

A WEEK ON THE COOKS RIVER

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This is to certify that to the best of my knowledge; the content of this thesis is my own work. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or other purposes.

I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work and that all the assistance received in preparing this thesis and sources have been acknowledged.

Signature

Name: Clare Britton

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

This research is conducted on Gadigal land with respect.

The Cooks River moves through the land of the Wangal, Cadigal and Gameygal people.¹

This research acknowledges Traditional Owners and pays respect to Elders past, present and future.

¹ Paul Irish, *Aboriginal History Along the Cooks River* (Sydney: Cooks River Alliance, 2017), 11.

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ABSTRACT: A WEEK ON THE COOKS RIVER

KEYWORDS: Site-specific art; rivers; performance; visual art; memory; The Cooks River; walking; practice-led research; history of Sydney.

A Week on the Cooks River addresses the question: *What Australian history and attitudes are exposed through embodied observation of the Cooks River, and can those findings be communicated visually?* The dual outcomes of this thesis are a body of visual artwork and a paper that elaborates on the historical and theoretical underpinnings of the work. Both iterations of this research intend to expose narratives held in the landscape of Sydney's Cooks River and analyse and respond to the work of artists who engage with site, walking and water. Through the practice of turning attention to the history, geography and visual language of an overlooked urban river, *A Week on the Cooks River* uses a small frame to consider broader issues and ideas.

Named after Captain James Cook, the Cooks River is a tidal estuary that flows twenty-three kilometres from Yagoona to Botany Bay in Sydney, Australia. Over its course, the water moves through the traditional lands of the Wangal, Gadigal and Gameygal² people and past middens and cave shelters, suburban houses, Sydney's largest cemetery, an ice-skating rink, industrial areas and golf courses. The water in the Cooks merges with Botany Bay where the river's mouth has been engineered a kilometre off course to make way for Sydney's International Airport. This research establishes that given this geography and its name, Sydney's history is reflected in the Cooks River, but the river holds an under observed place in Australia's post-colonial narrative.

² Paul Irish, *Aboriginal History Along the Cooks River*. (Sydney: Cooks River Alliance, 2017), 11.

Research for this thesis is informed by Guy Debord's *The Theory of the Derive* and Henry David Thoreau's *A Week on the Concord and Merrimac Rivers* and uses the practice of walking and rowing as a methodology for documenting and exploring the Cooks River today. This approach was developed by the author at Sydney College of the Arts to harness methodologies honed during the making of contemporary performance, for studio practice, site-based research and visual art. This thesis proposes that images and installations can play a role in disseminating research to a non-academic audience, thereby making places like the Cooks River more legible. *A Week on the Cooks River* argues that Sydney's Cooks River is an entangled, worldly, troubling place and a potential training ground for enacting Feminist theorist Donna Haraway's suggestion that we "stay with the trouble."³ Adopting an interdisciplinary approach to research enables information not usually in the same field of view to be considered together to generate new meaning and create new understandings. *A week on the Cooks River* proposes tracing the Cooks River's length, tributaries and tidal patterns as a productive frame for contemplating and researching complex layers of Australian culture.

³ Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

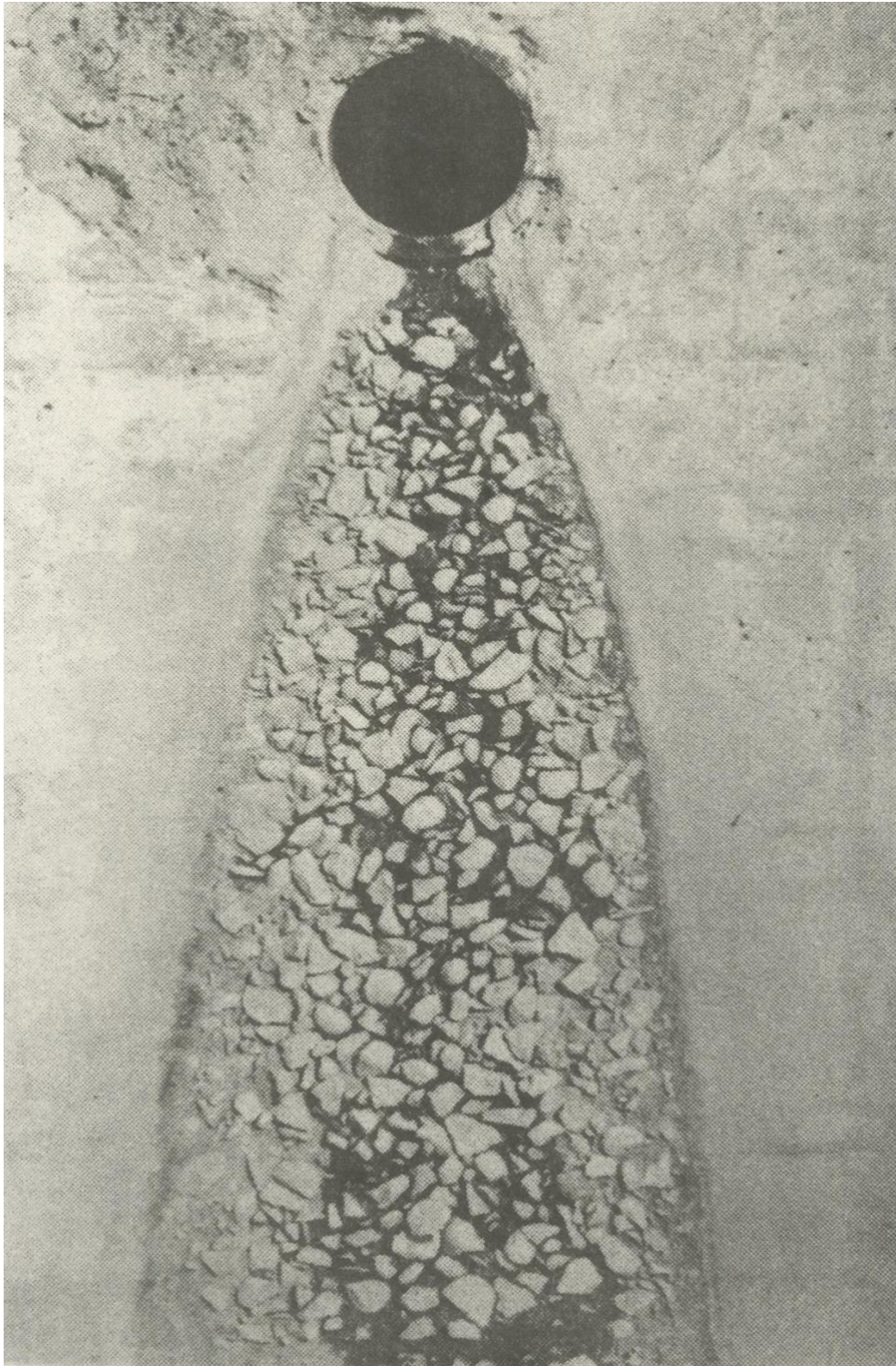


Figure 1. Research image. Risograph print of “Water eating concrete at Wolli Creek” from *Cooks River Environment Survey and Landscape Design : Report of the Cooks River Project, 2019.*

I want to understand how tracts of
country and drafts of consciousness
can mingle and fashion each other in
long processes of remembrance when
each beat of the present lays down the
past over lifetimes, across generations,
throughout ecologies and geographies
and inside societies, all knitted by
actively remembering individual
psyches. So, my writing needs a
personal tone.⁴

⁴ Ross Gibson, *Memoryscopes: Remnants Forensics Aesthetics* (Crawley, Western Australia: UWA Publishing, 2015), 1.

INTRODUCTION: YAGOONA

The aluminium picnic table at the highest point in Graf Park, Yagoona looks out over two sports ovals. The closest oval has an AstroTurf cricket pitch in the centre—green against the mottled yellows and browns of the actual grass. A small fence circles the field with black hurricane wire attached to round steel posts. The perimeter of the park is a patchwork of hardwood and Colorbond fencing. In Graf Park Yagoona, every one of the houses surrounding the park has its back fence to the sports fields. The city of Bankstown has installed signs saying, "No kicking of balls against the fence", evoking a steady suburban Australian drumbeat. There are various places on the low side of the park where water can start travelling underground—grates, holes, pipes. Sydney's skyline makes angular grey-blue shapes on the horizon. In the mid-ground, there are cranes rigged over new apartment blocks and, nearer to me, the silhouette of a wonky telegraph pole and a palm tree. None of this feels like the beginning of a river. There is no mythic source, no groundwater gurgling up through a crack in a rock at the top of a mountain. No mist. There is a rain garden, which sounds nicer than it looks because there has not been much rain. In the dry, tangled, thin blades of native grass, there is an empty packet of salt and vinegar chips. On one side of the rain garden, there is a concrete retaining wall surrounded by sandstone blocks with a dark hole at the centre. The mouth of a pipe. Visually, this dark, round opening is the part of the park that most satisfies the idea of the beginning of a river. The start of the Cooks River is ambiguous. Maybe it is the mouth of the pipe recessed into the concrete retaining wall. Perhaps it is the little gutter running adjacent to the rain garden, or the muddy ground-patches where the dirt is dark. It is not even wet. To call this a backwater would be an overstatement—it is not even a puddle; but these small dark patches are the beginning.

⁵ A simple engineered water filtering system that is made from a large hole filled with different porous materials and topped with hardy native grasses. It drains the water through the ground like a big sieve.

Yagoona is the suburb in South West Sydney where the Cooks River is said to begin; thus, making it an apt name for this introduction. Yagoona is an Indigenous word that means “now” or “today”⁶ and it is precisely this association of “presence” with the words “now” and “today” that animates this project.

The Cooks River is a tidal estuary as opposed to a river. Rain gathers at the lowest points in the valley into a ribbon of water that meets the saltwater moving in and out with the daily tides. The water flows twenty-three kilometres from Yagoona, through Rookwood cemetery to Botany Bay in Sydney. Over its course, the water moves past suburban houses, Indigenous middens and cave shelters, an ice-skating rink and industrial areas. The river’s mouth empties directly into Botany Bay and was engineered a kilometre off-course, in the late 1940’s, to make way for Sydney’s Kingsford Smith International Airport⁷. At an unexceptional sports ground in Yagoona, it is difficult to hold in your mind the idea of Botany Bay and the Pacific Ocean. *A Week on the Cooks River* targets this gap in understanding.

