no different to the bulldozers clearing the ground (Carter 1996: 3). In his discussion of the colonization of Australia he comments:

No one appears to worry about what was cleared away when the streets were laid out according to a two-dimensional plan, when the
natural topography was neutralized and in its place artificial vistas were carefully mortgaged. At no point in the process of arrival, survey, settlement and residence does the ground make any claim upon our attention. (Carter 1996: 1-2)

This represents a form of amnesia that underpins the colonization of Australia and all other colonizations. This underlying amnesia has a direct impact on the cultural foundations of Australia that have negative implications upon a cohesive cultural identity. It is through such a colonization of the so-called terra nullius that cultural amnesia evolves and has an impact on the value given to Indigenous culture predicated on Country. Apart from this amnesia about the ground of settlement, land is also seen as a type of “other”, land is something to be controlled and defined by the use of power. Land is also seen as the “Antipodes”, romanticized and feared. The important point here is that western thought works through a metaphors of light/sight as it relates to knowledge.

We build in order to stabilize the ground, to provide ourselves with a secure place where we can stand and watch. But this suggestion that the ground is treacherous, unstable, inclined to give away, is the consequence of our own cultural disposition to fly over the earth rather than walk with it. (Carter 1996: 2)
The type of value given to “land” in western terms differs greatly to an Indigenous one. Crucial here is the distinction between an Indigenous and western value of “land” and how a western definition is one that determines the value of an Indigenous one. Opposing the notion of clearing the metaphysical ground, is an Indigenous conception of art and a worldview that provides an alternative to cultural amnesia and ideology based upon imaginary relationships to real existence.

An Indigenous worldview locates materiality in a whole cultural practice. The most vital aspect of Indigenous ideology is that all aspects of culture do not stand alone. For example, art does not exist in isolation from life and culture as it plays a crucial role in cultural life, extending its relationship with Country. The ontological premise and connectedness of Indigenous ideology can be explicated further by Karen Lillian Martin’s framework of “relatedness theory”. In her examination of an Indigenist research paradigm, Martin presents her “relatedness” theory within the context of Aboriginal epistemology, communication protocols and discourse (Martin 2008: 9). In establishing a theoretical framework of Indigenist research, she states:

The theoretical framework, called relatedness theory, is comprised of three conditions: Ways of Knowing, Ways of Being, and Ways of Doing. These conditions articulate particular orientations to knowing, being and doing that are available to Aboriginal scholars. Thus, Indigenist research methodology is both an enquiry and immersion process…. (Martin 2008: 9)
Through her discussion of a Quandamoopah worldview and ontology, Martin observes that ‘Throughout this account of Quandamoopah worldview, the essential feature of relatedness is constant’ (Martin 2008: 69). She gives a definition of relatedness as a particular manner of connectedness and a relation between things, going on to say:

In this research study relatedness is defined as the set of conditions, processes and practices that occur amongst and between the Creators and Ancestors: the Spirits: the Filter and the Entities. This relatedness occurs across contexts and is maintained within conditions that are: physical, spiritual, political, geographical, intellectual, emotional, social, historical, sensory, instinctive and intuitive. (Martin 2008: 69)

It is this interconnectedness, or in Martin’s words, “relatedness” that further demonstrates the premise of a “real” relationship people have to an inseparable cultural ideology that is premised on Country. More importantly, this is further reiterated in Martin’s discussion about relatedness between people and Country.

We are therefore related to every inch of our Country and to every Entity within it, but there are sites where this relatedness is deeper for some Entities. For People, this depth of relatedness is experienced in terms of gender where there are women’s sites or men’s sites. There are also areas within our Country where the relatedness is deeper for certain families or clans. (Martin 2008: 70)
In Martin’s discussion, the three conditions that comprise “relatedness” are vital to an Aboriginal ontology. Martin’s theorization of ontology in relation to Ways of Doing substantiates how an Aboriginal worldview and lived experience is based on the practice of relatedness.

*People,* however, have practices that range from rituals to ceremonies and thus, every time we fish, camp, talk about or walk on Country we are living relatedness, the practices of Ways of Doing. (Martin 2008: 80)

This relatedness and premise of Country will be illustrated with reference to the works of Kathleen Petyarre and Rover Thomas and further elaborated through an examination of the works of Uncle Badger Bates. In the next chapters I will also present and situate my own practice within this field of Indigenous cultural productions and demonstrate how my works illuminate cultural practice that is based within the “real”. Understanding this alternative framework permits us to reconfigure the context of contemporary art in Australia hitherto based on western representationalist notions of ideology.
CHAPTER TWO

INDIGENOUS CULTURAL IDEOLOGY

Indigenous Cultural Ideology and Arts Practices

In this chapter I explore how ideology and *methexis* operate within Indigenous cultural practices. I do this through the work of selected Aboriginal artists to demonstrate real immateriality and real materiality that is predicated and formed out of Country. I will contrast the way a western artistic framework tends to operate within a representationalist mode by examining contemporary Australian artists whose ideology in art practice perpetuates amnesia. This analysis will allow us to witness false consciousness of a western dominant ideology in action. In this context, I introduce my practice in contrast to and for the purpose of critiquing this western framework grounded on a false consciousness. Whilst providing this alternative framework, I will elaborate and extend on my notions of the *methexical*, the real immaterial and the real material through practice.

Grand narratives and representation within western discourses result in the onset of “amnesia” grounded in a subjective position that is related to ideology. This also applies to western conceptualizations of “art” and its art practices. Indigenous cultural ideology is based on how our ancestors brought into existence the *methexical* relationship between Country and people. As discussed with reference to Martin’s “relatedness”, from this ground, all cultural productions are created with a holistic inter-relatedness as they do not exist in isolation to one another. The vital part of this ideology is the movement and dynamic force of everything including the movement across Country and all culture throughout the mediation of
everyday life. Within this dynamic, there is no split between memory and temporarily or between the ontic and the ontological, the real and the imaginary.

The argument that Indigenous cultural ideology is ontological goes beyond Heidegger’s notion of ontology. Heidegger’s notion of ontology still operates within western modes of thinking. This is so because Indigenous Australian ontology refuses the binaries of western thought. Also, an Indigenous framework permits a reconceptualization of ontology that involves a shift from “light” to “Land” as an underpinning condition for ideology. Whilst Heidegger’s thinking on ontology is underpinned by the metaphorics of light and revelation, the Indigenous imaginary is grounded in materiality and the “real” – in ontology. The immaterial is materially constituted by the real material conditions of existence, where the immaterial and the metaphysical become a reality through the practice of creating cultural productions, through the relatedness of the imaginary or immaterial and the physical and material or real dimensions of art making.

Immateriality in Indigenous cultural ideology is manifest in the real existence of Land. Here, I would like to posit the concept of “Real Immateriality” as a term that encapsulates the notion of an Indigenous ontology in which the real, the material and the imaginary operate concurrently. “Real immateriality” offers an alternative way of defining the concept of “ground”. Western philosophical discourse and conceptions of art formulated in a representationalist view of the world seeks a fundamental reality, which underpins artistic practices and its relationship to materiality. This relationship of materiality, artistic practice and culture is already realized and accepted in an Indigenous worldview. This has fundamental and
widespread ramifications for notions of cultural identity and the discourse of artistic production in highlighting how the relationship of the everyday world and cultural productions inform and give basis to Indigenous cultural identity. The ontological relationship that people have to country is vital in Indigenous cultural practices where the casual relationship between the referent and the sign is reciprocal:

Art provides a sacred charter to the land and producing art is one of the conditions of existence. It keeps the past alive and maintains its relevance to the present. (Morphy 1998: 5)

This relationship is demonstrated in the works of both Alyawarr and Eastern Anmatyerr artists Kathleen and Margaret Petyarre and Warmun artist Rover Thomas. Petyarre’s work focuses on her country as a foundation to her identity and she states:

That’s the dreaming. The Dreaming journeys were made for real people, for Aboriginal people. And now we really follow that Dreaming – now Aboriginal people keep following it. (Petyarre in West and Green 1993: 215)

Petyarre’s work focuses on the relationship of the Dreaming and the location of ancestors on her Country. Her work also points out important information such as
the location of food, animals and water. These things and the location of important sites and tracks are vital in the foundation of “belonging to Country” and her work demonstrates a reality founded in real Country which is the ontological premise of Indigenous cultural ideology. It is the reciprocal relationship that she has with Country that informs her work, where Country is not passive in the sense of having been taken for granted. For example, in the work *Emu, thorny devil, yam and dogwood seed dreamings at Althalker and Akweranty* (fig. 1), Petyarre demonstrates her own and her family’s relationship to Country. This specific work outlines a women’s ceremony from Alhalker Country.

Figure 1. Kathleen and Margaret Petyarre, *Emu, thorny devil, yam, dogwood seed dreamings at Althalker and Akweranty*, 1989, batik on silk, 593 x 224cm

The complexity of this work lies in the relationship of this ceremony to ancestors, animals, dreamings and Country itself. This Country is Petyarre’s grandfathers’ Country, where various marks in the work *materialize* emu tracks, tracks of dancing women, dingoes, yams, yam leaves, hairstring skirts, dogwood seeds, women’s body paint designs and the dreaming journey of the mountain devil lizards. All aspects of this work extend from Country, not only the images, but the
materials used in its production, for example, the ochres. It is this constant immersion in all things associated with Country that creates this work, and it is the artist’s role to continue to bring this into existence into material and imaginary reality. Country in this instance plays an active role in the materialization of the work. The work is not a representation of Country, it is an immersive performance of Country. The compositional elements of rhythm and repetition of patterns produce an immersive and sensuous materiality. When looking at this work, the viewers’ eyes dance across the surface, the repetition of marks creates the immersive experience in the viewer, forcing the viewers body to move with the work. This work goes beyond a representationalist view of the world because it engenders a visual and bodily experience. The performative aspect distinguishes such work from representation. According to Bolt, there is a relationship of work to body in the performative act that is articulated through the artwork.

I believe that we can argue that the work of art can exceed its limits as representation and become more than the medium that bears it. Further, I would suggest that this materialization involves a mutual reflection rather than a one way causality. (Bolt 2004: 185)

In *Emu, thorny devil, yam and dogwood seed dreamings at Althalker and Akweranty*, the work becomes the emu tracks, tracks of dancing women, dingoes, yams, yam leaves, hairstring skirts, dogwood seeds, women’s body paint designs and the dreaming journey of the mountain devil lizards. The texture and tactility of the work also engenders an auditory response through its synaesthetic quality. The repetition of marks is like the beating of a drum whilst its tactility gives rise to
sculptural form. It is the compositional and modal function of this work that draws the viewer in, dragging the eyes across the surface. We then realize that the surface is divided into sections (almost grids) and we forget what we essentially were looking at as we become totally immersed into the work. It is this relationship between the content of the work, the making of the work and the viewing that engenders a physical and sensory response. This is Petyarre’s *methexis*.

This relationship can also be observed in the work of Rover Thomas, which draws on recollections of the Kukaja/Wangkanjunga world of the Gibson Desert region. His work directly articulates country in the sense of a performative mapping. For example, *Landscapes at Kalumpiwarra, Yalmanta, and Ngulalintji*, (fig 2). This work shows a person’s spirit journey where they cannot decide which direction to go.

Figure 2. Rover Thomas, *Landscapes at Kalumpiwarra, Yalmanta, and Ngulalintji*, 1984, natural pigments and gum on board, 300 x 151cm
This work is a direct mapping of Country, it performs Country as it is the artist’s role to articulate, in this case, Thomas’ Country. It is the creative act that allows this performance.

In the creative act, the artist no longer sets the world before him/her as an object, but rather allows a total openness to the Being of art, that is the “work” of art. (Bolt 2004: 186)

The top band of yellow ochre demonstrates Blackfellow Creek, the large red ochre shape at the top is the rock at Ngarkarlin, the small white shape on the left is the grass at Yalmanta, the repeated shapes in orange show a wooded area of trees and the lower yellow ochre shape shows Ashburton Hill with a creek running through it. His work demonstrates a methexis, a performative rhythm that is part of the real surface of Country and this performativity is real as it extends from the real world. Like Petyarre, this performative rhythm is realized in the dots in Thomas’ work; they create a sensation that is like the rhythm and sound of a train crossing its tracks. The dots mark a physical trace of the jabbing hand that relives Country, mapping the surface of the ground. This has real effects and affects on the viewer and allows the viewer to experience how meaning emerges from the action of art making.