THE PROBLEM

A Week on the Cooks River addresses the research question:

Following the river, what Australian history and attitudes are exposed through embodied observation⁸ of the Cooks River and can those findings be communicated visually?

⁶ "Yagoona," Dictionary of Sydney, accessed February 25th, 2020, <https://dictionaryofsydney.org/place/yagoona>

⁷ Ian Tyrell, *River Dreams, the People and Landscape of the Cooks River*, UNSW Press: Sydney, 2018, 142.

⁸ The phrase “embodied observation” acknowledges that this research has been conducted in person and on site over time. Understandings gleaned by deliberately paying attention to the Cooks River have guided both the library and studio-based aspects of this study.

Over the decades, the Cooks River has attracted many passionate advocates who see its beauty and potential. However, this care runs concurrent with the history of the river's mistreatment. Historian Paul Carter points out in *The Road to Botany Bay: An Exploration of Landscape and History* that Botany Bay (and by extension the Cooks River) is one of Australia's first "Other" places: "Botany Bay, the name no sooner makes history than it is eclipsed, left astern. It ends as it began, a rhetorical place."⁹ Rejected in favour of the Parramatta River and Sydney Harbour, the Cooks River is not the body of water that comes to mind when thinking about Sydney. We don't put it on our postcards or show it in advertisements. Tourists do not come to Sydney to get a photograph of themselves on the Cooks. In my experience, when people get excited talking about the Cooks River it includes visceral descriptions of how it smells at low tide or of the remarkable things they have seen floating in the water. I have seen cars, bikes, a Vespa, shopping trolleys and a teddy bear larger than a person—matted, sodden and face down in the mangroves. Anecdotes I have heard include sightings of a lounge suite and dead animals—a horse's head, a pig and dogs. To borrow from Bachelard's *Poetics of Space*¹⁰ by thinking about the Cooks River through the metaphor of a home, the Cooks River is more like looking down the back of Sydney's couch as opposed to greeting Sydney at its front door. As the Cooks River is somewhat unconsidered, it reveals Sydney how it is—and not just how it would like to be.

The Cooks River is elusive, thin, incomplete, easy to overlook. It lacks the natural beauty of Sydney Harbour or Bondi Beach because immersing yourself in its salty water is dangerous. There is a theory going around that if it hadn't rained for two weeks and you didn't stir the bed or put your head under the water, you might get away with a quick dash across the Cooks. But having read what I have read, I wouldn't chance it. The *2016–2017 Cooks River Ecological Health Report Card*¹¹ measures

9 Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay. An exploration of landscape and history*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988), 34

10 Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 3.

11 "Cooks River Ecological Health Report Card 2016–2017," (Sydney: Cooks River Alliance, 2017). Accessed 25th February, 2020. <http://cooksriver.org.au/publications/ecological-health-report-card-2016-2017/>

and publishes the health of macroinvertebrates (dragonflies, snails, worms etc.), water quality, benthic diatoms (microscopic algae) and vegetation communities at several places along the river. In the most recently published health report card, the river was found to be showing symptoms of “Urban Stream Syndrome” and the overall health of the river was described as “poor”. In a scale that slides from A-F, there was no point on the river where the Cooks scored higher than a D. The image that begins this introduction (page 1) is an enlarged risograph print I made of a small photograph from the 1976 *Cooks River Environment Survey and Landscape Design*.¹² It depicts water draining into the Cooks River at Wolli Creek so chemically toxic that it is attacking concrete. To this day, the Cooks River remains polluted with heavy metals and sewerage, and the street rubbish and debris people throw into the river, or which is gathered up by stormwater.

I was born in Sydney and grew up in Ashfield, a suburb in the catchment area of the Cooks River. The river and my relationship to its catchment is not something I thought about while I was growing up, and I have not previously addressed it in any of my work. I don’t think this was solely due to my own lack of engagement; the Cooks River is a strangely illegible place. An increasing awareness of the Cooks River is evident in the sharp increase in material published about it in the last 4 years. This thesis is a small part of a growing body of writing, thinking, community activism, image-making and analysis that takes the Cooks River as its subject. Many individuals and organisations have long been passionate advocates and their contributions shape current understandings of the Cooks River and efforts to increase its visibility and legibility. These include The Cooks River Alliance, The Mudcrabs, The Cooks River Valley Association, The Wolli Creek Preservation Society, The Tempe River Canoe Club, Ian Tyrell, Paul Irish, Asher Milgate, Leslie Muir, Jenny Newman, Jason Wing, Nathan Moran, Nadia Wheatley, Doug Benson, Danie Ondinea, Virginia Bear and Peter Munro among others.

¹² Cooks River Project, *Cooks River Environment Survey and Landscape Design: Report of the Cooks River Project* (Sydney: Amber Press, 1976), 12.

My focus on the *legibility* of the river is informed by a collaborative, interdisciplinary research project active in the USA called *Mississippi: An Anthropocene River*. The aim of *Mississippi: An Anthropocene River* is communicated on the website that holds the collaborative research together.

Mississippi: An Anthropocene River makes the iconic landscape of the Mississippi River Valley legible as a critical zone of habitation and long-term interaction between humans and the environment. The project is a collaborative learning experiment to understand the river as a composite and storied space— emblematic in the way it grounds the global transition into the Anthropocene, the geological epoch of humankind. Through transdisciplinary field explorations and the production of locally situated conversations, the project contours the complex way in which histories, ecologies, technologies, and worldviews collate and collide to shape an entire river system.¹³

The existence of *Mississippi: An Anthropocene River* is reassuring to this small project about the Cooks River. Conceptually, the idea of making an iconic landscape legible is deeply relevant. Compared to the Mississippi River, the Cooks is not an iconic landscape, so its legibility is even more obscure. Standing on the bank of the Cooks, the river's twenty-three-kilometre trajectory is fragmented and hard to perceive of as a whole. Despite the many colonial, urban and suburban compromises the Cooks River has absorbed, it is strangely beautiful. Its beauty is complicated and delicate. If you soften your eyes and look out along the water as the sun is setting, you might see a mullet throw itself out of the golden pinky water and imagine what it would feel like to swim down to Tempe

¹³ Mississippi. An Anthropocene River, *Mississippi: An Anthropocene River* Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW), Berlin, and the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science (MPIWG), Berlin, in collaboration with numerous international partners, accessed 20th January, 2020. <https://anthropocene-curriculum.org/contribution/in-situ-anthropocene>.

railway station instead of walking there. If you look closely at the water you might notice a slick, a dense tangle of plastic, a Keep Cup floating downstream or you might make out the shape of an O-Bike on the riverbed; this doesn't account for the pollution you can't see.

THE ARGUMENT

A Week on the Cooks River proposes that tracing the length, tributaries and tidal patterns of an under-observed Sydney river will provide a productive frame for contemplating various layers of contemporary Australian culture. One of the propositions of this thesis is that a body of water can guide an artistic enquiry. Australian philosopher Val Plumwood's thinking about having a “radical openness to the Other”¹⁴ informs this premise. The Cooks River has determined a new path for me, geographically, artistically and conceptually, through the city in which I was born and grew up. Feminist theorist Donna Haraway challenges human-centric views of the world and suggests that we “stay with the trouble”.

Staying with the trouble requires making odd kin, that is, we require each other in unexpected collaborations and combinations in hot compost piles. We become with each other or not at all. That kind of material semiotics is always situated someplace and not no place. Entangled and worldly. This and not that. Alone in our separate kinds of expertise and experience, we know both too much and too little, and so we succumb to despair or to hope, and neither is a sensible materialist attitude. Neither despair nor hope is tuned to the senses. To mindful matter. To material semiotics. To mortal earthlings in thick co-presence.¹⁵

¹⁴ Val Plumwood, "Journey to the Heart of Stone," *Nature, Culture and Literature* 5 (2007), 22.

¹⁵ Donna Haraway “Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene” Lecture at the San Francisco Art Institute, April 25, 2017. Video 1:34:44 Accessed 25th February, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GrYA7sMQaBQ>

Haraway warns against both hope and despair; the immensity of the task at hand with our environment in the age of the Anthropocene can be paralysing. Haraway says that hopeful people sometimes do nothing—putting faith in technology and human resilience and that despairing people do nothing because it's too late. The Cooks River might be a place where we can develop the “sensible materialist attitude”¹⁶ that Haraway is advocating—a place small enough that efforts might make a positive difference. *A Week on the Cooks River* argues that the Cooks River is an entangled, worldly, troubling place and a potential training ground for making odd kin and staying with the trouble.

APPROACH TO RESEARCH

This thesis answers the research question using descriptive language and vernacular expression to engage the reader in a shared experience. To structure my embodied observation of the river, I have repeatedly returned to the question, what is the Cooks River like today? This question emerged out of a review of the literature on the Cooks River. It addresses my observation that it's hard to understand what it used to feel like on the Cooks River. The first field trip I undertook for this research was an excursion devised for Sydney University geography students tracing engineering changes along the riverbanks.¹⁷ I conducted this fieldwork as an artist rather than a geographer. This research has identified a gap in knowledge of the Cooks River and intends to communicate not just historical and theoretical research, but also physical research, that is, descriptions of what it is like to walk and row the length of the River.

¹⁶Donna Haraway “Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene”

¹⁷ Included as an appendix.