Meaning is embodied and in Thomas’ work, is locally situated in the real. This real world is immaterial and material concurrently and it is Thomas’ causal relationship to this world that is evident in his work. The work *Landscapes at Kalumpiwarra,*
Yalmanta, and Ngulalintji realizes this Country in a material sense from the immaterial world. The detail in the work draws us into Country. Line, color, tone and shape create a methexical mapping, laying location of Country across the surface. Physically the work is a manifestation of Country through its modal and sensuous effects of the elements of line, color and shape, movement and repetitions. Our re-experiencing of Thomas’ hand forces us to enter the painting, to enter Country.

This work is a performative mapping, not a landscape. If anything, we could term it a Countryscape. Western accounts of the “Landscape” refer to the depiction of scenery, as it is a representation of cultivated land and composed of land with horizon line and sky. In Thomas’ work, mapping of Country is an account of an Indigenous conception of Land as Country. Land in this instance is not an object that is depicted but is a living entity that performs and is materialized through the image.

**Methexical Ontology and Performativity**

It is of vital importance to the artist to articulate the relationship to Country, as it is our role to bring the world into existence through our interaction with it. Art is the result of this reciprocal relationship. This demonstrates an Indigenous conception of ideology as being our “real” relationship to existence, not one based on the imaginary. The immersive experience one has with Country that informs the work and this further demonstrates the purpose of Indigenous cultural practices of relaying the ontological methexical relationship of Country into the material work. The transmutation between the artist, Country and work constitutes its methexical
ontology. Methexis is that action that brings something into being. It is the relationship between the action and what is created that engender relatedness.

The social ramifications of this are vital to the ongoing evolution of Indigenous cultural practices as they are intrinsically linked to the real world and refuse to work within the binary of the material and the metaphysical, since both occur at the same time within these practices, which is vital to a reconfiguration of ideology according to Indigenous terms. Country is the foundation of this ideology and it is the causal relationship that we have to Country which is manifest in cultural productions. The causal relationship is not based on an imaginary relationship to real existence as it is experienced in a western representationalist account based in Althusserian terms. The mapping in Thomas’ work is realized by the performative application of the white dots that repeat throughout the surface. They force the viewer to trace Country, to experience the mapping in a physical way. Each shape in the work realizes parts of Country, mapping locations that create a movement that transmits the journey to be taken. It is the repetition of marks that produce movement in the work.

The aspect of Country in relationship to cultural productions demonstrates the ontological relatedness of Indigenous cultural practices. It is the materialization of the metaphysical aspect of Country in these practices that refuses the split between the ontic and the ontological, the material and the immaterial. The textural aspect of Thomas’ work marks the texture and physicality of Country, locating it from an aerial view allowing us to experience the metaphysical journey across Country. It is this experience and physicality that is realized in my practice. The drawings I have
produced, called *Methexical Countryscapes* are positioned in a similar way to Petyarre and Thomas, however they extend the *methexical* relationship of the ontic to the ontological, the material and the immaterial through their materialization of the relatedness of the abstract and the representational. My practice also goes beyond the relatedness of the binaries constructed by a representationalist way of thinking. This is because the practice of making engenders lived experience *methexically*, engendering a material experience, as do the works of Petyarre and Thomas. The *Methexical Countryscapes* also expose and realize the tension between the abstract and the concrete; between the material, the real and the imaginary. The tensions between these elements is resolved in an Indigenous world view through the notion of “Real Immateriality” (discussed further in Chapter Three and Four).

Carter refers to the relationship between mark-making and experience as *methexis* and it is the ongoing *methexical* relationship to Country that is brought to the fore in these practices. This account of *methexis* can be applied to the effects of making and viewing art which realizes a direct indexical, rather than a representational relationship between Land and the viewing subject. *Methexis* resolves or erases the boundaries between Doing, Being and Knowing; all become the continuum of lived experience. Bolt elaborates on the potential by observing

> What emerges in and through *methexis* is a different sort of practice and a different politics of practice. Just as hammering in a workshop shows up the web of significant relations, so in *methexis* a pattern begins to emerge from the shifting shapes of relational ontologies. The
A powerful transmutation of art and life comes to the fore in the works of Petyarre and Thomas and will be further demonstrated in my analysis of the work of Uncle Badger Bates. Grounded materiality is evident in both the language and material practices of Indigenous Australians. The sound and rhythm of language in Indigenous Australia correlate to form, color and rhythm experienced in visual language. It is important to note that there is no written language in Indigenous Australia so the sound and practice of language is repeated in art and relived to be embedded in memory and affect. Visual language has the same importance as the spoken word. However, it is also important to recognize that the status of “art” in Indigenous culture deviates from western understandings. Among the various languages in Aboriginal Australia, the word “art” is not at all common. For example, in Southern Queensland, Murri country, the word “Mulka” translates as painting. Also, in Wergaia language of the Horsham district of Victoria, “Yuka” translates as “to paint”. These two examples illustrate how language relating to art denotes action. All visual production is active and engenders an ontological relationship. The image of Country is Country within the artwork. This is realized in my practice of the Methexical Countryscapes as they engender my own immersive experience through mark-making of Country. This is further re-experienced through the scale of the works and the repetition and tactility of the marks within the drawings.
In Indigenous ideology, cultural productions are active and inclusive for the whole of society. The visual arts in Indigenous culture have a language that is always associated with, and is parallel to other languages, stories, dance, song, and ritual. In an Aboriginal view, the meaning of the visual is inscribed in one’s awareness only when it is absorbed through languages that effect and affect both mind and body. Languages in this instance not only included the spoken oral tradition but the visual languages created in cultural productions.

A recognition of the dynamic of ritual and practice within Indigenous culture is crucial to overcoming the western experience of amnesia and its imaginary relationship to existence. Ritual is vital to memory and mediates between the real and the imaginary. Indigenous cultural ideology is understood as an “actual” and not a “potential” trying to build over the void of nihilism. Indigenous culture has its ideology grounded both materially and metaphysically in Country itself. This overcomes the notion of the void experienced in western discourses. It is through my creative practice and written analysis that I demonstrate how the works explore and extend the relationship that methexis has to materializing Country and therefore overcoming the dilemma of amnesia.

**Immaterial Land, Memory and Practice**

Indigenous art is a process that reveals memory and is a practice that preserves *living* culture. Indigenous practice and “cultural ideology” links ideology, identity and art in a cohesive ontology that creates a different “value” to our existing understanding of “art”.
The important point here is that an Indigenous framework is connected with the “real” world. As previously discussed, both Petyarr’s and Thomas’ works are grounded in the everyday world. The works *Emu, thorny devil, yam and dogwood seed dreamings at Althalker and Akweranty* and *Landscapes at Kalumpiwarra, Yalmanta, and Ngulalintji* extend out of the artists’ relationship to Country. This relationship is based on something real existing in both the real world and the artists’ imaginary world, as they are inseparable. For example, the emu and the thorny devil in the images are real as the ones that exist in Country. This is an Indigenous ontology that is based in the “relatedness” of all things. Martin’s notion of relatedness asserts that all things in Country have a vital inter-connectedness. As images are part of this economy they are “real” in their relationship to Country and as Aboriginal “cultural ideology” is predicated on the “real” world. This Indigenous framework also proposes different layers of ontology, from the physical to the spiritual. However, western thought views this as mere “myth”. A western conception of culture is one that has a dramatic impact on contemporary Australia. Edward Said noted:

> Now the trouble with this idea of culture is that it entails not only venerating one’s one culture but also thinking of it as somehow divorced from, because transcending, the everyday world. (Said 1993: xiii)
Much of contemporary art practice is divorced from the everyday or real world. For example, postmodern art may at times involve social critiques but it is primarily built on a negation of any grounded truths. I will now turn to Uncle Badger Bates’ cultural productions to illustrate the ideas presented here. This will be extended in the following chapter to inform an account of my practice and my research methodology.

**Practice: Uncle Badger Bates**

A visit to Uncle Badger’s Country and ancestral lands provides the opportunity to view ancient rock engravings that are around 20,000 years old. This type of etching into rock is what Uncle Badger has transformed into mark-making through the process of lino printing. Uncle Badger’s cultural practice has direct lineage to an ancient past and practice. The ontological *methexicality* of his work lies in its reality, as his work is directly derived from his “Country”. The work *Parntu Thayilana Wiithi – Cod Eating Yabbies* (Fig. 3) is an example of cultural productions that encompass the metaphysical, the material or the ontological and the imaginary.

![Figure 3. Badger Bates, Parntu Thayilana Wiithi- Cod Eating Yabbies, 2004, lino print, 37 x 79cm](image)
Uncle Badger has constructed this work from memory, a real experience. The cod is part of his real experience since he has opened this fish numerous times creating a continual ontological relationship. This is evidenced by the relationship that Paakantyi have with the Darling River:

When you open the swim bladder of the Murray Cod, the shape of its skin shows the place where this fish was born, under the same shaped tree where it was born. (Bates: 2008)

It is believed that people who experience this part of the cod are also born under the same tree that the shape forms. There are various stories such as this that are passed through the generations that illustrate different relationships between people creating skin groups. This relationship underpins the connection between people and their country and further, the relationship between the real physical world and the metaphysical. These both have a causal effect on real land, real people and real Country through ongoing practices, actions and beliefs. It is this causal relationship that is demonstrated in the indexical images produced by Uncle Badger. In Bolt’s terms, this image has “real material affects”. We can see the image’s construction and how the artist has realized the cod and through its indexicality, relive the experience. The cod has real material effects and becomes the cod itself through a re-experiencing. This is crucial to understand a new materiality. Uncle Badger has made this work from memory, and has presented the cod in iconic and symbolic form. However, the work becomes the cod itself through having a real material
effect on the viewer by its constant movement, created by the linear patterns that have been created within the ancient rock etchings of his Country. There is nothing hidden or ephemeral in this work. It does not claim what it is not, but rather this work simply relates to the real world conveying a story that is embedded in an ancient culture. The sophistication of this work is in the ability to borrow from one tradition, and to communicate through another. This is engendered in the work itself through experiences as real material experience. The viewer re-experiences this materiality even as, simultaneously, one views it as “representation”.

This ability is also illustrated by the work *No More Catfish* (Fig. 4). This work has a direct relationship to Uncle Badger’s experience in watching catfish as a youth. By utilizing mark-making techniques Uncle Badger brings this work to life and also returns us to question why there is no more catfish.

![Figure 4. Badger Bates, *No More Catfish*, 2004, lino print, 37 x 75cm](image)

In his Country and in this work, Uncle Badger is illustrating a direct connection to his surroundings and further materializes the performative power of the image. In discussing his work, Uncle Badger states: ‘I look at the fish, I respect it, I eat it and bring it back to life in art’ (Bates: 2008). It is this performative action that “makes
real” the indexical quality of his work. The performative transmutation between life and art is realized here. Uncle Badger’s statement is an action; it is movement, which is also demonstrated pictorially within the work itself. The dynamic of experiencing this fish that enables Uncle Badger to bring it to life within the work. This is an ancient performative tradition. There are many sets of connections existing in his work.

Firstly, he is relating memory (a vital factor in Indigenous culture) to present experience through cultural production and repetition. This memory is embedded in Country and incites a transformation in the thought and awareness of viewers. The physical work also moves constantly by the placing of marks within the pictorial space. The repetition of line and contour and of light and dark engender movement. This movement disturbs the viewer’s normal optical function. It is this repetition and rhythm of lines that set up a visceral reaction in the viewer and forces the viewer to move. Similar to Thomas’ mapping of Country, No More Catfish is a methexical mapping, yet with a deeper engagement. The wavy lines give rise to optical and sensuous effects immersing the viewer in experiential responses and a kind of knowing. At the same time the viewer is not taken anywhere beyond the present. This is its methexical immersion.

The work extends beyond a mapping and engenders the relationship between figuration and abstraction, the real and the imaginary. This is a key point in my argument: the catfish is a representation of the figurative counteracted with the abstraction of line and contour. This is a new materialism, a new real. In these layers of Country, the real, the imaginary, the concrete and the abstract, the work is
realized. The lines, contour and the indexical catfish all operate *methexically* to not only force something into being, but to also take us into its experience. This is the real immaterial and the real material. These layers also illustrate the Indigenous perception of all existence in congruent layers from metaphysical to physical dimensions. The lineage of cultural productions in an Indigenous view is also important as images have been renewed in present experience from ancient traditions which are embedded in “Country”.

By engaging with and discussing his work, one forms a relationship of immediacy with Uncle Badger. This immediacy encourages listeners not only to memorize but also to visualize at each stage. This further illustrates the performative power of his images, relating ancient traditions in both a metaphysical and material sense in contemporary form. His images are extracted from the foundation of his Country and are further demonstrated by his origins: Paakanyi, meaning “river people”. The word Paakanyi further demonstrates the *methexical* relationship that language has to Country, and in this instance River Country. Language becomes an act or performance that brings Country into being. The sound of language works similarly to the synaesthetic reverberations of the dots on Thomas work or the wavy lines in Uncle Badger’s catfish. Uncle Badger’s work articulates an Indigenous “cultural ideology”, an ideology that is created through the real conditions of existence, and not by our imaginary relationship with them, as is the case in the western construct of ideology and its relationship to a separate culture. The possibility of cultural ideology based on real conditions of existence raises an important question: Is it possible to incorporate ideas from Indigenous culture within a system of western thought in ways that would contribute to the formation of a more cohesive cultural
identity? I would argue that this may be possible if we can recognize a different conception of ideology permitted by the grafting of an Indigenous understanding of art and its relation to culture into a western framework. If the viewer of the work shares in the cultural experience there is a re-living of the experience of the artist and a transfer between artist and viewer. This can extend to individuals beyond culture resulting in the emergence of an empathetic relationship made possible through art. In this sense Indigenous culture is vital to a refiguring of the function of art and of ideology as within it there is no false consciousness. Art has a different function within the broader spectrum of cultural practices. It is in this sense of ideology and culture in which there is no false consciousness that “reality” and cultural ideology can be transferred between cultures.

Expedience and Post Modern Practice

How then do methexical ideological practices that are based on Country and “relatedness” antithesize contemporary art practices within Australia? An Indigenous framework also proposes different layers of ontology, from the physical to the spiritual. However, western thought view these practices as mere “myth”, as previously discussed in relation to the construction of value. A tradition within a western conception of culture is one that is based on representationalist notions of reality and on the notion of an imaginary relation to existence. This view has a dramatic impact on contemporary Australia because it perpetuates a division between most contemporary art practices. In order to illuminate how contemporary art practices engender false consciousness that perpetuate amnesia, I will now turn to a consideration of art works by John Young and Imants Tillers. My analysis of the practices of these artists is intended to illustrate their theoretical position and
the construct of ideology I have outlined. It is also an attempt to reveal the apathy and complacency found in art practices from the 1980s until recent times.

The works of John Young and in particular his “Double Ground” paintings are an exemplary demonstration of how post-structuralist theory and thinking transformed art into a coded system of signs and representation. Young’s work is contingent on the conditions of the “art world”, a world that is based on representationalist notions of ideology. Although the stance in Young’s practice is contrary to a Marxist position in its attempt to advance the notion of plurality, it still operates in the domain of an ideology based on the subject’s relationship to an imaginary existence. Although it may be argued that his work looks at the difficulty in defining cultural centeredness and connectedness, especially in relation to his own diaspora, Young’s work maintains a relationship with the symbolic and the imaginary that perpetuates a state of amnesia from within a representationalist mode of practice and thinking. This is so because there is no resolution to the deferral of meaning that is offered in the postmodern space of this practice. Carolyn Barnes observes:

The ‘Double Ground’ paintings reflect the insoluble conflict of difference between representational and cultural orders, suggesting there can be no straightforward resolution to the problem of cultural difference. (Barnes 2005: 47)
Young’s practice operates in the domain of the postmodern and his works clearly reflect this space of ever-deferred meanings and it is in this domain that the artist produces work that fails to question this unresolved dilemma. Barnes states:

The ‘Double Ground’ paintings recognise the importance of distinguishing between how things really are as opposed to how they appear, exploring how images circulate and fix dominant mythological schemas that stand for meaning and identity. A primary concern for the series in this respect is the projection of meaning onto and through nature and the human body. (Barnes 2005: 43-44)

When looking at Young’s work, this notion of ‘how things really are as opposed to how they appear’ is questionable. We have an ontological crisis that is not questioned because of our complacency and amnesia concerning the establishment and formation of the “Lucky country”. Art practice that brings to the fore issues related to our political climate is not promoted, and furthermore, contemporary artists tend to remain passive on many issues. This can be seen in the works in an exhibition by Young, Orient/Occident at the Tarra Warra Museum of Art and is one example of the relationship of his work has to the “real”. It has been stated by the artist himself and by Megan Backhouse that ‘his pictures have a political edge’ (Backhouse 2006:24) in reference to refugees and issues in the Middle East. Furthermore, in relation to these works, Barnes states:

In dealing with issues including Australia’s treatment of asylum seekers and the war on terror, they bear witness to the way cultural
and identity politics are directly implicated in world political events.

(Barnes 2005: 48)

Looking at the works Red, Blue (Fig. 5), Red Blue III (Fig. 6), a convoluted reference to polypropylene shopping bags that apparently represent the suitcases of displaced refugees is seen in the works.

The work Red, Blue 2003 (Fig. 5) demonstrates a compositional play of images that create the double ground that Young investigates. The relationship of images is just this; a compositional play and the relationship of images do not clearly investigate the plight faced by refugees. The structure of this work demonstrates a representationalist ideology. Manifestly, Young is attempting to portray a politics sympathetic to the plight of refugees. However, latently what emerges in the structure and content of the work is a voyeuristic power play between the subject (viewer/artist) and the object (female form). The figure in this work is presented
within the tradition of western nude painting and is highly eroticized. This representation does not suggest that she is a refugee who has suffered physical and psychological trauma. The composition of the work further adds to a western patriarchal gaze in the creation of windows within the work. This window structure forces the viewer to extend their gaze to the eroticised figure, who is in a very submissive and passive pose. The patterning of the cross-hatched polypropylene shopping bags act as a filter and further direct the viewers gaze towards what is revealed in the windows. This work engenders pleasure for western eyes, and through its peephole framing, the subject/viewer gains the power.

The eroticizing and romanticising of the female form underpins imperialist notions pertaining to the object of desire further separating the content and structure from lived reality and real experience. The choice Young makes of a young woman in this work fails to depict the experience of refugees. It is more in line with a tradition of patriarchal representations of the female form. Although the shapes and images may have a dependency on one another, the work is a depiction of an imaginary existence. These works are not only within a representationalist mode of operation; they also extend an amnesiac condition of covering up the real issue at hand. It can thus be argued that the structure of this work perpetuates a false consciousness. This western imperialist and representationalist mode of politics can be further seen in the following work in which Young appropriates Persian carpet designs in the painting The Pergamon Room, (Fig. 7) to reflect a relation to the issues of war in the Middle East.
This work does not evoke any of the trauma or reality of asylum seekers or terrors of war, and the suggestion it does is absurd. This work also operates within a representationalist and imperialist construct and ideology. Looking at both the manifest and latent meanings in this image, there is a heavy emphasis on the conceptual rather than the material. Young’s attempt to appropriate Persian designs, for the purpose of representing the Middle East within the context of the politics of war, terror and refugees, fails. This failure is due to the overtly latent meanings in the work. The eroticising of the female form, which is passive and subjugated by a dominant western representationalist gaze, portrays the imaginary in this work. Young deploys the pictorial device of window like shapes to direct the viewer’s gaze. The ambiguous relationship of scenes and objects in this work ensure that the female form is not only an object of desire but also an object for decoration. The power dynamic set up in this work is consistent to the representations of the orient that conjure up this erotic ideal. This power dynamic operates within a system of political doctrine that has seen the west willing itself over the Orient.
My whole point about this system is not that it is a misrepresentation of some Oriental essence-in which I do not believe for a moment-but that it operates as representations usually do, for a purpose, according to a tendency, in a specific historical, intellectual, and even economic setting. (Said 1979: 273)

The depiction of the East in Young’s work is primarily from a western aesthetic point of view and the image structures a representationalist and imperialist mode for the viewer.

Young’s work is concerned only with its own discourse, not of a social consciousness outside its own parameters. This particular work almost trivialises the terrors of war in its reference to Persian patterning coupled with images that symbolically represent aspects of Middle Eastern culture. The image of the female figure in this work is highly glossed over which is a pictorial summation that the issue of war is glossed over as well. This digital image of the Persian pattern is divorced from reality, and this work extends an inherent amnesia. Its appropriation destroys the original patterning.

The major focus of this work is the notion of aesthetics, the play of the visual image in relation to the photographic, and the issue of authorship in the discourse of the postmodern. Its decorative aesthetics enforce its purpose: to become a highly commodified item. This Marxist/Althusserian position, along with its plundering of Eastern imagery, ensure its contribution to amnesia. The work is not about “real” issues affecting real people and the claim that these works present a
political stance demonstrates how this work is very far removed from the everyday world and clearly demonstrates Young’s relationship with the imaginary. It is also in his imaginary relationship to existence that Young operates in his position as an artist working in a marginalised periphery from the art centres of Europe and America. It is in this domain that his contemporary Imants Tillers also operates.

It is in the framework of Australia and its art practice being at the periphery of the centres of the art worlds of Europe and America that Tillers attempts to establish a more level playing field in cross-cultural exchange. This challenge is what has informed the work of Tillers in reference to his own diaspora and position of being a migrant to Australia. The context of Australia’s history is one that could rightfully be defined as one of theft, and Tillers’ work which operates under the morphological banner of postmodernism and appropriation can be said to illustrate this notion. This is demonstrated by the elusive and contentious title of his exhibition *Not yet post-Aboriginal*. We need to consider the “true” meaning behind this word, “post” in “post-modern” and “post-colonial”. It is in Tillers’ notion of “white Aborigine” that I question the status of contemporary thought with regards to identity and the “other” in relation to his practice.

My critique to follow is necessary to uncover the blind spot of both postmodern practice and the ideology in which it is positioned. Such a critique is needed in order to point out the subsuming and consequential erasure of a specifically Indigenous identity predicated on relatedness to Country. My intention is not to set up a binary, but rather to establish an alternative position from which a different kind of dialogue may emerge. Making a claim for located or situated knowledge
neither asserts not denies binary, but rather attempts to reveal “differing” as a
necessary process of meaning making. The work of Tillers illustrates the absurd
notion of the perception of his self-definition as “white Aborigine”. Tillers’
appropriations are problematic in a number of ways. Firstly, his appropriation of
Indigenous artworks (with or without permissions) employs them in a conceptual
and representationalist mode of practice which from an Indigenous world view and
within an Indigenous cosmology may be considered as “misuse” or
misunderstanding of the underlying mode and function of art-making in Indigenous
cultures. Secondly, Tillers’ claim to the identity of “white Aborigine” subsumes
difference and as such mirrors the colonial assumption of Terra Nullius through its
act of erasure of the notion of a specifically Australian Aboriginality that is
predicated on culturally historical and traditional relatedness to Country. Rather
than engendering a dialogue with the other as a mode of “differing” or diffractive
engagement, this erasure perpetuates the very forgetting that my critique here is
attempting to uncover.

The main purpose of my analysis is to reveal the inter-cultural abyss that continues
to exist in Australia, as well as the lack of a sustainable, real and inclusive cultural
identity. My critique also aims to further demonstrate the importance of the
alternative ideology founded in Aboriginal culture, which I attempt to re-iterate in
my own artistic practice. The following comment by Blazwick underpins my
position here:

Imants Tillers’ reflections of reproductions of 19th and 20th century
Western ‘masterworks’, often invaded with fragments of ‘native’
culture, suggest place through displacement: reality through representation: authorship, origin and identity through copy, through distance and through, not the author, but the spectator who gazes down this hall of mirrors. (Blazwick 1988)

I argue that Tillers’ work is located in the mode of representation and it is through his use and abuse of “native” (sic: Blazwick’s words) images that set up a dynamic that defines his own displacement. In 1985, Imants Tillers “appropriated” imagery for an artwork, *The Nine Shots* 1985 (Fig. 8), from a work created by Michael Nelson Jakamara; *Five Dreamings* (Fig. 9).