My art practice has developed through my work as the Co-Artistic Director of performance collective *My Darling Patricia*,¹⁸ as well as through my work freelancing as a dramaturg, director and designer in contemporary performance (including dance and experimental sound).¹⁹ My background working in performance demands that I consider the audience for this thesis. I aim to work and research in a manner that is rigorous and diligent; to write in a way that is approachable to anyone interested in the subject. This is a political decision intended to make the work more accessible. In addition to this approach, I am also addressing a gap in knowledge, also a political act. I also intend my use of the first-person and vernacular expression to acknowledge the limitations of my research approach by foregrounding the use of first-person descriptions: “My writing needs a personal tone.”²⁰ Positioning myself within the writing, and situating this research within the context of studio practice and my observations, is my attempt to mitigate the potential reflexive flaws in my research question. I hope that a reader of this paper will feel like they have walked along the Cooks River *with* me, thinking about Australian Culture and that, over time, this thesis will become a document of how the river and our culture has changed. This approach is an extension of my performance practice and intends to bring a new understanding of the role that art can play in creating richer and deeper connections to place—specifically, this place.

The concept for this project came out of my career working as a designer, dramaturg and director in contemporary performance and dance. *A Week on the Cooks River* has been a container for the evolution of my practice from performance maker to visual artist. In 2008, I instigated a project that became a collaboration between My Darling Patricia and Moogahlin Performing Arts.²¹ This

18 “My Darling Patricia”, My Darling Patricia. Accessed 25th February, 2020. <http://www.mydarlingpatricia.com/>.

19 See appendix for more information about performance, sound and dance works completed during this research period.

20 Ross Gibson, *Memoryscopes: Remnants Forensics Aesthetics* (Crawley, Western Australia: UWA Publishing, 2015), 1..

21 Moogahlin Performing Arts are an Indigenous performance company based on Gadigal land at Carriageworks in Sydney. <http://www.moogahlin.org/>.

involved researching, with empathy, the story of Jimmy Governor, a bushranger who murdered relatives of mine in 1900. The resulting performance work, *Posts in the Paddock* (2011), engaged with the ruins of the house where the murders happened on the farm where my mum grew up. We worked for three years in collaboration under the guidance of Lily Shearer with Moogahlin and the actor LeRoy Parsons who is Jimmy's great, great-grandson and LeRoy's Aunty, Loretta Parsley.



Figure 2. *Posts in the Paddock*, 2009, Photo Michelle Blakeney

I found a section in my grandpa's journal where he talked about the land we call “Poggy” and how it had changed in his lifetime because Indigenous people used to burn the bush back and it became overgrown when they stopped doing that²²; reiterating, in a couple of throwaway lines, the firestick farming Bill Gammage describes in *The Biggest Estate on Earth: How Aborigines Made Australia*.²³ The result of this work is that *Posts in the Paddock* unsettled me. Wherever I am in Australia, I want to be mindful of the history and stories that land holds. In the catalogue essay for *Posts in the Paddock*, Bandjalung curator and artist Djon Mundine frames this exploration of the site as a kind of memory walk:

²² “Poggy” burned in the 2019/20 catastrophic bush fires.

²³ Gammage, Bill. *The Biggest Estate on Earth: How Aborigines Made Australia*. Crows Nest, N.S.W: Allen & Unwin, 2011.

In Cicero's *De Oratore* (55 BCE), following the collapse of Scopas' banquet hall, the poet Simonides of Ceos is described as inventing a "system of loci" memory where he was able to locate and name the dead under the rubble. In our history, is the challenge knowing who and where the dead bodies are buried? Is our memory about reclaiming things from "under the rubble"? A retrieval operation?²⁴

A Week on the Cooks River is another kind of memory walk. Having considered the history of the place where my mum grew up in *Posts in the Paddock*, I wanted to take some responsibility for engaging with the history of the place where I currently live my life. Where *Posts in the Paddock* was a collaboratively authored, oral history-based project, *A Week on the Cooks River* is singular: my attention is focused on the river and what has already been published about it. I hope that this work will become a foundation from which I continue to research and make work that reflects on Australian landscapes.

I have an embodied, life-long experience of this landscape, but it is only in the last four years that I have really engaged with that. In Australia, remembering our military history, we say "lest we forget" a couple of months after our nation celebrates January 26 on the anniversary of this country's colonisation. The concept "lest we forget" needs to be embraced more deeply. Acknowledging the truth of Australia's history may allow for connections to form with the depth of culture, knowledge, and spirituality that this country has to offer. During the 2019 Sydney Festival, the first all-night vigil was held at Barangaroo on the 25th of January.²⁵ A moment to reflect as a community on the impact of colonisation and what came before Australia Day. Acknowledging our history may allow us to put our present into proper context and move into our future with stronger foundations and more

²⁴ Jeff Khan Clare Britton, Djon Mundine, Tony O'Brien, Loretta Parsley, "Posts in the Paddock," ed. Performance Space (Sydney: Performance Space, 2011), 6.

²⁵ "The Vigil," Sydney Festival, Accessed 25th February 2020, <https://www.sydneyfestival.org.au/events/the-vigil>

confidence. In Sydney, this is one of the “troubles” we need to learn to stay with.²⁶ How do we take personal responsibility for our colonial history?

It is important to pay respect to the Traditional Owners of the river, the Wangal, Cadigal and Gameygal people²⁷ and acknowledge the Indigenous history and ongoing custodianship of the Cooks River on country that remains sovereign and unceded. Reading Aileen Morton Roberston’s *Talkin’ Up to the White Woman* and Clare Land’s *Decolonizing Solidarity: Dilemmas and Directions for Supporters of Indigenous Struggles* has been instructive. As has Anita Heiss’ 2002 essay “Writing about Indigenous Australia: some issues to consider and protocols to follow. A discussion paper”. In her article, Heiss points out that non-Indigenous writers can unintentionally take up space that could be occupied by Indigenous writers and academics who write with a culturally embedded understanding of that history.

For some non-Indigenous writers working in the area, their case for doing so gains credibility as they are seen to be providing a voice (however indirectly) to Aboriginal Australia. However, this attitude is unacceptable to many Indigenous writers who are tired of competing with white writers for the opportunity to write and be published in the area that is particularly and specifically related to their lives, that of the Aboriginal experience.²⁸

This thesis is written with Heiss’ critique in mind. I have written about Indigenous history where it intersects with colonisation, the place where I live, and how I have practised as an artist. I have referred only to published material about the Cooks River that is publicly available, so my research is

²⁶ Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016.

²⁷ Paul Irish, *Aboriginal History Along the Cooks River*. (Sydney: Cooks River Alliance, 2017), 11.

²⁸ Anita Heiss, "Writing About Indigenous Australia Some Issues to Consider and Protocols to Follow: A Discussion Paper," *Southerly* 66.2, no. Summer 2002.

“situated and therefore, partial.”²⁹ Research that attempts to understand some of what is already published about the Indigenous history of the Cooks River forms part of the historical underpinnings of this body of work. Though it may not be highly legible in the resultant artworks, this research has informed my understanding of the Cooks River as Aboriginal Land with a deep history of thousands of years of life lived, canoes made, fires lit, seafood eaten and only 250 years in which the river is physically diverted, dammed, becomes toxic and gets filled with things that shouldn't be there. It is not my place to make work about Indigenous history, but the work I make is informed by an awareness of thousands of years of history held in the banks, the bed and the landscape of the Cooks River. This fact informs my understanding of the river and approach to making artworks about my experience of this place.

CONTENT OF THE THESIS

This practice-led, site-based research has led me to websites and archives like the Dictionary of Sydney, Trove, local history publications (especially the work of Lesley Muir), the Cooks River Alliance Archive and the pages of the 1976 *Cooks River Environment Survey and Landscape Design*. *A Week on the Cooks River* has generated its own extensive archive of photographs, videos and drawings of the Cooks River as I experienced it during the years 2016-20. Since commencing this study, significant publications have added to our understanding of this body of water. Notable recent publications include Ian Tyrell's book *River Dreams, the People and Landscape of the Cooks River* (2018) and the works that make up the *Cooks River Catchment Aboriginal History Project*: Paul Irish's publication *Aboriginal History Along the Cooks River* (2018) and Asher Milgate's *Oral History* (2018). These works indicate increasing levels of awareness and attention towards the Cooks River.

²⁹ Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *Talking up to the White Woman. Indigenous Women and Feminism* (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 2000), xxii.

The Theory of the Derive by Guy Debord, Michel de Certeau's essay *Walking in the City*, Henry David Thoreau's *A Week on the Concord River* and *Walking* and Rebecca Solnit's *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* are all texts which express and value action. These authors value walking as a methodology, and it is this action of moving along a body of water—with the metronome of footsteps or oar movements setting the rhythm—that is central to the work generated by this research. The relationship these writers create between movement and understanding inform the theoretical underpinnings of this body of work.

De Certeau's "Walking in the City" begins with a prophetic view of New York from the top of the World Trade Centre. Writing in 1988, de Certeau observes that New York doesn't get old; it just throws off its history and reinvents itself for the present moment. This statement rings true for the Cooks River as well. There are things I don't know about how future contexts will change the emphasis of this research, just as de Certeau did not understand that the Twin Towers would be attacked in 2001, and the image of Icarus he was evoking at the beginning of that essay would come to have a resonance that was unknowable at the time of writing. The future will happen to the Cooks River, and the descriptions included in this thesis will become inaccurate and altered in ways that I cannot understand today. *A Week on the Cooks River* embraces de Certeau's thought that walking through a city is a type of storytelling. De Certeau ruminates on the automatic choreography of walking in the city:

These practitioners make use of spaces that cannot be seen; their knowledge of them is as blind as that of lovers in each other's arms. The paths that correspond in these intertwining unrecognised poems in which each body is an element signed by many

others elude legibility. It is as though the practises organising a bustling city were characterised by their blindness.³⁰

De Certeau goes on to say that, “objects and words also have hollow places in which the past sleeps.”³¹ *A Week on the Cooks River* is an attempt to take the time to move through the city of Sydney and listen some of its “hollow places”. Rather than looking at Sydney from a birds-eye view like de Certeau does with New York, *A week on the Cooks River* moves between perspectives above, within, alongside and beneath the river.

Guy Debord’s *dérive* is a proposition for how to shake off the “blindness” observed by de Certeau and become perceptive in the ways we move through a city. *Dérive* translates from the French as “drift”. This thesis examines the Cooks River through the lens of several *dérives*.

A walk along the urban river. A tracing of a body of water with my own body. Following the Cooks River has taken me to places just around the corner, where I have never been. In a 1956 essay Debord situates the derive within the practice of “psychogeography”. Psychogeography acknowledges the non-material, non-human and less tangible aspects of a city— its atmosphere, or the strangely authorless mood to which everyone contributes but no-one owns. Debord proposes that “psychogeographical contours” are trajectories that form a confluence of lived, social, economic, geographical and chance encounters that coalesce to create the way a place feels.

The *dérive* consciously rewrites our passage through the city and confounds our work and consumption-oriented trajectories. Rather than moving from house to job to shops to house, its movement reinserts poetic, unproductive potential into our lives. Perhaps we can walk for 20 minutes in the direction of the setting sun. Debord’s analysis and strategies are even more pertinent

30 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 93.

31 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 93.

when re-examined in the context of the Anthropocene and the emergence of the internet. Today our trajectories are not just physical. Social and news media profit from attention gained by our fear, outrage and our connection to other people. American artist Jenny O'Dell proposes in *How to Do Nothing, Resisting the Attention Economy* that spending time in real places, giving them our attention and researching their histories could be a methodology for re-calibrating our relationship to the attention economy, capitalism and our environment. O'Dell describes being drawn to a rose garden near her home in Oakland, California “like a deer to a salt lick or a goat to the top of a hill.”³² This innate compulsion (and the critique behind it) aptly describes my initial engagement with the river. *A Week on the Cooks River* is an attempt to look, with fresh eyes, at my every day and the river at the bottom of the street, and consciously tuning my attention to the concepts, landscapes, discussions and discourses that have shaped my practice. In paying attention to the cultural geography that I am a part of, I have discovered a richness I greatly appreciate.

Creating imagery inspired by the Cooks River is a contribution to new knowledge. Engaging with this site, over time, through research, observation, photography, sculpture and video, allows future changes in the river to be communicated and, therefore, reflected on. The writing of Vanessa Berry, Nadia Wheatly, Delia Falconer and Gavin Souter has been crucial to my critical reflections on the Cooks River, providing a personal and subjective rendering of Sydney, and the landscape of the Cooks River. Their prose contains a tangible sense of what Sydney felt like to them. My practice has followed Berry, Wheatley, Falconer and Souter by using language as well as images to communicate my observations on the river. My first-person descriptions of the river begin and end chapters of this thesis and are distinguished from the other text by a coloured panel. Gathering interdisciplinary resources together with embodied observation is a practice I draw from working in performance. It is through the ethic of framing—in the same field of view—scholarship, local history, public

³² Jenny O'Dell, *How to Do Nothing: Resisting the Attention Economy* (New York: Melville House Publishing, 2019), 4.

artwork and personal observations, that *A week on the Cooks River* can be considered a contribution to new understandings of the Cooks River. As an artist working in relationship to the Cooks River, this contribution is a kind of time capsule and a personal, visual and kinetic understanding of the river, as well as a historical and theoretical one. Working in relationship to *A Week on the Cooks River* has required looking back to the lineage of my art practice alongside this enquiry. This project can be considered as growing out of the context of Australian contemporary performance where I situate my practice as an artist. The fields of Land Art³³ and Social Sculpture also inform this study. Land Art practices direct relationships to landscape. Social Sculpture, as theorised by Joseph Beuys, proposes that every aspect of daily life can be approached creatively, and that “[I]he concept of art must transform itself to include everything that is created, even today's economic and production output.”³⁴

This body of work is also made in the wake of Nicholas Bourriaud’s observations about *Relational Aesthetics*³⁵ where artists make work inspired by social contexts, and Clare Bishop’s reminder that “if relational art produces human relations, then the next logical question to ask is what *types* of relations are being produced, for whom, and why?”³⁶ *A Week on the Cooks River* is indebted to the work and thinking of artists who have gone before and shaped our contemporary conception of sculpture, as well as the many artists who use walking in landscapes as a research tool including Hamish Fulton, Richard Long, Francis Alÿs, David Watson and Sara Morowetz.

33 Robert Smithson and Jack Flam, "Robert Smithson, the Collected Writings," (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

34 Joseph Beuys, "Joseph Beuys: Statements, 1976-1986," (*Flash Art* 45, no. October 1, 2012).

35 Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*. (Paris: Les Presses du Reel, 2002).

36 Claire Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," *City University of New York Graduate Centre* no.110, no. Fall (2004). Emphasis from the original

STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

A Week on the Cooks River is divided into four chapters beginning with two chapters that address the manifestation of this project and the methodologies that inform it, followed by a literature review of existing material about the Cooks River (early writing, artworks and more recent scholarship), and concluding with a discussion of the work of other artists and writers who use walking and conversation as a methodology for researching places.

Chapter One situates *A Week on the Cooks River* within the context of the work of artists and writers who use walking as a research methodology, and identifies the creative development strategies used to create the body of work, specifically reflecting on insights from a 2017 residency at the Watermill Centre in New York. *A Week on the Cooks River* deploys methods used for creating contemporary performance as tools for site-based and historical research. Chapter One argues that methodologies for interdisciplinary collaboration developed in performance making have much to offer projects that require collaboration across various areas of expertise. Interdisciplinary performance making methodologies can be applied to site-based research, and processing research into images and spaces can be an effective method for communicating that research to a general public audience. Processing research into images and installations creates opportunities for other people to experience these ideas for themselves, unavailable when using more conventional research methodologies. Chapter One will expand on the specific outcomes of this research and the processes from collaborative performance making that may be usefully applied to site-based interdisciplinary collaboration.

Chapter Two discusses the four *dérives* that have focused my attention on the Cooks River. This chapter reflects on those creative development processes and the body of artwork (photographs, video, sculptures, drawing experiments, propositional monuments and walks) that have resulted

from this research. Chapter Two also reflects on a collaborative conversation with artists Therese Keogh and Kenzee Patterson called *Rivers and a Well*.

Chapter Three is a literature review of significant publications that inform my current understanding of the history of the Cooks River. This literature review includes a variety of material: published oral histories, early colonial writing, a 1976 landscape survey, public artworks and an educational video alongside historical scholarship. Recent publications about the Cooks River have increased understandings of the river, and their consideration together in this literature review have not been written about before. Thus, this discussion of their research can be considered a contribution to new knowledge. The central argument of this chapter is that the Cooks River has a rich, complex ancient history that continues today. The argument for considering interdisciplinary research output is that doing so may shift our understanding of this place, pull new material into focus, and deepen the ways in which the river is valued. It is important to note that I am adding small threads to an existing tapestry of lives lived in a place that is at least 10,000 years old.³⁷

The fourth and final chapter discusses contemporary Australian academic practices that use walking, conversation, and following watery edges, as a research methodology. The discussion then considers Australian writers who turn their attention to place and temporality and who work to describe atmosphere and history. Finally, this chapter re-engages with the work of Henry David Thoreau, especially his book “A Week on the Concord and Merrimac Rivers”, which inspired the name of this project. This discussion situates the process I have undertaken in a broader field of research with long traditions that have manifestations within Australia and globally. Arguing that many academics and artists use walking, conversation and observing waterways as a research tool and the historical

³⁷ Val Attenbrow, *Sydney's Aboriginal Past: Investigating the Archaeological and Historical Records*, 2nd ed. (Sydney, N.S.W: University of New South Wales Press, 2010).

and theoretical underpinnings of *A Week on the Cooks River* are bolstered by the field of research of which this work is a part.

During the research for the final chapter of *A Week on the Cooks River* I got involved with collaborative projects *Walking Upstream*, *Mapping Edges*, *The Sydney Environment Institute*, *Composting Feminisms* and with Diego Bonetto's *Weed Walks*. I went on walks, presented research at symposiums and workshops, attended excursions, reading groups and exhibitions, and had many conversations. I also referred to published work on websites, and in essays and books. I read *A Week on the Concord and Merrimac Rivers* in my boat on the Cooks. I read writers who reflect on Sydney or the Cooks River, and I held their observations up against my own embodied knowledge of Sydney by writing and reflecting on their work and also by considering their work in relationship to one another. There are many artists and academics who acknowledge the value of researching physically and in conversation with others. This conversation and attendance is the "compost pile" that Donna Haraway talks about, and after which *Composting Feminisms* is named. In this process, we come in to contact, agree or disagree, shape our understanding, and expose our lack of understanding and learn. This chapter reiterates the proposition that creative work that maps and engages with the Cooks River can generate knowledge, and that making images and spaces inspired by that research can be a useful tool for consolidating and disseminating that knowledge to a non-academic audience.

The conclusion of this thesis, Botany Bay, outlines the challenges and opportunities encountered making this work; it explains how this research addressed the research question and describes the contributions that this research makes to new knowledge, and outlines the possibilities for future work.

This week on the Cooks River is not, strictly speaking “a week”. It is the culmination of four years of walking, rowing, drawing, researching and observing the Cooks River. In November 2017, I walked through Sydney along the length of the Cooks River from Yagoona in the South West of Sydney to Botany Bay and spent a week attentive to the river, its history and geography. I drew the Cooks Catchment area on the walls of Sydney College of the Arts every day for a week in 2018. In 2019 I projected underwater footage from the first trip along the river on the sleeping streets of Marrickville. Henry David Thoreau's journey up the Concord and Merrimac Rivers took two weeks to complete and two years to write. Working with shifting temporal scales is dictated by my interest in contradictions and ephemerality—what Paul Carter thinks of as “spatial history.”³⁸

Significantly, Carter turns his attention to what gets left out when history is written and towards the capacity of art, design and creative practice to address contradictory, elusive and bodily gaps in knowledge. Carter's approach to engaging with ephemeral history has informed my research. Carter considered the landscape of the Cooks River when he wrote *The Road to Botany Bay. An Exploration of Landscape and History*. Carter now works at the nexus of design, performance, history and geography. His more recent work is documented in his books *Material Thinking The Theory and Practice of Creative Research* and *Dark Writing: geography, performance, design*. Reading Carter's work compelled me into the landscape of the Cooks thinking about tacit history and the way power impacts archives. I have thought a lot about the fleeting, physical, and intangible histories Carter acknowledges in his introduction to *The Road to Botany Bay*: “The road to Botany Bay then is written against these mythic imaginings. It is a prehistory of places, a history of roads, footprints, trails of dust and foaming wakes...flight of birds, the direction of smoke, the lie of the land.”³⁹ Concurrently, *A Week on the Cooks River* also “recognises that our life as it discloses itself spatially is dynamic, material but invisible”⁴⁰

38 Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay. An Exploration of Landscape and History*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc, 1988), xxi

39 Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay*, xxii

40 Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay*, xxii

In 2012 the Cooks River flooded and all three bridges between our house and Marrickville went under the water. The swollen river ignored all of the human constructions: the bridges, the river-banks, the golf course, the footpath. All these things were underwater in a matter of hours. As the rain stopped and the tide receded, the landmarks re-emerged. This impressed on me how powerful the small body of water at the bottom of our street is. The Cooks River has patiently absorbed the blows that colonial ambition has dealt it, including its name. The Cooks River is, for the moment, hemmed in by steel retaining walls, concrete canals, and underground pipes, however, for a few hours in 2012, the flood demonstrated that all of this could hold steady for a long time and then change very quickly.