Figure 8. Imants Tillers, *The Nine Shots*, 1985, synthetic polymer paint, oilstick, 91 canvas boards, 330 x 266cm

Figure 9. Michael Nelson Jakamara, *Five Dreamings*, 1984, acrylic on canvas, 122 x 182cm

Although Tillers and Jakamara have since collaborated on a number of works, it is in the context of *methexis*, Country and the real, that this earlier act of appropriation demonstrates a dislocation associated with postmodern discourse.
The act of theft on Tillers’ part in reference to Five Dreamings reflects a colonial artist acting in the role of the dominant ideology that confirms a colonized and representationalist thinking that continues to dominate art discourses in Australia. This appropriation is theft, considering that Tillers himself discussed this action and only sought permission with Jakamara about a year after the work was created. It has been argued that Tillers plays a vital role in the definition of what constitutes contemporary Australian art, and is referred to as one of Australia’s most important contemporary artists. However, I would argue that this act of “appropriation”, in the context of our history, is one that adds to the growing amnesia and insensitivity in regards to Australia’s past.

In comparing both the works The Nine Shots (Fig.8) and Five Dreamings (Fig.9) we can experience the methexical performativity in Jakamara’s work; the movement, the patterns and the repetition of marks, dots and shapes take us on a journey from and into Country. This movement has real material effects and affects upon us as the viewer and enables us to relive Country. The circular dot shapes are a manifestation of locations across Country; the patterning engenders the tactility and structure of Country. The dreaming and creation of Country is realized in this work through the formal elements, purposefully bringing Country into being.

Tillers’ appropriation in The Nine Shots (Fig.8) immediately destroys the original’s methexical performativity. The Nine Shots conceptually transforms the content into signs, symbols and representations. By superimposing the figure of a man onto the surface, Tillers does not integrate the image but rather it takes over the original. There is no attempt to integrate images in an aesthetic way. Tillers
claims to be using this erasure of Country in order to depict a political dislocation (Hart 2006: 89), however latently; he has committed an act of violence. The question here is dislocation by whom and of whom? The large scale of the superimposed figure abruptly intrudes and destroys the surface. The violence of this act lies not only in the destruction of Jakamara’s image, but also in its colonizing and re-mapping of the Country of the original work. What it does succeed in doing is structuring a work that in performing its own situated meanings, defers and erases original meaning and thus perpetuates amnesia in its act of Terra Nullius. The appropriation replaces the methexical mapping of Jakamara that is embedded in Country and traditional culture with the representational. Thus the mode of mapping Country through methexical practice is destroyed.

What is ignored here is the fundamental aspect of Indigenous ideology being immersed in relatedness. By this theft of Aboriginal imagery Tillers is removing relatedness not only to Country but also to culture, in order to set it up in the domain of the ontic. It is in this postmodern folly that reaffirms representationalist notions of art and therefore produces amnesia. In addition, the work also creates a dynamic within the power relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal artists and conceptions of value. Tillers argues from the periphery, utilising further “marginalised” imagery in order to overturn the “mainstream”. Some questions arise; isn’t this the challenge that Tillers has taken on himself, to overturn the notion of the art centre? Does his appropriation of Aboriginal imagery ascribe value, in western terms, to Aboriginal imagery and does Tillers himself become the centre he so determinedly attempts to critique? Is Tillers then creating a binary
where Aboriginal imagery and Indigenous ideology become the “other” so that Tillers becomes the “mainstream” which he so desperately wants to critique? In his attempt to investigate displacement in relation to location, Tillers further covers up the “ground” that western ideology forgets. It is this type of arrogance that not only insults us, but further re-iterates that our culture, practices and productions are ascribed valued by the chosen hand of a dominant western discourse, and in this case, an artist. As it has been observed by Marcia Langton, ‘Aboriginal art is used to define Whiteness through its role as a souvenir of the lowest levels of human evolution’ (Langton 2003:83). This can be further demonstrated with Tillers’ appropriation and act of *Terra Nullius* of Emily Kame Kngwarreye’s work *Big Yam Dreaming* 1995 (Fig. 10), in the work *Terra incognita* 2005 (Fig. 11). He says

> While Kngwarreye’s majestic painting relates to the lifecycle of the yam my interest in it apart from its stunning beauty was that her image with its network of tangled lines and worldly unpredictable trajectories seemed like an analogue for the complex networked connections within my canvasboard system. (Tillers in Hart 2006: 89)

This clearly demonstrates a representationalist view of the work and how Kngwarreye’s image relates to his own aesthetic. What the appropriation does do is ignore the relatedness and real relationship that an Indigenous work has to Country. *Big Yam Dreaming* is a realization and performance of Country, as Kngwarreye is the custodian of the big yam dreaming. This work is painted in an ongoing line and Kngwarreye’s hand has moved and danced across the surface creating a movement, repetition and rhythm of lines. These lines flow in and out of
each other creating lyrical shapes; this work is musical in its patterning. Its performance is both visual and auditory. This patterning is *grounded* in the reverberation of Country.

![Image 1](image1.png)

**Figure 10.** Emily Kame Kngwarreye, *Big Yam Dreaming*, 1995, synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 291.1 x 801.8cm

![Image 2](image2.png)

**Figure 11.** Imants Tillers, *Terra incognita*, 2005, synthetic polymer paint and gouache, 288 canvas boards, 304.8 x 853.4cm

The structure of this work draws the viewer’s vision across and into the surface, having a direct effect and affect on the viewer’s experience and immersion into Country. The interacting lines map out the cracked surface of the earth where the yam grows. These cracks/lines create a movement between negative and positive space that enable the viewer to look within the earth and across its surface concurrently. This shimmering between two modes of looking shifts the viewers’
vision across and within the surface of Country. This is Kngwarreye’s *methexical* mapping, locating her Country in a similar way to Thomas.

*Terra incognita* (Fig11) dislocates Kngwarreye’s work not only in its physical appropriation but also by its title. *Terra incognita* translates as “unknown land”. As I have discussed previously, Indigenous ideology, locality and Country are the basis of Aboriginal culture. Tillers’ title is an affront to the traditional custodians of Country. Through its structure, the work engenders amnesia through covering up and covering over of Country. As such the work may be viewed as an act of colonization.

This can be further demonstrated by the following quote that Tillers utilizes in a paper for the Venice Biennale in 1986: ‘Australia is the dumping ground for the rubbish of all the earth- The Skull (Ross May)’. (Tillers in Crowley 1996: 16) Tillers uses this quote in an attempt to inform the audience that Australia is a “dumping ground”, receiving second-hand art and copies from the art centres of Europe and America. Australia in this sense is a periphery of Europe and America. This quote is highly problematic and demonstrates the manifest and *latent* meanings at the hand of appropriation. The key point is that this quote demonstrates the working of unconscious elements that give rise to the false consciousness perpetuated by Tillers under a representationalist way of thinking. Again, my critique here is not intended to produce further binaries, but to reveal and uncover the blind spot of representationalist thinking which unavoidably involves a dimension of repression.
This effect of using language, and also images, in a manifest and latent way can be elaborated through Barrett’s critique and analysis of the works of Bill Hensen and Marian Drew. Although in reference to looking at photographic practices and images in term of a politics of abuse, we can examine the following statement by Barrett in reference to language.

The manifest content of this critical discourse works to negate or repress latent meanings that a narrative reading would allow. (Barrett 2009: 22)

This negation and repression is what Tillers’ appropriation achieves in reference to the quote by “The Skull” (Ross May). This is very dangerous. I have already examined this negation in the appropriation of Jakamara’s and Kngwarreye’s images.

So who is “The Skull”? The Skull was a member of the National Front of Australia, which was an Australian nationalist and anti-immigrant organisation in the 1970s and 1980s. The Skull (Ross May) was a neo-Nazi, an extremely racist person who publicly abused ethnic people and racial minorities. I personally and materially knew The Skull when I was a child. I remember The Skull would wear a Nazi uniform and attend rugby league football matches in Sydney. Because of his racial abuse to football players of ethnic descent, including a player of Jewish descent, The Skull was banned from attending various football ovals in Sydney. My real memories also extend to The Skull being respectful to my family, as he
had developed a fear of my older brothers. This fear was predicated on the threat
they posed to him because of his racial slurs and abuse.

Tillers is quoting from a neo-Nazi. The latent question here is; Does Tillers
sympathize with The Skull’s racial politics? Does Tillers believe that Australia is a
“dumping ground” for immigrants? Considering this act of appropriation of
language in concert with the theft of Aboriginal imagery, Tillers’ politics and
ideology is highly suspicious and questionable. In addition, when we compare the
use of language in different contexts, we can illuminate how it operates through the
real and the imaginary. For example, the word Paakantji that has been used in
relation to Uncle Badger extends a real and methexical relationship to Country.
The use of The Skull quote by Tillers conjures up the imaginary with very
disturbing representations. It is this folly and “game” played out within a
postmodern paradigm that not only demonstrates an ideology based on the
imaginary and a false consciousness, but also is one that perpetuates an amnesiac
condition, ignoring the cultural relatedness immersed in Indigenous ideology.

The key to understanding the work of Tillers is that he is adopting real things and
persons as mere symbols to be utilised in his representationalist and imaginary
schema.

Representationalism never seems to be able to get any closer to
solving the problem it poses because it is caught in the impossibility
of stepping out from its metaphysical starting place. (Barad 2003: 7)
These things have no real connection to Tillers’ real existence. Contrary to this is an Indigenous worldview where the image or reference is an index of the thing and clearly has a causal relationship to the real.

In his discussion on the “sonorisation” of the audio-visual within the sphere of contemporary art, Paul Virilio (2004: 69) argues that artists fail to appreciate what ethical concerns are at risk in the genetic factories of fear. Contemporary artists, such as Young and Tillers, seem incapable of comprehending their own contemporary society. In contrast, Michelle Grossman proclaims that ‘…one of our distinctive and exciting features of contemporary Indigenous critical writing is its ‘connection with the social world’ (Grossman 2003:6)

Practice as Method

My practice and specifically the Methexical Countryscape series are “grounded” in reality. These works illuminate and extend on the works of Thomas, Petyarre and Uncle Badger and critique the works of Young and Tillers. Firstly, my drawings are grounded in the Country in which they are immersed. As described with reference to Petyarre’s and Thomas’ work, my drawings articulate Country as Country plays the most active role in the materialization of the work. This relationship they have to Country is vital to their production. As in the works of Uncle Badger, my relationship to Country is immersed in the real. The causal relationship that I have discussed in relation to Uncle Badger’s work reflects the indexical relationship that images have to real material effects. As in Uncle Badger’s work, my drawings do not hide their construction, as it is important for the viewer to re-experience the making. The process of experiencing Country on
Country, photographing it, rebuilding it through mark-making in the drawing and the real material effect and affect the viewer experiences in looking is the whole process of an embodied practice. In this instance the viewer re-experiences Country and its materiality. It is in the indexical that my drawings extend their relationship to the viewer. The methexical performative relationship the works embody in the experiencing and the making extend their relationship to the real. This performative relationship will be further elaborated in Chapter Three with a detailed account of the process of making the works.

Through a real materiality and real immateriality, the drawings relate directly to experience. They are not predicated on false consciousness and in this sense they differ from the works of Young and Tillers, which are contingent on the dynamics of the “art world” and that represent the false consciousness based on dominant western ideology. Young’s and Tillers’ works are located within the dynamic of the ontic and the imaginary, while my drawings emerge from a different relationship with the real as there is no dislocation from the ground informing the work or its production. Being methexical, my works resist and attempt to reconfigure dominant ideology.