The interests and concerns outlined in this introduction are the patchy wetlands where this research begins. At different points along its course, Sydney arranges itself to either look towards or turn away from the Cooks River. As you trace the length of the Cooks River, the water gets deeper and the river becomes more substantial as it approaches the ocean. In his book *The Shallow Water Dictionary, A Grounding in Estuary English*, John Stilgoe observes how in shallow waters, “Rowboats, anachronisms elsewhere in the maritime world of windsurfers, jets skis and inflatable dinghies, seem to work”.⁴¹ I leave the land and start travelling along the river in a small rowboat, *Sally*, I refurbished for the purpose.

⁴¹ John R. Stilgoe, *Shallow Water Dictionary. A Grounding in Estuary English* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2004), 7.



Figure 3. Research image. Sydney College of the Arts Workshop, 2017

Onboard *Sally*, Debord's theory of drift has a literal manifestation as well as a conceptual one. The following chapters will continue to follow the river's geography, its history, and the process underpinning the creation of the body of work that is *A Week on the Cooks River*. Chapter One will begin with an analysis of the creative processes that made this body of work.



Figure 4. Research image. Sydney cockle shell from junction of Cooks River and Wolli Creek, 2019

Walking shares with making and working
that crucial element of engagement of the
body and mind with the world, of knowing
the world through the body and the body
through the world⁴²

⁴² Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001), 29.

CHAPTER ONE

Next to a petrol station in Yagoona, I saw the river travelling underground; a dark line of water receding into a concrete tunnel. In the upper reaches, I lost the river several times. I walked from Graf Park, through Yagoona, along Rookwood Road. With the river in mind, the flow of traffic looked like a current. Following train tracks, power lines and weedy grass, I stopped walking to look around. My chest tightened. I felt like being stationary made me conspicuous. I noticed (and turned a blind eye) to a discarded translucent pink plastic bag on the nature strip full of belts and dildos. When I found the river again it was running through small concrete channels in Rookwood cemetery: Sydney's largest necropolis. Long rectangular trenches appear following the lowest points and catching the water that seeps down through the grassy hills. You can't follow the river as a pedestrian from Rookwood Cemetery to Strathfield Golf Course: the property changes hands, so you have to walk around. Strathfield golf course changed significantly over the duration of my study. The advertisements by a company called "Conquest" for a lifestyle called "fairway living" have since been replaced by the apartments they were promoting and the old clubhouse by a new event centre. On the golf course, I noticed I was looking at the water differently. The edges of the river aren't fixed lines: they are dynamic, kinetic, liquid. The airborne spray irrigating the fairways is a part of the river too. Sitting under a tree on the dirt banks of the Cooks, I see the river meander off into the distance through the green fairways. The water has accumulated enough so that at Strathfield the river becomes a path that can be followed. A small path. I think if I took a determined run-up, I could jump over the whole thing.

This chapter details the process and the workspaces that have created *A Week on the Cooks River*, and considers the broader field of study within which it can be located. The chapter begins with examples of situated research and identifies the strategies used in the development of this body of work through a discussion of the creative processes engaged with during this study and an early residency. Reflecting on these processes led me to identifying research and creative development techniques from my experience working in contemporary performance and recognising how I adapted those methods for studio practice alongside discoveries from an early residency completed at the Watermill Centre in New York. This chapter argues that practices honed making performance have a lot to offer site-based research. Performance making strategies are inherently collaborative, spatial, interdisciplinary and focused on the audience and are developed using different types of attention at varying stages of creative development. *A Week on the Cooks River* endeavours to adapt this process for site-based research. The following discussion is an attempt to reflect on the context this work sits within, and how new knowledge has developed throughout this project.

Before I formally began studying the Cooks, my son went to school along the river. Every day, often two times a day, he walked from Earlwood to Marrickville along the Cooks, with me or his dad. We would imagine what it might be like to swim to school or row home. I bought a small fibreglass boat and in an almost imperceptible transition, the Cooks River became the subject of my study. *A Week on the Cooks River* makes the case that collaborative strategies, developed in the rehearsal room, can be extended to working with landscapes.



Figure 5. Research image. Rowing to school, 2015 Photo Matt Prest

SITUATED RESEARCH: WALKING, OBSERVATIONS AND CONVERSATION

Walking, conversation and observation can be regarded as the most basic of human research tools. When we are walking, our bodies are in communication with a landscape. If we are paying attention, it can become a sensory experience. We absorb sounds, sights, smells, the feel of the air on our skin and the surface under our feet. There already exists a substantial history of walking informing research, writing and art-making, as Sarah Truman and Stephanie Springgay make clear in *Walking Methodologies in a More-Than-Human World* which explores walking as a research tool:

As a research methodology, walking has a diverse and extensive history in the social sciences and humanities, underscoring its value for conducting research that is situated, relational, and material.⁴³

Rebecca Solnit wrote extensively about the relationship between walking and writing in her book *Wanderlust a History of Walking*. Solnit elucidates her rigorous research by incorporating written personal examples and observations from her own experience as a walker. Solnit's use of the methodology she is advocating for (walking and writing), along with her substantial research, give her work a pragmatic authority. Perhaps one of the reasons Solnit's approach is so effective is that her writing shows that her thinking is situated and embodied, foregrounding the strengths and limitations of a personal perspective. Donna Haraway talks about feminism putting bodies back into thinking when she writes about *Situated Knowledges*.⁴⁴ Australian eco-feminist Val Plumwood wrote in *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* about complicating the separation between minds and bodies that Descartes articulated when he wrote, "I think therefore I am".

Cartesian thought stripped nature of the intentional and mindlike qualities which make an ethical response to it possible. Once nature is reconceived as capable of agency and intentionality, and the human identity is reconceived in less polarized and disembodied ways, the great gulf which cartesian thought established between the conscious, mindful human sphere and the mindless, clockwork natural one disappears.⁴⁵

Plumwood's argument for collapsing the distinctions between our minds, our bodies, ourselves and the nature we exist within articulates a much-needed shift towards mutual responsibility, the

⁴³ Stephanie Springgay and Sarah Truman, *Walking Methodologies in a More-Than-Human World*. (London: Routledge, 2018), 14.

⁴⁴ Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* Vol. 14, no. No. 3 (Autumn) (1988).

⁴⁵ Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, (London: Routledge 1993), 5.

relevance of which can be seen in my close examination of the Cooks River. Henry David Thoreau was a compelling nature writer. One of the qualities that resonates in this writing after more than 150 years is the sense of connection that he feels to the nature around him. Perhaps Thoreau's most famous quote is this one from *Walden*:

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.⁴⁶

In 1862, reflecting on his experiences moving through landscapes, Thoreau published the essay "Walking" where he said:

If you are ready to leave father and mother, and brother and sister, and wife and child and friends, and never see them again—if you have paid your debts, and made your will, and settled all your affairs, and are a free man—then you are ready for a walk.⁴⁷

Reading the essay *Walking*, I respond to the liberty it communicates. I am also a woman and a mother and am not prepared to step out of my house like I am going to go and never come back. I have responsibilities, and people whom I love and to whom I am committed. The nature I am stepping out into most often isn't an immense wilderness—it is a thin slice of bushland and a ribbon of water. I have been reading the work of Thoreau and attempting to find a way that I can access some of the freedom he describes. I respond to Thoreau's independent thinking and his ability to

46 Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (London J.M. Dent & Sons, 1908), 85.

47 Henry David Thoreau, *Walking* (Boulder Colorado: Net Library, 1999).

take charge of his attention and become deliberate. I also admire his “civil disobedience”⁴⁸ and his preparedness to be arrested for his convictions about equality. It is worth noting that Thoreau had the requisite privilege to build a house by Walden pond on his friend’s land and dedicate himself to swimming, writing and walking every day.

To go for a walk, you don't necessarily have to have settled your debts and said goodbye to everyone you love, but you do need time and the confidence to move about the world. In a *A Room of One's Own* Virginia Woolf reflects on privilege. Asked to deliver a lecture about women and fiction, Woolf considers the conditions that made it possible for her to write. Woolf gives an example of an impediment to her writing while recounting her experience of being kept out of a university library, both physically and socially, and imagines what might have become of a female Shakespeare. Woolf ultimately argues that to write, she (and any writer) needs a room of her own and an independent income. My walking has been supported by a scholarship as part of the PhD program at Sydney College of the Arts. For the first time in my life and for three years, I have had a room of my own and an independent income. It is important that I recognise there is significant privilege involved in my walking.

Scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson grapples with white Australian feminism. In *Talking up to the White Woman*, written in 2000, Moreton-Robinson argues that post-modern feminism can, through misguided attempts to empathise with different types of oppression, render invisible the power that is inferred on white women in a racist country like Australia. Moreton-Robinson argues that “all knowledge is situated and therefore partial.”⁴⁹ As I move through this work, I appreciate the fact that whilst everyone deserves to walk confidently, to follow their curiosity, to have a studio and

48 Civil Disobedience, (Raleigh: Generic NL Freebook Publisher), Accessed 25th February, 2020. <http://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy1.library.usyd.edu.au/login.aspxdirect=true&db=nlebk&AN=1086214&site=ehost-live>.

49 Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *Talking up to the White Woman. Indigenous Women and Feminism* (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 2000), Page xxii.

access to a library like the Sydney College of the Arts Library, in reality very few people get that privilege. My perspective as a middle class, Australian woman of Slovenian and Irish descent both limits and informs this research. I take these dialogues and critiques into my work with me, and proceed carefully; I acknowledge that my understanding of the Cooks River and even my understanding of walking beside it, is “situated and therefore partial”⁵⁰ .

While Thoreau was living at Walden Pond, he was writing *A Week on the Concord and Merrimac Rivers*⁵¹ —a description of a boat trip to Concord, New Hampshire and back from Concord, Massachusetts. The initial journey was made with his brother John in 1839 in a boat they made for the purpose. Thoreau wrote *A Week on the Concord and Merrimac Rivers* following John’s death from tetanus in 1842. The book is a poetic record of their trip and written in memory of his brother. The structure of *A Week on the Concord and Merrimac Rivers* is broken up into chapters Saturday through Friday. Thoreau is playing with time; the actual trip took two weeks to complete, and the book took two years to write. Thoreau uses his journey to address broader cultural topics: poetry, religion, politics and history before returning to his experience of literally travelling along the Concord River. He stops to eat berries and make fires at night. They haul the boat out of the water and drag it around obstacles. Thoreau relates big philosophical ideas to his own life experiences, and locates his reflections within the context of the rapid changes taking place as a part of the Industrial revolution. Thoreau wanted to live "deliberately". “Deliberately” means “carefully weighed or considered; studied; intentional”.⁵² In his *Theory of the Derive*, Guy Debord provides “the derive” as a methodology for moving deliberately rather than habitually through urban environments. Debord

50 Moreton-Robinson, *Talking up to the White Woman*, xxii

51 Henry David Thoreau, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimac Rivers* (London Walter Scott Ltd, 1889).

52 Macquarie Dictionary (Australia: Macmillan Publishers 2020). Accessed 25th February, 2020, https://www-macquariedictionary-com-au.ezproxy1.library.usyd.edu.au/features/word/search/?search_word_type=Dictionar&word=deliberate

was writing at a time of great unrest; the questions that Thoreau and Debord were asking in 1889 and 1954, respectively, are increasingly relevant.

Guy Debord was a central figure in Situationists Internationale, a revolutionary group of European artists and philosophers whose work drew ideas from Marxism and Surrealism. The Situationists were active from 1957-71 and regarded cultural production as an integrated part of everyday life. Their work and writing animated the student protests in Paris in 1968. Teaching Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* and "The Theory of the Derive" to design students today,⁵³ demonstrates how Debord's influential critique of capitalism remains pertinent while simultaneously being co-opted by budding designers as a productive visual research technique. In "The Theory of the Derive", we see the tension resulting from capitalism's ability to capitalise on (and as a result, commodify) even its staunchest critics.

"The Theory of the Derive" presents a methodology for questioning our pathways and rewriting them. According to Guy Debord, a "derive" (literally, drifting) is a tool for exposing the latent cultural information held in a landscape: its "psycho geography". Most of the trajectories we take through our cities are habitual and, at least partly, determined for us. When we change our patterns and travel to unfamiliar places, this also alters and enhances our ability to pay deliberate attention. We notice details and compare how they are different from what we know. As we spend longer in a place, we come to know and make assumptions about our surroundings and we stop paying attention. Debord's text "The Theory of the Derive" asks us to step into the unknown and to see a familiar place from a different perspective—listening not only to the physical spaces we are moving through but to how those places feel, in other words, their "psycho geography".

⁵³ From 2015-20, I have taught *Thinking Through Design* to first year students at the University of Technology, Sydney.

In a *dérive* one or more persons during a certain period drop their relations, their work and leisure activities, and all their other usual motives for movement and action and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there. Chance is a less important factor in this activity than one might think: from a *dérive* point of view cities have psychogeographical contours, with constant currents, fixed points and vortexes that strongly discourage entry into or exit from certain zones.⁵⁴

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, French philosopher Michel de Certeau reflects on everyday practices like talking, walking, cooking and reading. *The Practice of Everyday Life* argues that within the constraints of societal expectations and norms there is an element of creative resistance that can be accessed by ordinary people. In the chapter *Walking in the City*, de Certeau uses a vantage point from the top of the World Trade Centre in New York to expose the strategies at play in the construction of the city. Looking at New York from above, de Certeau sees the way the city has been designed: the streets, cars, train stations, and the shops drawing people to and fro. De Certeau contrasts this birds-eye view with a walker at street level who remains oblivious to these manipulations. De Certeau identifies little gaps in everyday life where individuals might be influenced by imposed structures, but where their behaviour is not entirely determined by them. The Cooks River winds a path through a city that has been generated by water, land, gravity, Indigenous culture, colonial ambition, governments, corporations and thousands of individual lives. This urban river can be perceived as a unified whole, but it is also an amalgamation of cultural forces and the many people who have lived on its banks. De Certeau articulates the concept of listening to the “hollow places”⁵⁵ in a city. Artists like Pauline Oliveros can provide a methodology for listening that can help connect us to these spaces.

54 Guy Debord, "The Theory of the Derive," *Les Lèvres Nues* 9, no. November (1956), 2.

55 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984). Pg93

American composer Pauline Oliveros was a lifelong advocate for the practice of “Deep Listening”⁵⁶, a term Oliveros coined and defines as: “experiencing an expanded awareness of sound, silence and sounding. *Experiencing* is the keyword.”⁵⁷ Oliveros listened to fridges, to traffic, to electricity. She embraced all sound and paid deliberate attention to it. Oliveros’ attention to listening took her work outside of the confines of what is traditionally considered music, and she asked us to stop and listen to the world around us and its deeper sonic vibrations. For Oliveros, this was a political act.

I recognized that being heard is a step toward being understood. Being understood is a step toward being healed. Understanding is a step toward building community. I am trying to facilitate inward experience because people have to feel in their bodies what they have to do in order to create change. I don’t think one can create change just with words. One has to have a full body response that has total presence and impact. That does not mean that words are not effective. They are; words are powerful. Without engagement of the body, though, words are literally disembodied⁵⁸

At the heart of Oliveros’ practice was “sonic meditation”⁵⁹ which she explains as the practice of fostering the kind of consciousness that means you can actually listen: “Take a walk at night. Walk so silently that the soles of your feet become ears.”⁶⁰ I see a relationship between Oliveros’ “experiencing”, Thoreau’s “deliberateness” and Debord’s “psychogeography” in their shared quality of *contained, deliberate attention*.

⁵⁶ Coincidentally, there is a concept from the Ngan'gikurunggurr and Ngen'giwumirri languages from the Daly River Region of the Northern Territory- “Dadirri”. Dadirri translated by Ngan'gikurunggurr elder Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr means “inner, deep listening and quiet, still awareness.”

⁵⁷ Pauline Oliveros, “My American Music”: Soundscape, Politics, Technology, Community,” *American Music* 24, no. No. 4 (Winter) (2007), 392. Emphasis from the original.

⁵⁸ Pauline Oliveros, “My American Music”: 2007, 393.

⁵⁹ Pauline Oliveros. “Sonic Meditations”: *American Music*: Smith Publications, March-November 1971, 1

⁶⁰ Pauline Oliveros. “Sonic Meditations”: *American Music*: 1971, 9

Artists Hamish Fulton, Richard Long, Francis Alys, David Watson and Sara Morowetz represent some of the many artists who use walking as a part of their research and art practice. Fulton, who describes himself as a walking artist, captured his photographic work *Pilgrims Way* as a single image taken on a 10-day walk.



Figure 6., Hamish Fulton, *Pilgrims Way* 1971. Gelatin silver print on paper, dry transfer print on board Image: 150 × 225 mm support: 570 × 625 mm. The Tate, London <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/fulton-the-pilgrims-way-t07995>

The caption incorporated into the image reads: “1971. A Hollow lane on the North Downs. Ancient Paths forming a route between Winchester and Canterbury. 10 days in April a 165-mile walk.”⁶¹ The succinct text and image provoke imaginations of the walk and the landscape. Fulton evokes several time scales: the split second it took for the photograph to expose, the 10 days of walking, the ancient footsteps that shaped the path, and the modern reiteration of this earlier choreography. Through Fulton's eyes and his walking practice, even an image empty of people and the built environment is social, cultural and historical.

⁶¹ Hamish Fulton, *The Pilgrim's Way*, 1971. Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper, dry transfer print on board, Image: 150 × 225 mm. The Tate Gallery.

Francis Alys also uses walking as a means of playing in the space between the literal and the metaphoric in the conceptual artworks he creates. In *The Green Line*, Alys literally trails a line of green paint behind him as he walks. The work, first performed in Sao Paulo in 1995, was restaged in 2004 when Alys traced the "green line" that runs through the municipality of Jerusalem (the demarcation line drawn in the 1949 Armistice Agreements after the Arab-Israeli War).⁶² The subtitle of the work acknowledges walking as a relational practice: "The Green Line. Sometimes doing something poetic can become political and sometimes doing something political can become poetic."⁶³



Figure 7. Francis Alys, *The Green Line*. Jerusalem 2004, Video.17:41min. Website of Francis Alys. <http://francisalys.com/the-green-line/>

62 Francis Alys, *The Green Line*, 2004. Website of Francis Alys, Accessed 25th February, 2020. <http://francisalys.com/the-green-line/>

63 Francis Alys, *The Green Line*, 2004. Website of Francis Alys,

Richard Long makes art by walking in landscapes shaping ephemeral sculptures and noticing, recording and sometimes manipulating the shapes that the gestures of human bodies can make on a landscape. Long outlines his art-making as works that are about freedom, lightness and mobility.⁶⁴ His work is temporal and situated, and harnesses the qualities inherent to walking. His elegant gestures explore the scale of his body in relation to the landscape he moves through. Long's work reflects on the poetry of distance and the subtle ways that human passage shapes landscapes.