A common structure that can be seen in both my work and that of Tillers is the use of the grid. We both share the similarity in being able to work on a small scale in relative small spaces in order to produce a larger image. However, there are many distinctions. Firstly and importantly, Tillers’ use of the “CanvasBoard System” is based on dislocating the mediated nature of the postmodern image. This is demonstrated by the image being slightly misaligned in the work to further
deconstruct the image. It is in his use of postmodern strategy or tactics that differs to my use on the grid. Coulter-Smith observes:

The examination of the three phases of the Canvasboard system will conclude that authorial deconstruction is one of the most important features of the System…(Coulter-Smith 2002: 64)

The act of archiving and deconstruction is of vital importance to Tillers’ “Canvasboard System” as seen in the work *Terra incognita* 2005 (Fig. 11). This work being an appropriation of Emily Kame Kngwarreye’s work *Big Yam Dreaming* 1995 (Fig. 10) is fractured as the original image does not align in the copy. Tillers appropriation using the grid is about dislocation and fracturing the image to reproduce it within his “Canvasboard System”. The fracturing of the image removes it from its original purpose of an immersive experience of Country. The use of the grid in my drawings is based on the performative and *methexical* process of making the works. Each panel is an abstract realization of experience immersed in Country and it is through this experience that Country is articulated. The grid in my practice dissolves the representational in the work to allow the viewer to return to the abstract panels and to experience its emergent agency. The use of the grid in Tillers’ work reflects Rosalind Krauss’ definition of the grid that place Tillers’ work within the realm of the conceptual rather than a work of immersion:
The grid’s mythical power is that it makes us able to think we are dealing with materialism (or sometimes science, or logic) while at the same time it provides us with a release into belief (or illusion, or fiction). (Krauss 1985: 11)

Tillers’ work releases the viewer into illusion and fiction, thereby creating a screen between the viewer and the real. My use of the grid allows me to construct the work in abstract pieces to build an image of re-presentation. It is this performative re-enactment of Country that re-lives real experience, not an experience based on deconstructing images. My usage of the grid is based on the “real” and an immersive experience of the “real” embedded in Country, not on a fictionalization of an appropriation. The movement between the abstraction of single panels and the figuration that emerges in the whole work creates a visceral/sensuous movement that engenders the methexical mapping of Country. It is this basis that informs my own Indigenous ideology and my relatedness to it.

To fully appreciate Indigenous cultural productions, we have to look at the context in which they are produced. Ian McLean’s review of Smith’s Transformations of Australian Art (2002), suggests that:

The legacy of Aboriginal art might, ironically, be the transformation of a largely nationalist cultural agenda to a post national one that repositions the global and local ways we are yet to see. (McLean 2003: 31)
In order to achieve what McLean envisions, it is necessary to reconfigure our understanding of art and Indigenous cultural productions. Instead of assigning an ascribed value to the practices of the other, the western world needs to acknowledge the importance of how practice plays a vital role in marking the relationship between people and expressing identity. In the context of Australia, contemporary contextualizing of Aboriginal art and culture has occurred in a confined terrain that has seen Aboriginal ideology and art practice devalued. However it may be possible to envisage a more inclusive and collective Australian identity. In looking at Indigenous art and ideology we may be able to reconceptualize an ontological relationship to identity, culture and the real. With reference to Aboriginal art, Maurice O’Riordon suggests that:

This movement signals a broad, ongoing political consciousness with radical implications for artistic practice and cultural sustainability that have yet to be fully appreciated. (O’Riordan 2003: 33)

Indigenous cultural productions not only demonstrate a practice that relies on the foundations of what Carter states as “ground” but they are founded in the real existence of Country rather then by an ephemeral relationship to an ideology. Indigenous cultural productions demonstrate an alternative way of defining ideology by opening an understanding of art not as transgression, but as an articulation of a cohesive and collective cultural identity. Through its foundation in “Country” Indigenous cultural productions present a different basis of ideology,
one that is predicated on linking the material and the immaterial. An Indigenous Australian conception of culture and life encompasses the material conjoined with the metaphysical and recasts the western binary relationship into a complete whole where the immaterial is materially constituted. My practice, and specifically my drawings *Methexical Countryscapes*, articulates the relatedness of the material and the immaterial in real experience.
CHAPTER THREE

METHEXICAL PRACTICE

We are both doing the same thing in a different way, but we are two black people. You go to different parts of the Country and even though you were reared up in Redfern, but you are in different parts of the country, and you are telling people in your artwork that you respect their Country. (Bates 2012)

My initial research was to examine and assert my argument through the analysis of the practices and work of a number of Indigenous artists, but as a practising artist and through the process of research to date, the crucial role of my own practice in articulating the core ideas and arguments of this research has become a central concern. In this chapter I will examine how my own practice demonstrates the relationship Country has to identity in Indigenous cultural practices and ideology and discuss my practice as a method of research. I will also draw on Barad’s thinking on materiality as it is in accordance to an Indigenous ideology and account of the world. The analysis I provide of my practice is through a selection of works from the research exhibition as principally these drawings demonstrate the argument. I will argue that in my practice and making there is no division between art and life and no division between the material and immaterial because it is predicated and realised on what I have outlined as an alternate Indigenous ideology presented in the exegetical component. The important consequence of this is that the drawings oppose the notion of the conditions of existence being predicated on an imaginary relationship, which perpetuates amnesia. Also, through my reading in
the field of creative research, (Gray 2004, Bolt 2004, Barrett and Bolt (eds.) 2007 and Barad 2003), I have come to understand the importance of practice as a valid mode of research and knowledge production. Knowledge is reproduced and preserved as living memory in the performative process of making. In this sense creative arts research is not dissimilar to modes of knowledge production and preservation that occurs in Indigenous culture. Such an approach to research is essentially performative.

**Performativity and Knowledge Production as Intra-Activity**

In her article, *Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Come to Matter*, Karen Barad states

> My more limited goal in this article is to use the notion of performativity as a diffraction grating for reading important insights from feminist and queer studies and science studies through one another while simultaneously proposing a materialist and posthumanist reworking of the notion of performativity. (Barad 2003: 7)

Barad moves from geometrical optics to physical optics to the questions of diffraction rather than reflection. It is through this notion of diffraction that Barad formulates “intra-activity” as opposed to inter-activity. The former being internally determined as to the latter being external between two separate bodies. This is vital to an understanding of performativity as it suggests that there exists an inherent “relatedness” between things internally. This also postulates the relationship
between the real and the imaginary. Barad states ‘… representationalism is the belief in the ontological distinction between representations and that which they purport to represent’ (Barad 2003: 3). In saying so, Barad suggests that representationalism determines that inherent attributes are anterior to them. It is on the basis of this ontological gap that I changed my mode of research from thesis to practice/exegesis in order to allow the research process to proceed beyond the framework of representation. Practice-led research is an exemplary way of demonstrating my argument since it articulates the premise of “doing” as a form of performative agency and immersive experience. The making and the work demonstrate this through an immersive re-experiencing in the doing and the viewing. The act of doing is vital not only to extend understandings of an alternative framework but also to enact an Indigenous ideology that is based in the real.

Another important part of the research methodology was to interview Uncle Badger Bates in relation not only to his work but also to the process of art working and to the process of my own research. The need to discuss his work and what I am researching is not only important in a scholarly way, but also in a cultural sense that is embedded in cultural protocol. In the discussion of his work, my work became part of the discussion as Uncle Badger is not a passive subject in the research process, but is a Paakantji man of knowledge and insight. My reference to him as “Uncle” is a clear demonstration of my respect for him as a wise person of cultural knowledge. The discussion was a two-way and intra-subjective dialogue about each other’s experience not just in art, but also in life. This is another indication of the relatedness between people and, in particular, to relatedness on
Uncle Badger’s Country. The *Methexical Countryscape* drawings of Paakantji Country also extend to the relatedness I have with him.

The following discussion outlines of the process of making the *Methexical Countryscape* drawings. The purpose of this explanation is to provide an insight into the real experience that is engendered in the process of the making as this relates to my argument so far. This process is taken from excerpts documented and re-lived in my visual journal.

**Method and Process**

Initially, Country is chosen, meaning the location where I will obtain images. The choice of Country is based on my own relationship to where I grew up, where I have lived and places that have personal and cultural significance. These include Sydney (Darug Country), Melbourne (Wurundjeri Country), Wagga Wagga (Wiradjuri Country) and Broken Hill/Menindee (Paakantji Country). I travel to each place, which is important, as travelling is a vital part of experiencing and re-experiencing Country. Travelling across Country is a “real” experiencing and an immersive re-experiencing, the act of travel leads our body into the experience. Once I am on Country I walk around and spend time observing various aspects of Country until a tree or part of Country reveals itself to me. While the photos I have taken in previous years were random, whereas in recent years and through the research process, the revealing nature of Country dictates the image taken. I liken it to drawing with a camera. The vital point here is that part of this experience is based on the tree or Country imposing its own subjectivity onto me and my own thought processes of looking and feeling the drawings of Country. This is an
important aspect of the process as it is the beginning of the journey of making and experiencing and sets up the relationship between Country, myself, drawing, Ways of Being and Ways of Doing (Martin 2008: 9). It is this relatedness and real experience that depletes the notion of amnesia.

Before outlining the process of making the drawings further, I would like to expand on the notion of Country imposing its own subjectivity. I will explain this through the use of Barad’s notion of an ‘agential realist account’ (Barad 2003: 16) and extend her discussion into the notion of reality of relatedness as it is understood within an Indigenous framework. In discussing Niels Bohr’s philosophy-physics Barad states:

For Bohr, things do not have inherently determinate boundaries or properties, and words do not have inherently determinate meanings. Bohr also calls into question the related Cartesian belief in the inherent distinction between subject and object, and knower and known. (Barad 2003: 8)

Barad presents a relational ontology where nature, the body and materiality can be in their own becoming whilst at the same time involving our role in the practices of knowing and becoming. It is in the causal relationship that a real materialist ontology is demonstrated. For Barad, the conceptual shift exists and begins in “intra-action” as opposed to “inter-action”. This is be elaborated through her understanding of phenomena as phenomena. This is contrary to the idea of the epistemological separable observer and observed, knower and known, subject and
object, ‘…. phenomena are the ontological separability of agentially intra-acting “components”.’ (Barad 2003: 9) This connects with an Indigenous notion that Country has an intra-active agency and it is in this action and from within an Indigenous framework, that the concept of object/subject, knower/known is questioned. As a practising artist the instance of Country imposing its subjectivity onto me is realized, my own body is inscribed by Country and I become the “object”. For Barad this objectivity is defined as intra-actions leaving marks on the body. For me, this is the process of immersive experience. Immersive re-experiencing is founded in the making and viewing of the drawings, of Country. This is further illuminated by Barad’s statement: ‘On an agential realist account, agency is cut loose from its traditional humanist orbit’ (Barad 2003: 16). In all Indigenous accounts Country is not passive.

This is vital to an understanding of what is already given in an Indigenous worldview. The relationship that this has to the Methexical Countryscapes is that they perform the knowing and becoming of Country, and my role is part of this practice. The relatedness that we have to the world around us also can be seen as the inseparable relatedness that we have to making cultural things, such as drawing or painting. To recap, the use of the word “Mulka” in our language means “to paint” which is a demonstration of the action of doing. As stated in Martin’s ‘Ways of Being’, ‘Ways of Knowing’ and ‘Ways of Doing’ (Martin 2008), these drawings advance these important aspects of an Indigenous worldview and ideology. The drawings enact not only an agential ontological realist experience, but also reveal a relatedness that underpins our understanding of the world and the worlds understanding of us.
An important part of the Methexical Countryscapes is that they become the knower as well as the known. There is no split between the two and thus they continually perform Country irrespective of the maker. These works become what they really are: Country. They become matter in the full sense of the word whilst at the same time merge the worlds of the imaginary and the real concurrently, hence the material and the immaterial.

I shall now return back to how the Methexical Countryscape drawings are made. Once I have taken the photo of Country and have them developed, I re-experience Country when looking through the images. I then choose images that I want to draw. The criteria for choosing each one are based on a number of factors. Firstly, the image of Country imposes itself in the same way as Country imposed its subjectivity when I am on Country. I also take into consideration various formalist aspects of the image as well. These two points of choosing the image are important as there is a relationship between the experience, the re-experiencing and the formalist aspects of the images, that is, composition, lighting, so on. These two points are interwoven in the experiencing as they inform one another as to the image’s material and sensory effect and affect on me. Throughout the whole process it demonstrates how Country is having a real material effect and affect onto me.