Figure 8. Richard Long, *A Line Made by Walking*, 1967. Silver print on paper and graphite on board
Image: 375 × 324 mm. Framed: 623 × 826 × 26 mm. The Tate. London
<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/long-a-line-made-by-walking-p07149>

⁶⁴ Richard Long, "Website of Richard Long," Accessed 25th February 2020.
<http://www.richardlong.org/index.html>.

Closer to home, Australian artist Sara Morawetz⁶⁵ created a walking project called *Étalon*: a 112-day walk completed in 2018. This project echoed the walk undertaken in June 1792 by Jean-Baptiste-Joseph Delambre and Pierre-François-André Méchain at Napoleon's request which saw the French astronomers walk the length of the meridian arc from Dunkerque to Barcelona in order to calculate the circumference of the globe and extrapolate from that, the metre. Morawetz walked the same 10 degrees of latitude, taking measurements that were processed in an algorithm written for the purpose; Morawetz re-defined a metre with her own body, the landscape she was walking through, and the unseen labour of herself and the other women she was walking with. Morawetz's aim was "to know a metre as one knows oneself. An honouring of unseen and hidden labour. A physical connection, an embodied sense of time and place."⁶⁶



Figure 9. Sara Morawetz, *Étalon*. 2018. Barcelona. <https://www.etalon-walk.com/>

⁶⁵ Morawetz is also a PhD candidate at Sydney College of the Arts.

⁶⁶ Sara Morawetz, *Étalon*, 2018. Accessed 25th February 2020. <https://www.etalon-walk.com/>

Resonating with my own motivations, Sydney based artist David Watson's PhD research *Wild Ryde* used walking as a daily practice, slowing his art practice down, walking extensively over years in his local suburb, and including swimming home up the Parramatta River.⁶⁷ Painter Tom Polo rode the train from Sydney's centre to its western suburbs of Campbelltown eavesdropping on commuters and then creating a series of word-at-a-time billboard paintings that spoke an overheard phrase back to train travellers. The phrase only make sense to commuters travelling to Campbelltown:

"All I know is that we just keep doubting ourselves."⁶⁸



Figure 10. Tom Polo, *All I Know*. 2014. Series of six billboards on the train line, between Minto and Ingleburn Stations. Each sign, 250 x 500 cm. <https://www.tompolo.com.au/all-i-know>

⁶⁷ David Watson, "Wild Ryde," ed. The University of Sydney Sydney College of the Arts (Sydney2012).

⁶⁸ Tom Polo, "The Website of Tom Polo," Accessed 25th February 2020 <http://tompoloart.blogspot.com.au/>.

I admire the attention and the listening to landscapes that these works encapsulate, and the physicality of their associated thinking processes. I also note that each of these artists use their own physical experience as a way of generating new knowledge and observations. *A week on the Cooks River* contributes to these established dialogues with Sydney and the practice of walking and paying deliberate attention to landscapes.

I commenced this study as a way of recalibrating my relationship to my practice. Rather than working towards opening night, as I would typically do in my performance making context, I have instead created multifaceted strands of enquiry that extend from my studio, out of the container of the gallery or the theatre, and into walks, sculptures that people take home with them, or videos that play out to the empty streets of Marrickville. Inspired by the residency model often used to create contemporary performance, I have alternated between development processes that allow me to focus my engagement with the river for week-long blocks and more ambient, daily studio practices. These two development processes require different types of attention, both of which have shaped this project. The following discussion analyses the development and research strategies that I have adapted from working in performance to working in the studio.

CONTEMPORARY PERFORMANCE

My performance practice developed in Sydney from 1999 and centred around PACT in Erskineville and Performance Space on Cleveland Street, and subsequently at Carriageworks in Redfern, Sydney. Artists like The De Quincey Company, Gravity Feed, The Sydney Front, erth, The Post Arrivalists, Frumpus, Branch Nebula, Theatre Kantanka, The Fondue Set, Julie Anne Long, Andrew Morrish, Ros Crisp, Brian Fuata, Martin Del Amo and Version 1.0 informed my conception of “performance”. They, in turn were influenced by artists such as Forced Entertainment, The Wooster Group, John Cage, Robert Wilson and Societas Raffaello Sanzio. Design scholar John Heskett highlights the multifaceted nature of the word “design” by constructing this grammatically correct

sentence: “Design is to design a design to produce a design.”⁶⁹ “Performance” is a similarly ambiguous term. Former Artistic Director of Performance Space, Sarah Miller, in *What is performance Art? Australian Perspectives* acknowledges that:

[The] lexicon to describe performance practices is notoriously slippery. Performance Art, live art, time-based art, performance and contemporary performance are terms variously employed by artists working at the intersection of visual arts and live -often mediated- performance.⁷⁰

The word “performance” becomes particularly ambiguous at the point where the practices of visual art and performance intersect. Andy Horowitz, founder of Culturebot, a publication focused on critical thinking about experimental performance, was compelled to consider the distinctions between “performance art” and “performance” in the wake of Yvonne Rainer challenging Marina Abramovic over hiring performers to restage past performances. Rainer argued that this commodified her past work⁷¹ and exploited the performers who enacted it. Horowitz writes:

When most visual artists come to performance, they are still thinking within the framework of object-making. They may be engaging with concepts around experience and representation, but from a perspective of bringing visual art to life in the time-based world using the techniques and tropes with which they are already familiar. They may not be concerned with the study of movement and embodied presence, of the craft of performance or the challenges of the created environment. In contrast, contemporary

⁶⁹ John Heskett, *Design, A very short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 3.

⁷⁰ Adam Geczy and Mimi Kelly, *What Is Performance Art? Australian Perspectives* (Sydney: Power Publications, 2018). Page 73

⁷¹ “Yvonne Rainer Accuses Marina Abramovic and LAMOCA for exploiting Performers”. Artforum, November 11th, 2011. Accessed 25th February, 2020 <https://www.artforum.com/news/yvonne-rainer-accuses-marina-abramovi-263-and-la-moca-of-exploiting-performers-29348>

performance as a genre has its roots in theatre and dance. Experimental, to be sure, but rooted in explorations that are primarily focused on the performative event itself.⁷²

Han-Thies Lehman outlines theatre forms developed since the 1960's in his influential book *Post Dramatic Theatre*. Lehman concentrates on the working processes of the Wooster Group, Societas Raffaello Sanzio and Robert Wilson among others, all of whom have influenced my conception of "performance". Whether my work has been "Post Dramatic Theatre", "contemporary performance", "performance", "experimental performance", "performance installation", "visual theatre", "hybrid theatre", "dance" or "experimental sound", my practice remains "focused on the performative event itself".⁷³ When I talk about "contemporary performance" in this paper, I refer to the experimental forms developed out of theatre and dance traditions from Europe, the US, and Japan, and the performance works I have witnessed in Australia in the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century. Developing a visual art practice necessitated adapting my process for making "contemporary performance" to the studio and site-based research.

PROCESS

In "contemporary performance", a residency model is often used to create new work.⁷⁴ Artists on a project typically come together around a concept or idea which has usually been proposed by one artist. Having committed to the project, the group begin turning the concept over. This "turning over" includes engaging with existing material (books, artworks, films, poems etc.) that have a tangential relationship to the work to be made. When working in this process, collaborators have different areas of responsibility. There is often a director, choreographer or composer who leads the

⁷² Andy Horowitz "Visual Art Performance vs. Contemporary Performance", Culturebot Maximum Performance. November 25th 2011, accessed 22nd Feb, 2020. <https://www.culturebot.org/2011/11/11663/visual-art-performance-vs-contemporary-performance/>

⁷⁴ ⁷³ Andy Horowitz "Visual Art Performance vs. Contemporary Performance", Culturebot Maximum Performance. November 25th 2011.

⁷⁴ The performance works I have collaborated on during this study have all used this system. Elaborated on in an appendix. *A Faint Existence* (2016), *Champions* (2017), *Mountain* (2018), *Polar Force* (2018/19), *Assembly Operation* (2018), *The Nightline* (2019), *Brightness*, *One Space One*.

creative process. The dramaturg provides honest feedback on work in development. The designer takes responsibility for how the work should look and behave spatially. A sound artist creates and makes decisions about the aural environment and the lighting designer collaborates with the director, designer and sound artist to create the visual rhythm of the work, to support the design and to sculpt the focus of the audience's gaze. Although *A Week on the Cooks River* is not a performance work, I take questions from performance making with me: What am I trying to communicate with this work? How does it look? How does it sound? How does it relate to the bodies of people who interact with it? How long does it take? What order do people see the images in? The answers to these questions, whether in performance or visual art, produce work that is spatial and considerate of an audience. Guy Debord's "derive", Henry David Thoreau's intention to live "deliberately" and Pauline Oliveros' "sonic mediation" are all techniques for focusing attention on experience. Guided by these concepts, my experience developing contemporary performance, and the work of other artists who use walking in landscapes as a part of their research practice, I can identify four main strategies that have supported the creative development of my work.

INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH

Engaging with interdisciplinary research material slowly shapes a constellation of related existing cultural output, out of which a visual language emerges. Viewed together, this arrangement of influences becomes a sketch for the work in development. For *A Week on the Cooks River*, this interdisciplinary research has included field work, studio practice, group critique processes, and library research focused on the Cooks River. This interdisciplinary research practice is adapted from the contemporary performance making processes I have participated in.

SUSTAINED DELIBERATE ATTENTION

“Sustained deliberate attention” is the practice of giving daily focus to a project over a long period of time. For *A Week on the Cooks River* this has taken the shape of daily walks or runs along the river, writing, reading, photography, and studio practice. This also includes gradually turning images and artworks and research over until connections begin to form and new understandings are reached. Sometimes the more focused, contained, material parts of the making process don't actually take very long; but I couldn't have done them until I have moved through this more immaterial part of the process.

CONTAINED, DELIBERATE ATTENTION

Short, focused blocks are also used where, for a condensed period of time, deliberate attention is focused on the project (for example a residency). This part of the process, translated to the studio, saw me write myself instructions for four week-long creative developments inspired by Guy Debord's “derive”. I documented the resulting observations using video, photography, writing, audio recording, drawing and GPS; I then took all that data back into the studio.