The next stage is that I enlarge the image onto A3 paper using a photocopier and then I measure the A3 copy, which is divided into thirty equal pieces. Each piece is numbered on the back from thirty to number one. After cutting these pieces from
the A3 copy I then scale them up to the paper I draw on. The purpose of the grid in this process is twofold. The grid is not only used to scale up the image, but also brings the entire image to the surface of the work when the drawing is complete. The grid maps the surface of the drawing. The materials that I use in the *Methexical Countryscapes* are willow charcoal on a heavy cartridge drawing paper. The materials also have relatedness to the subjectivity of Country as they are from Country. Charcoal and paper are made from trees, from Country and the work’s basis is embedded in Country. An important factor in the drawing process is how they are drawn. I draw each panel looking down, as opposed to the work being in front of me on an easel or a wall. This is important because it becomes an intimate experience between Country, drawing (mark-making), sensory experience and myself. The act of looking down onto the drawing re-iterates the *methexical/performative abstraction and immersive experience*. This also relates to an aerial way of looking down at the marks as experienced in many Indigenous visual practices. I then draw from number thirty (bottom right hand corner of the image) through to number one, drawing from the small image cut out of the A3 photocopy. In doing so I am drawing from the bottom right hand corner backwards upwards to the top left hand corner of the image, as opposed to the literal drawing from number one through to number thirty. This can be seen in the drawing *Methexical Countryscape: Wiradjuri # 2* (Fig. 12)

Through this process I am adding to the abstract quality of the work and the image tends not to reveal itself to me until I am two or three rows upwards. This also re-iterates the revealing experience of being “in” Country. Each piece is made up of abstract marks, which enables me to deal with the raw materials in a very physical
and sensory way as opposed to a representation. This can be seen in the panels in figures 13, 14, 15 and 16. This process involves responding to “non-sense” as opposed to the world of figuration or representation.

Figure 12. Brian Martin, Methexical Countryside: Wiradjuri #2, 2011, charcoal on paper, 2000 x 1500cm

Figure 13

Figure 14

Figure 15

Figure 16

Brian Martin, Methexical Countryside: Wiradjuri #2 (details)
There is a vital relationship between the panel and the whole image that is crucial to my argument where both the making and the viewing involve a sensuous re-experiencing of Country. This is the fundamental research method. By working through the grid, I am allowed to move between the abstract and the figurative. The rhythm of mark-making creates sensation, which articulates with movement and the body. This repetition and rhythm is disruptive as the grid becomes a disruptive element and destabilises the figuration. This is opposed to a Renaissance grid that works to stabilise the image. The grid sets up certain rhythms with each panel. An important point here is that mark-making has relatedness to embodiment and memory. The sensory experience shifts from panel to panel. This aspect of the drawing also shares the repetition of performative marks often experienced in traditional Aboriginal art. The function of the repetition of mark-making in Aboriginal art is to engender a performative methexical mapping of Country.

Although my drawings are based in figuration, it is the performative abstraction of each panel that enacts a methexical way of doing. It is also my fundamental right of self-definition to enact how I make artwork from various cultural standpoints (a notion on which I will elaborate in the next chapter). This repetition and rhythm of mark-making is a methexical performance, which relays memory to practice and vice versa, continually enacting the real relatedness of my existence as opposed to producing an imaginary connection. It is the rhythm of mark-making that maps the texture of Country as I have experienced it. Each panel is performative in that no mark is hidden and as a result of the choice of the materials of charcoal and paper.
It is at the point where the physical and conceptual meet that the viewer can see how they are made. It is this aspect of drawing “diffractively” that is performative.

Drawing “diffractively” is where the image is never fully seen as “realism” because it is diffracted by the grid, and therefore moves in and out of a representationalist position of looking at the world. Barad utilizes the term “diffraction” in contrast to the term “reflection” in order to move away from a representationalist way of thinking in relation to a performative metaphysics. My use of “diffraction” is an attempt to demonstrate how we look at things from a different starting point. The practice enforces us to look from a different positioning, one that moves from the abstract to the concrete concurrently. This is vital to my research as it allows me to start from a different positioning and in doing so reveals another or next different positioning. This is what I have discovered in the research process. This method moves the viewer to an experience of rhythm and repetition as will be discussed later through a closer analysis of the drawings.

In the process of the making, each panel becomes a different experience, which can be seen and experienced in the differences between each panel. After one panel is finished I spray it with fixative to fix the charcoal onto the paper. The next panel is lined up to the previous one and the process continues across thirty pieces. I then glue each piece down onto a larger sheet of watercolour paper and the pieces become a whole. The work is then framed. At this point, the work becomes representationalist to some degree. It is this movement that demonstrates the ontic and the ontological. These two modes operate concurrently in an Indigenous worldview. It is in the relatedness of each piece that Country is performed. In this
sense, there is no split, binary or dichotomy as articulated in a western construct that is premised on the imaginary conditions of existence and hence amnesia. Barad observes:

All bodies, not merely “human” bodies, come to matter through the world’s iterative intra-activity-its performativity. This is true not only as the surface or contours of the body but also of the body in the fullness of its physicality, including the very “atoms” of its being. Bodies are not objects with inherent boundaries and properties; they are material-discursive phenomena. (Barad 2003: 15)

In this instance the drawings become the body, hence they have their own agency, their own subjectivity, much in the same way that Country imposes its subjectivity onto me, the drawings are what they are: Country. The physical size of the drawings (2000cm x 1500cm) is also of crucial significance because the large size ensures the drawings impose themselves on the viewing audience. The size of the work extends the subjectivity of Country. This is vital to an understanding of their methexical relationship to others and Country. It is the real material and immersive effect they have that presents their reality, a type of “diffractive realism”. This is a crucial point that I will discuss in the next section.

**A Different/Diffractive Real-ism**

The separation of epistemology from ontology is a reverberation of a metaphysics that assumes an inherent difference between human and
nonhuman, subject and object, mind and body, matter and discourse.

Onto-epistemology - the study of practices of knowing in being - is probably a better way to think about the kind of understandings that are needed to come to terms with how specific intra-actions matter. (Barad 2003: 18)

The Methexical Countryscape drawings become matter in the sense of real Country. They are not just a representation of Country, they materialise Country. In an Indigenous worldview and ideology, there is no separation between epistemology and ontology as these are both predicated on the real conditions of existence. The real materiality is grounded in Country and Country holds and generates a subjective agency. This subjectivity of Country is demonstrated in the drawings by their size and scale, so they impose themselves onto the viewer, as they are larger than the person viewing them. This is important, as my own experience of Country has always reminded me of our insignificance in relation to the all-encompassing size and age of Country. It is this aspect of Country that also removes it from the objective and merely representational.

The Methexical Countryscape drawings are seemingly representational in the way that they present a type of realism, as they look like the tree in “real” life. Realism in western formalist terms is a representation of reality. However, I assert that these works are an embodiment of the real, and therefore they are Country. Although seemingly representational, they are in some way “diffractive” in the sense that they are not only realised from a different starting point opposed to western representationalist thinking; they also position themselves as an immersive
experience of Country. Hence, they become Country. This point is vital to my argument so far and is further elaborated via a close analysis of two of the drawings.

These drawings are about sensation on varying levels. There is sensation of drawing/performing each individual panel and not knowing the end result. However, the image is predetermined as Country is predetermined in this case. It is in this instance that ideology and practice is based on the relationship with have to Country. Our role in the work is to re-live it, not merely represent it. These drawings are not sketched or planned first, they are immediate insofar as what is drawn on each panel is final as they emerge from sensory experience. The process is like a journey through Country where each panel builds until the final work emerges; it is not known until it is finished. The drawing itself is unpredictable however the subject is not. This is another example of the premise of the “real” in images of Country that emerge through an Indigenous way of working.

*Methexical Countryscape Wurundjeri #3*

The drawing *Methexical Countryscape Wurundjeri #3* (Fig. 17) was a breakthrough in various ways throughout making all the drawings. This particular drawing provided a significant illumination of what I understand as materiality through process and practice. The image itself did not reveal itself to me until I arrived at the third row from the bottom. This drawing is vital to the series, as it has extended my understanding of the relationship between abstraction and representation and how this results in a presentation. This work also revealed the notion of immersive re-experiencing that is made possible through viewing. As
maker of the work, I am also the first viewer. The experience in drawing each panel in this work was more intense than the others. This image is heavily textured and visceral and had a further physical sensory effect on me in the process of making it as I spent more time creating marks on it than the others. This intensity made me work further in the doing, the making and therefore it had a greater bodily effect and affect on me.

Figure 17. Brian Martin, *Methexical Countryside: Wurundjeri # 3*, 2011, charcoal on paper, 2000 x 1500cm

Figure 18

Figure 19

Brian Martin, *Methexical Countryside: Wiradjuri # 3* (details)
The marks in this drawing have an intensity because they are more layered and more abstract. This forced a further unconscious sensory process through the constant repetition of marks and the rhythm that resulted. The building up of texture is more comprehensive and each panel demonstrates the different points in time in which they are drawn. This can be seen in the two panels in the second row from the bottom and the second and third panel from the left of the drawing (Fig. 18 and 19). Whilst drawing each panel, it is my sensory response in the drawing and also my memory in Country and the image that is relived and experienced. This becomes evident to me through the varying textures and tones evident in each panel. I have found that each piece of willow charcoal is slightly different in its texture, composition and structure. Some pieces of willow slide across the surface whereas others grip the paper. There is a real material application of the material of charcoal. This drawing required further marks and distinctive parts left untouched to let the grass and roots emerge. In this instance, Country dictated and emerged the drawing. This drawing has all aspects of a work that is embedded in a type of realism.

The use of space is important in this drawing (as in all the drawings) as the overlapping of shapes create depth. These shapes formed by tone also realize distance and give a linear and aerial perspective. Tone is vital in the drawing as this is what gives the forms shape. The light and dark in the drawing distinguishes shapes from one another and contributes to the pictorial depth. An understanding of this comes to me only once the work is complete. During the making, such elements emerge unconsciously and from direct bodily experience.
The interesting aspect of this drawing in relation to perspective is that the drawing presents transversal lines that establish perspective whilst at the same time, the grid formation of the panels brings the surface of the drawing to the utmost foreground. This adds to the imposing/immersive nature of the image and of Country; the gird provides a mapping of the surface.

Space, shape and texture in this work relay the immersive re-experiencing of Country. When I view the work, I experience many things: my time at this place, taking the photo, and being immersed in Wurundjeri Country. However there is one further point in the viewing of the work- Country comes from the essential “fabric” of the drawing, the materiality of mark-making becomes Country not a representation of it. This direct and immersive relationship demonstrates what I have outlined as our relatedness to Country. The immersive experience we have to Country. In this the drawing moves between the notion of objectivity and subjectivity, the imaginary and the real, the material and the immaterial. It is in the visceral aspect of the work that the performative emerges; as the work is always performing. In this sense the work is opaque and moves between the spiritual/imaginary and the real. The making of this particular work illuminated a key moment in the methexical relationship that is in the experience of making and in the experience of viewing.

Tone, shape and texture in the drawing contributes to the real material effect and affect that it has on the viewer. In viewing, the sensory experience engendered by formal elements in the drawing gives rise to a relatedness of memory and Country,
thus overcoming the dilemma of amnesia. This resonates with Barad’s notion of how matter has real material/sensory effects. For Barad

Matter, like meaning, is not an individually articulated or static entity…. Matter is not a support, location, referent, or source of sustainability for discourse. Matter is not immutable or passive. It does not require the mark of an external force or history to complete it. Matter is always already an ongoing historicity. (Barad 2003: 13)

In this instance, the formalist aspects of the work have their own relatedness to each other, to the image and to Country. It is in this performative dynamic, or in Barad’s terms ‘agential realist account’ (Barad 2003: 23), that the drawing(s) enact subjective Country.

Another aspect of the experiential nature of making has emerged when I have shown the work to others. In showing the work, I lay down each piece in the order that I have drawn it so the work performs literally for the viewer. As the panels are placed on the ground, the image slowly reveals itself to the viewer. The film of me laying the works down extends the method to the viewing audience, revealing the relationship between the abstract and the representational throughout the process. In this particular drawing, the revealing nature of Country is vital and is intensified by being viewed on the ground. Within the final research exhibition, this work will remain in separate panels and be displayed on the ground. Displaying this particular work in this way extends the methexical immersive relationship the
viewer has to it. Viewing the works on the floor causes viewers to physically immerse themselves into it.

*Methexical Countryscape Darug #1*

Figure 20. Brian Martin, *Methexical Countryside: Darug # 1*, 2012, charcoal on paper, 2000 x 1500cm

The work entitled *Methexical Countryside Darug #1* (Fig. 20) seemingly returns to the representational when compared to the abstraction of *Methexical Countryside Wurundjeri #3*. Once again, it is tone (light and dark) that defines shape and relays pictorial linear and aerial perspective. Light in this drawing is paramount to giving volume to the tree. It is the combination of a gradation of light and an abruptness of shape that creates volume and a sense of realism. The sensory experience realized in the viewing of this drawing is somewhat similar to that of *Methexical Countryside Wurundjeri #3* because of the tone, texture and shape
which also enhance perspective. The grid brings the image to the foreground, to reiterate and map the surface.

This drawing’s apparent return to representation distinguishes it from *Methelexical Countryscape Wurundjeri #3*. However, the work is not just representational and also exerts a powerful performative quality in a different way to *Methelexical Countryside Wurundjeri #3*. As opposed to the dynamic composition of elements of *Methelexical Countryside # 3*, this drawing presents a stable composition. This solid stable balance adds to its monumental quality. The “subjectivity” of Country filters through however because of the sense of monumentality. The scale of the tree also gives it weight, which is enhanced by the tonal elements. Compositional elements that give rise to this sensory experience takes us to Darug Country, and hence to this monumental tree. This tree demonstrates a living subjectivity that is not solely of the material world. I will describe this quality in the following way.

The tree in this drawing has its own subjective historicity that is embedded in an immaterial world. This can be understood in relation to the importance of trees in an Indigenous worldview. This drawing articulates “Real Immateriality”. It combines the material, the imaginary and the real and shows us that these occur concurrently.

Trees in Aboriginal society have significant cultural and ceremonial importance. For example in both Wiradjuri and Kamilaroi Countries trees have played a vital role in ceremony. On Wiradjuri Country some trees signify and present as primary burial markers, and on Kamilaroi Country they enact ceremonial or bora ground markers. In each case trees can have ceremonial designs relaying important totems
or practices. Others have been utilised in making canoes, shelter, shields or coolamons, in which case they have been defined as Scarred Trees. In an Indigenous context trees have monumental power based on their own subjective agency. In this particular drawing, the large mass and volume of the tree demonstrates a solid opaque strength. Once again the grid further draws the tree to the surface so that the image imposes itself onto us. In completing this drawing, I found that it was more than just representational. I experienced it as an imposing subjectivity that reminds me not only of Country’s importance but of our potential insignificance as well. The words of Barad are pertinent here:

On an agential realist account, materiality is an active factor in processes of materialization. Nature is neither a passive surface awaiting the mark of culture nor the end product of cultural performance. (Barad 2003: 17)

This has vital ramifications for understanding the Methexical Countryscapes as it suggests they have an open intra-active relatedness with Country; Country, the viewer and artist, occur as an intra-active continuum. No priority is given to either materiality or discursivity, as it is based on relatedness. This is of great significance in the drawing process. In this sense, Country dictates the drawing. Seemingly representational, and embedded in realism, the drawings are a different type of realism, a diffractive realism. There is a direct collapse between the representational and the ontological through and by immersion and realism lies in that the works are not just representation, they are Country. This extends the real notion that the artwork is a physical embodiment of an ancient culture.
**Significance: A New Way of Looking**

The significance of this research and mode of practice used is that it contributes to a new way of looking at images, culture, art and practices. Through the process of doing or making the drawings and providing an analysis of them, I suggest an alternative way of analysing and looking at cultural productions. The criteria for looking at work and practice are based on formal analysis from a different starting position. The criteria for looking at art are not just based on aesthetics in terms of western formalist thinking. Although the formalist aspects of the work are not ignored, it is the intervention of a materialist approach that distinguishes the way I have positioned the analysis and the type of analysis that emerges. This position draws on materialist perspectives of western thinkers, but is primarily based on an Indigenous ideological understanding of the world predicated on relatedness and materiality.

Ultimately, the criteria for looking at artwork rest on the extent to which a work of art is immersive and *methexical*, and how such work combines the ontic and the ontological, the material and the immaterial, the imaginary and the real. These criteria also relate to how the maker and the viewer have a real immersive re-experiencing of what the work attempts to relay, what is relayed inside the work and also the “subjectivity” of the work itself. These criteria aligned with the formalist aspects of artworks create a diffractive way of looking. This way of looking is predicated on the real, insofar as the work becomes part of material existence that opposes the dilemma of amnesia.
It is the combination and relatedness of these criteria that informs us of an alternative way of looking at work and practice. Barad helps to illuminate this:

The world is intra-activity in its differential mattering. It is through specific intra-actions that a differential sense of being is enacted in the ongoing ebb and flow of agency. That is, it is through specific intra-actions that phenomena come to matter-in both senses of the word. (Barad 2003: 11)

Inter (intra)-relatedness explains the matter of phenomena. This notion can be applied to an understanding of the production of drawing as a ‘Way of Doing’, as elaborated by Karen Martin. Intra-activity is the whole process from taking the photo to the drawing in its final form and the continuum of immersive re-experiencing by the viewer. By utilising these criteria we can reframe not only how we look at art but how we look at and experience the world.
CHAPTER FOUR

DIFFRACTION, SENSATION AND EXPERIENCE

The criteria elaborated in Chapter Three proposed a set of questions that arose when looking at the work in terms of sensation (real material effects) and experience (engendering experience). In this chapter I will discuss issues that relate materiality to experience through the following questions:

- What does this mode of inquiry used in this research reveal that could not have been revealed via any other method of inquiry?
- How do the individual works in the exhibition relate to each other?
- How do these works engender a similar experience in the viewing as I have experienced in the making?
- How do these works operate methexically and therefore directly overcome amnesia?
- How is this new knowledge derived from an Indigenous ideology?
- How do the works articulate the argument or thesis?

Addressing these questions is intended to articulate a materialist position that is derived from both western and Indigenous perspectives.

A Diffractive Mode of Inquiry

Through the combination of practice and exegesis I was able to develop a set of new criteria for looking at and analysing artwork and cultural productions. The practice makes the theoretical tangible and also brings the theoretical into experience and sensation which was a crucial factor in changing from thesis based
research to practice led research as discussed in Chapter Three. According to Barrett/Bolt in their investigation of practice-based research:

Drawing on materialist perspectives, including Martin Heidegger’s notion of “handability”, our exploration of artistic research demonstrates that knowledge is derived from doing and from the senses. (Barrett et al 2007: 1)

The type of knowledge acquired from doing and through the senses is vital to my research. My argument is based on the notion of art as real experience, such as the immersive experience of Country realized in Indigenous ideology. The works and analysis attempt to demonstrate this real experience of Country in the following way: Through an initial experiencing of Country, the constructing and making of artworks, an account of the viewing experience and how it allows us to relive the experience and to engender a relatedness with others who view it.

This interactive process informs the underlining methexical quality of the works that I argue provide a real form and alternative mode of presenting Country to combat the effects of a false consciousness and therefore amnesia. In Barrett’s argument of re-conceptualising and expanding the notions of cultural capital she states:

The innovative and critical potential of practice-based research lies in its capacity to generate personally situated knowledge and new ways of modelling and externalising such knowledge while at the same
time, revealing philosophical, social and cultural contexts for the
critical intervention and application of knowledge outcomes. (Barrett et al 2007:2)

It is the experiential and emergent nature of practice-based research that reflects the content and mode of my research concurrently. The content and the mode of research go hand-in-hand as they reflect the importance of the relatedness. Practice-led research is an apt way of demonstrating my argument because it is based on the premise of doing as a form of performative agency, of immersive experience.

Practice is immersive and it is through practice that knowledge “emerges”. This is the basis of an Indigenous conception of the world and was specifically discussed in relation to Karen Martin’s “Ways of Doing”. This mode and method of inquiry is driven by the structure and content of the research. The mode and the content are embedded in the “real” and the immersive experiencing and re-experiencing of the “real”. They inform each other as research modes. It is important to note that in Indigenous culture, image-making and performative cultural rituals are a significant form of not only communication but also of ways of learning in and through real experience. This experiential way of doing in order to acquire knowledge is vital to an Indigenous conception of the world.

Because this mode of inquiry is reflective, the knowledge it produces is emergent and experiential. According to Barrett:
As a reflective process, methodologies in artistic research are *necessarily* emergent and subject to repeated adjustment, rather than remaining fixed throughout the process of the inquiry. (Barrett 2007: 6)

It is this aspect of practice-led research that is real and combines sensation and experience. The *methexical* drawings made through the research have attempted to demonstrate a physical embodiment of an ancient culture and ideology in a way that is accessible to the viewer. The drawings reveal experience, they reveal the real, and the viewer experiences this dynamic. When engaging with the work, the drawings reveal what they are: Country. This is vital in relation to the notion of relatedness in an Indigenous conception of the world and how this concept has wider and significant importance to Australia and western understandings of ontology and materialism.

**Sensation: Engendering Experience**

I am suggesting that there is space for rethinking realism as a material realism; not one that is grounded in mimesis or perpetual approaches to the real, but one that is arises in the Real. In this material realism it is not a question of figuration or a photographic re-presentation of reality but rather where art subverts the domain of representation and activates sensation to become experience. (Bolt 2011: 66)
In Bolt’s argument for rethinking realism as a material realism, she presents an argument for the way that art articulates sensation to become experience. By looking at the real material affects of the “triple register of colour” and analysis of Yves Klein Blue, Bolt explains how it is the real affect on sensation that creates a real materialism. This type of real experience through sensation is the basis of cultural practices within an Indigenous conception of the world. The methexical drawings reflect this real experience in the making and in the viewing. It is here that the viewing is affected materially through and by the senses. As I have experienced the work in the making, the viewer experiences it in the viewing. The correlation here is that the viewer can experience my hand moving across the surface with the charcoal, as the marks are not hidden, they reveal experience in the making, the doing and in the handling. Bolt states:

Rather, we come to know the world theoretically only after we have come to understand it through handling. (Barrett et al 2007: 30)

How do the works presented in this research engender a similar experience in the viewing as I have experienced in the making? It is the notion of handling that the works are re-experienced. There is no split between the handling and the viewing, the imaginary and the real, as we come to understand the world through handling as elaborated by Bolt through Heidegger’s notion of handling. It is this relatedness between the experiencing, the handling and the viewing that defines the methexical performance. This “intra-action” is extended from within the work, the relationship between textural and rhythmic marks, to the experiencing and out to the viewing.
This movement and experience is one of methexis. This is the methexical quality of the drawings.

**Methexis: A Remaking**

As previously defined, *methexis* is an action or performance that is not individualized and has a direct relationship to the group or commemorative act. It is Carter’s *methexis* emphasizing the physical ground, which relays its important materiality. As mentioned earlier, it is the action on something that brings something into being. An example of this bringing into being is the Emu totem that Carter discusses in reference to *methexis* (Carter 2006: 96). In dancing the Emu dance, the man does not just imitate the Emu, he becomes the Emu. It is here that the man is the iconic, the symbolic and indexical of Emu. Through union or relatedness between the person and totem and in the dance, the man becomes Emu. The notion of Emu is brought into Being through dance. This is crucial to an understanding of how *methexis* moves us beyond the representational and into the real. It is this important relationship between *methexis* and performativity that is the bringing of things into being. Indigenous art is always working and performing. It is the same indexical action of Uncle Badger’s *Yabbie*; the Yabbies is danced into existence. The print is not mimesis it is the *Yabbie*.

A methektic identification began in recognition of duality of being; it assumed that communication being as an oscillation, a contract across difference. (Carter 2006: 84)
The *methexical* basis of the drawings start immediately through the process of making the works as discussed in Chapter Three. From the initial experience of being on Country to the drawing in its final form, it is through the process of the making (the doing) and repetition and rhythm of mark-making that is performative and *methexical*. This brings into being Country. The *methexical* performativity of Country is relived in the drawings, the handling and the viewing. The *methexical* process is transferred to the viewers as they are modally affected by the drawings. The works have real material effects and affects by forcing the viewer to move physically through vision from the abstract to the figurative, back to the abstract and so on. It is this duality that converges within and around the drawings that allowed them to imprint onto the viewing audience.

This performative dimension of image-making and viewing can be further explained in the following way. In Erin Manning’s analysis of ‘the ontogenetic potential of ideas as they become articulations’ (2009: 5), she discusses the action of movement in Aboriginal image-making as a way of creating a new space-time for experience. In her discussion of Dorothy Napangardi’s *Mina Mina* (2005) she states:

> How we see becomes a politics of touch: what the painting compels is not a static viewing but an activity of reaching-toward that alters the relation between body and painting, creating a moving world that becomes a touching of the not-yet-touchable. This touching is rhythmic. (Manning 2009: 153)
This type of feeling-doing-seeing starts in the first experience of Country and is then re-experienced in the making. It is this re-shifting of experience from the making, to me, to the viewing and to the viewing audience, which further encompasses the works’ *methexical* qualities.

Figure 21. Brian Martin, *Methexical Countryside: Wurundjeri # 3*, 2011, charcoal on paper, 2000 x 1500cm

Figure 22    Figure 23

Figure 24    Figure 25

Brian Martin, *Methexical Countryside: Wurundjeri # 3* (details)
The rhythm and repetition of marks can be seen throughout figures 22, 23, 24 and 25 of *Methexical Countryside Wurundjeri # 3* (Fig. 21). Looking at each of these panels the marks bounce and dance through each one, although materializing different shapes and parts of the drawing and Country, they are inter-woven with one another. The marks converge into a whole within the complete work, however it is the reciprocated relationship and rhythm of the marks that create movement across and within the surface. The marks are repeated throughout each panel forming a pattern and rhythm of making, movement and doing that realises the visceral relationship I have with the work. It is this dancing texture and “drawing” out of Country that is *methexical*; it is this action from my hand that engenders the performance of the doing to the viewing audience experience. In his analysis of Giorgione’s practice, Carter states:

> Only in this way, by *methexis* rather than mimesis, can the painting avoid coming between us and the environment; such painting will not represent nature but provide a performance of it, a choreography of marks that mimes the experience of looking. (Carter 2006: 151)

This can be extended as to how the works themselves relate to each other as a group of works in and about Country. The works as a collective relate to one another, as they are all Country and present different aspects of Country. This also suggests a movement from Country to Country. These images become real experience. *Methexis* describes the relationship of the abstract to the representational, the real to the imaginary, the ontological to the ontic. This *methexical* real experience extends
from the individual experience in the making to the collective audience in the viewing and furthermore, from the individual works to the collective works as a whole. Each panel in the works maps Country, it does it again and again, through the doing and the experiencing and the re-experiencing. Each whole drawing maps Country and the collective works map various Countrys. This is their immersion. This is the revelation of the methektic practice.

This is how the works operate methexically, as they are a performative re-telling of Country, re-telling to me, to the viewer and to each other. This methexical quality of real material effects and affects can be explained by Manning’s discussion of Emily Kngwarreye’s, Kathleen Petyarre’s and Dorothy Napangardi’s work.

These paintings ask us to move (move away! come closer! look again!), figuring movement such that what is felt is not the representation of a story but the act of the telling itself. (Manning 2009: 161)

This operation is constructed via the formal qualities of the work, the rhythm, tone, texture, composition, scale, etc. Returning to Methexical Countryscape: Wurundjeri # 3 (figure 21), the visceral and textural quality of this work in concert with tone, enforce the viewer to investigate these qualities in a very physical way, searching and moving between the abstract and the figurative, constantly fractured by the presence of the destabilising grid. It is this convergence and fracture on the eye that shifts the viewer’s standpoint. In this searching, the texture of Country mapping the surface within the work, materializes Country for and onto the viewer. All these
formalist aspects of the work have a relatedness to one another, creating a real materiality and a real immateriality. It is the formalist aspects within the drawing that evoke a sense of becoming, embodying Country, embodying a real experience.

This materiality is extended by the movement between various parts of Country, not only as I have experienced it in being in and on each Country, but also by re-experiencing it in the making and re-experiencing it in the viewing. Looking at the works as a collective (Figures 26-34), there is not only a pictorial and thematic relationship, but also a material relationship that extends the relationship between Country and Country. They are different locations imposing themselves onto the viewer, however they are not competing between each other. They seem to have equal value, materializing each Country. The panels across each drawing are related. For example the two drawings *Methexical Countryscape: Wurundjeri # 3* (Fig. 27) and *Methexical Countryscape: Darug # 2* (Fig.28) interact through their textural marks although they relate to different locations in Melbourne and Sydney. The viewer’s eyes dance across multiple drawings finding relationships of similarities and differences in texture and marks. These two works are similar in texture and tone. As a collective they seem to relay a representation of landscapes, however when the viewer approaches the work, they experience the fractured grid, realizing the abstraction of each panel. It is at this moment a realization emerges; the entire exhibition of works and practice is abstract. The research exhibition is made up of panels of *methexical* marks. It is not just a representation of Country, it is Country.
I suggest that the viewer interacts at a methexical level, experiencing each mark and at the same time, Country imposes itself through the scale of the works and its own subjectivity that moves the viewer as “object”. The oscillation between intimate visceral experience of the individual panels and the whole imposing work is the movement that Country enforces. It is this immersive experience that I initially have of Country that the viewer re-experiences when visiting these drawings. The mapping is the experience and the experience is the mapping, further overcoming the dilemma of amnesia. This different mode of mapping is a reaction against representation, as seen and realized in the representationalist works of contemporary artists such as Tillers. It is the real material effects of texture, surface, movement, tone and scale on the viewing audience, the imprint and index onto memory that brings about the obliteration of amnesia. It is here that the works engender experience through not only sensation but via this immersive sensation of the subjectivity of Country and the relationship between one Country to another. As explained by Bolt, it is the force of immersion that re-creates a new form of materiality:

It is the sensational pressure that destroys the calm of the surface and the contour and in doing so ruins the normative meaning thus allowing for the ‘subject to come through’ anew. (Bolt 2011: 66)

The subject that comes through anew becomes crucial knowledge, a repetition or ritual of knowledge that reframes our experience and sensation and therefore memory.
**Overcoming Amnesia**

The key points in how the works overcome amnesia have been explained above through the primacy of practice, engendering experience. This occurs through the making and sensation and the *methexical* quality of the work. It is in the indexical nature of the work and through individual and group experience and re-experience of the work that amnesia can be overcome. The movement and nature of experience itself allows this dynamic. The real material effects and experience in the viewer is an imprint on their physical memory. This dynamic is crucial to continuing the *methexical* quality of the works. The works are forever moving, forever imposing their subjectivity of Country. The works also relay their relatedness to each other as a collective. Importantly memory comes from and by the viewer, as well as from the works.

The memory of Country and the visceral presentation of Country is relayed and danced in the work and the viewers’ immersive experience. This re-iterates the appropriateness of the application of practice in concert with exegesis. Practice as research is a corollary for the fundamental basis of real experience as it is realized in Indigenous conceptions of knowledge, ideology and culture. This view of the world is based on the real, on the premise of Country, which is not predicated on any imaginary relationship to existence. In the alternative cultural ideology that I have proposed in this exegesis and demonstrated in my creative practice, the dichotomy of the imaginary and the real is abolished and the relatedness of all things is embodied in ‘Ways of Being’, ‘Ways of Doing’, and ‘Ways of Knowing’ as explained by Karen Martin’s grounded relatedness. It is this movement of knowledge that defeats the threat of amnesia.
Figure 26. Brian Martin, *Methexical Countryside: Wiradjuri # 1*, 2011, charcoal on paper, 2000 x 1500cm

Figure 27. Brian Martin, *Methexical Countryside: Wurundjeri # 3*, 2011, charcoal on paper, 2000 x 1500cm

Figure 28. Brian Martin, *Methexical Countryside: Darug # 1*, 2012, charcoal on paper, 2000 x 1500cm

Figure 29. Brian Martin, *Methexical Countryside: Wiradjuri # 2*, 2011, charcoal on paper, 2000 x 1500cm
Figure 30. Brian Martin, *Methexical Countryside: Wurundjeri # 2*, 2011, charcoal on paper, 2000 x 1500cm

Figure 31. Brian Martin, *Methexical Countryside: Darug # 2*, 2012, charcoal on paper, 2000 x 1500cm

Figure 32. Brian Martin, *Methexical Countryside: Darug # 3*, 2012, charcoal on paper, 2000 x 1500cm

Figure 33. Brian Martin, *Methexical Countryside: Wiradjuri # 3*, 2012, charcoal on paper, 2000 x 1500cm
Figure 34. Brian Martin, *Methexical Countryside: Paakantyi #1*, 2013, charcoal on paper, 2000 x 1500cm
CONCLUSION

SITUTATED KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE

It is through identifying the gap in representationalist thinking that this exegesis operates. Initially via Althusserian ideology, we came to understand ideology predicated on an imaginary relationship to existence. By utilising Huyssen’s amnesia, we uncovered the effects that ideology can have culturally. Heidegger’s ontology in art offered an alternative understanding of ideology, despite that it is still operating within the constraints of western thinking. Bolt’s performativity presented a way of understanding a new materialism in the arts and by extending this understanding and when combined with Martin’s relatedness and an Indigenous conception of Country, we arrived at an ideology based on the real. By adopting this alternative framework, I demonstrated how this new conception of ideology operates in cultural productions of Indigenous artists where it has failed in the representationalism based on false consciousness within the work of contemporary Australian artists. My approach to research in the form of practice and exegesis illuminated the real material and the real immaterial and demonstrated the cohesion between the concrete and the abstract, the real and the imaginary. It was in the making and analysis of the Methexical Countryscapes that extended and developed my argument.

It is important to note that the image-making in Aboriginal culture can at times emphasise the “how” instead of the “what” as some things have to be kept private. It is the way of working indexically that has impacted onto the viewing audience,
physically affecting memory through and by its performativity. The process of making the work is vital to the experience of the making and the relaying of this making to others. Some things are secret knowledge where other things are public knowledge. This cultural protocol is very significant in many cultural practices within Indigenous society. The drawings I have made demonstrate the “how” and the “what” concurrently. The audience that the drawings may reach is very diverse in the way they situate themselves in relation to the practice of Aboriginal Art as well as the wider field of art discourse. Of course these are general categorisations that have been created in order to locate different practices.

The *Methexical Countryscapes* relay my fundamental right for self-definition in how I enact my way of making work from various cultural standpoints. The drawings enact the ideas and issues communicated in the exegesis component of my research and operate across a cultural and discursive divide. The drawings start from a point of an Indigenous ideological understanding of the world and present work that is not engrossed in dichotomies of meaning, which have been created to define “Aboriginal Art”.

This approach is compounded by my own definition of being an artist or someone who makes things in a constant state of flux. My Aboriginality is an important basis of my identity but this should not limit or categorise my image-making, for example by suggesting that the works are not “Aboriginal art”. These works are Aboriginal art in a contemporary sense and at the same time depend on specific ways of looking. The key issue here is that an Indigenous worldview allows us to understand the *methexical* quality of art. This is usually ignored in accounts of
realism and formalism. An Indigenous worldview reconfigures understandings of art, practice and culture.

More important than the categorisation of “what they are”, the drawings exist as they are- they exist as Country, which is crucial in the field of the theory and practice of art and also in the broader experience and dynamic of the world around us. This is their contribution to knowledge. They offer materiality and the real to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures. They are from an Indigenous framework and conception of the world and purposefully attempt to offer an understanding of this world to a wider audience in a form that is accessible to all. The works have revealed a real experience of Country and materiality through an Indigenous understanding of the world. This is new knowledge in the sense that they are seemingly representational, until the viewer sees how they are constructed and what they are presenting: Country as opposed to a different conception of Land. They also reveal a materialist understanding of the real effects and affects created by images. This has crucial significance for articulating a materialist position, which reframes how we look at the world in relation to experience and embodiment. They also extend beyond the discourse of art in that they question the politics of identity and the constructions of cultural differences and confined categorisations that are formed to create these restricted imaginary definitions of culture, ideology and people.

Indigenous ideology and cultural practices are a critical vehicle for articulating how we can reframe the way we look at the world in relation to experience. In this, we can move towards adapting this alternative ideology not only to culture and theory,
but also to politics and worldviews. Attempting to “prove” Indigenous ideology within a western structure and framework within an exegesis can undercut the very argument itself. However, the exegetical component can act as a materialist component of the practice. This has significance not only for practice-led research, but also to reframe how Indigenous ideology and culture can support and refigure a cohesive and collective identity in Australia.
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