TESTS: Allowing for failure and unexpected successes

Perhaps the only thing I know about making contemporary performance is that you have to build the work out of a series of tests. In a rehearsal room, the results of improvisations are only reflected on *after* they have been tried. This process yields small moments (usually a couple of minutes long) of tested performance material that everyone feels good about alongside many, many other moments experienced as failures. The full-length work is created by ordering and reordering the performance material (this is the dramaturgical process). Rather than making minutes of performance material, I have been making images, video and sculpture that seem to contain and transmit things that I have learned on the river. The principal of reserving criticism until after I have

attempted a test is the crucial part of this process; this allows for the unexpected to occur and for ideas that might be awkward as sentences to be tried in the studio.



Figure 11. Research image. Drawing experiment, Sydney College of the Arts Foyer. Photo Matt Prest.

As I draw the bends of the Cooks River on the wall of the Sydney College of the Arts, I remember walking and rowing it alongside the research I have undertaken. Placing lines down one after the other, I know that the real lines of the river are dynamic: they raise and lower with the daily tidal movements and dry up and reform with rainfall. They are mud, concrete, sandstone, sheets of steel, and water that gets saltier as the river gets closer to the Pacific Ocean. From time to time the edges widen with floods. Completing *A Week on the Cooks River* I have accrued an archive of images and experiences—artefacts of my developing, embodied understandings and attempts at making that knowledge visually legible. This research process has questioned, extended and recalibrated my creative process as I understood it; it has contributed to developing an ongoing daily practice of observation and research where works are developed slowly over time. Before discussing the first residency process that produced this body of work, this chapter will consider the studio space and critique process at Sydney College of the Arts.

STUDIO SPACE.

Studio practice creates the connective tissue between the research conducted and the artworks made. My studio was in the Kirkbride Campus at Callan Park—a large room with benches running along one wall on the second level of the ceramics building. The walls are thick blocks of Hawkesbury Sandstone plastered on the inside. There are cream blinds that lower or retract over the windows with a beaded silver chain. If I look out the windows near my desk, I can see a tall, round brick tower with a small fig tree growing out the top, at first leaning, but now surrounded by scaffolding. Afternoon light streams in through the windows and hits the wall behind my desk. Above the door, in my studio, light grey paint is peeling off the wall in big sheets to reveal the rough white walls behind this most recent layer of paint. The architecture speaks to its history; other rooms have bars on the windows and eye holes drilled through the door. The Kirkbride building was a part of the Callan Park Lunatic Asylum for the Mentally and Criminally Insane. Prior to its current incarnation as an art school it was a jail and then a mental asylum.⁷⁵ When I shut our door at the end of 2019, there would be no more artists coming in. Having this studio was a responsibility. I hope that, in addition to the other outcomes, this research serves as a document to demonstrate the value of how much a studio space can teach an artist. Alongside access to physical resources (the studio, workshop, library, photographic studios and gardens), Sydney College of the Arts also provided critical and conceptual space for my process to be developed within. This included the confluence of all the artistic, theoretical and conceptual practices of my supervisors Julie Rrap, Ann Elias and Mikala Dwyer, along with the cohort of past and present students at Sydney College of the Arts.

⁷⁵ Peter Reynolds and Ken Leong, "Callan Park Mental Hospital, ," Dictionary of Sydney, accessed 25th February 2020 http://dictionaryofsydney.org/entry/callan_park_mental_hospital.

Sydney College for the Arts values studio-based practice. Having a studio has allowed me to put down my work in the middle of an idea, come back the next day, and find my way back into that same thought. This way of working reminds me of Belgian choreographer Anna Theresa De Keersmaker's six-hour dance work with her company Rosas.⁷⁶ The works, *En Atendant* and *Cesena*, are presented over two nights. The last image of the first work commences the second work. The effect of re-entering the theatre in the middle of the same moment is of my memory of the two evenings of performance becoming seamlessly stitched together. I could not have made this body of work without the continuity afforded me from being able to leave my work mid-thought and re-enter that thought the next day. Having a “Room of One’s Own”⁷⁷ where my ideas are developed has created a context to enable these research observations to take visual form. Sadly, during the time that I have been studying, Sydney College of the Arts has endured existential threat. In the last days of the college occupying the site at Callan Park, Michael Waite the archivist at Kaldor Projects came to document the final studio critique with my supervisor Julie Rrap. Having a dedicated studio and the input of insightful practicing artists and researchers has made this project possible, and I will be indebted to that experience for the rest of my working life.



Figure 12. Last Sydney College of the Arts studio crit with Julie Rrap, 2019. Photo Michael Waite.

76 Anne Teresa De Keersmaker, *Rosas, En Atendant*, 2012. Carriageworks & the 18th Biennale of Sydney.

77 Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas* (London: Penguin Random House, 2001).

GROUP CRITIQUE PROCESS:

If you just describe what you see, you'll be sure to get there, you'll arrive in the sphere of the things I mean. ⁷⁸

Formal group critique processes create discipline and structure for stepping, as a community of artists, into the unknown. Repeatedly participating in group critiques has convinced me that artworks can hold and impart knowledge. In her teaching, artist Mikala Dwyer is host to meaningful human connections, and her ethics of acceptance, openness and play are evidently carried over into the gallery. In her group critique process, participants are encouraged to approach artworks with the intention to listen, read and encounter them while putting as many assumptions as possible to the side.

The artist who is subject to the critique installs their own work. They write 500 words about what they intend with the work. The group encounters the work: this encounter is silent, focused and observant. Meanwhile, the artist watches and listens but does not participate or frame the interaction with language except for giving us the name of the work. After a lengthy period of silent and attentive engagement, the discussion commences with the group reporting their observations in a straightforward manner: mainly one-word responses such as noticing the material choices, the colour, the scale, the form. As the conversation continues, the artist listens as a perceptive group of people describe their work back to them. In the last stages of the critique, the group talk in full sentences about references and ideas. When the group have exhausted the associations and observations that the work has provoked in them (usually after about an hour), the artist reads out the 500 words and the group contend with the differences or resonances between the artist's intentions and the group's observations.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Beuys, Joseph. "Joseph Beuys: Statements, 1976-1986." *Flash Art* 45, no. October 1, 2012

⁷⁹ This process is revelatory when Dwyer is facilitating, but sometimes doesn't work when she is not there.

The properties of this critique structure have some commonalities with performance work. The critique process brings people together for a particular time and duration. Attention is focused on a set of ideas, we share our perspectives and then leave. Dramaturgically, there are some essential mechanics in Dwyer's critique process that bolster its effectiveness. The first component is that the artist has written at length about what it is they intend. The second is that there is time set aside for wordless engagement with the work. This part of the process allows an almost ritualistic gathering of perception and attention. It also disarms the power of language. Listening to the artwork of other people and paying attention to the material decisions, spatial decisions, colour and form, can provide a contemplative gap for processing experience and formulating a response. This listening is acknowledged and articulated well by philosopher Gilles Deleuze when he states "[...]it's not a problem of getting people to express themselves, but of providing little gaps of solitude or silence in which they might eventually find something to say."⁸⁰

The third important aspect is that there are no computers, phones or essays in the room; all the individuals viewing the work are limited to navigating the information and assumptions they carry around with their bodies, and the concepts and materials the artist has installed—in this sense Dwyer's critique process is very much like a walk in a landscape. The last important dynamic generated by this process is trust. This trust is necessarily developed over time, as several iterations of an artist's work are presented to the group, and each member of the group moves between the vulnerability of showing and the responsibility of contributing responses. This process—nurturing the discipline of putting aside what you supposedly know, placing the attention of a thoughtful group of people on the present moment, and teasing out the complexities and the poetry of what is in front of you—has helped shape the making process of *A Week on the Cooks River*.

80 Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 129.

The process of creating this body of work has been one of accruing knowledge and experience over time. Following a river puts your body in conversation with a landscape; it makes literal the metaphor of the river leading this research. The image below is of *Cooks River 1*, a two-channel video work of images taken underwater in the Cooks River. The audience watches the work seated in hand made rocking chairs—adapted seats that have held the artists of Sydney College of the Arts in Callan Park over many years. The intention is for the audience to soak up the feeling of rocking on the river, to immerse themselves in the water we can no longer touch, to be held by the art school chairs, and permit the space to open up a gap for the contemplation of this research.



Figure 13. Installation view of *Cooks River 1*, 2016. Photo Ian Hobbs.

WATERMILL RESIDENCY, WATERMILL NEW YORK, NOVEMBER 2016

The Watermill Center is an artist residency space established by theatre director Robert Wilson in Watermill New York.⁸¹ Artist Matt Prest and I were in residence in November 2016. Looking back, the Watermill Residency was a significant part of this process. I had recently commenced studying⁸² and was developing *A Week on the Cooks River*. Prest and I were working in the Donald Judd Room and alternating working at a desk and on a chair that Donald Judd had made. We each worked alone and also scheduled a time where we crossed over. At the end of the residency, we sealed images, video and objects from our collaborations in a PVC tube, labelled it *Flux Capacitor*, and buried it underground on the site at Watermill. The idea is to go back in 2026 and dig it up. This small gesture was the first in the study that dealt with time and with site.

Reflecting now on the Watermill residency, I see that it gave me time to generate some crucial insights that would eventually underpin much of the work on *A Week on the Cooks River*. While researching the work of Isabella Blow in the Watermill Library I came across an image of Ebe Oke⁸³ with Blow. Oke was one of the other artists in residence. The next chance I had, I asked him what Isabella Blow was like. Oke gave me a real sense of her, and he also talked about experimental sound artists Brian Eno and Laurie Anderson as friends and mentors. Our time in New York coincided with Donald Trump getting elected as the 45th President of the United States of America. We spent the day after the election consoled by the watery retrospective of artist Swiss Pippilotti Rist.⁸⁴ The accumulative effect of these experiences was to take Donald Judd, Donald Trump, Pippilotti Rist, Isabella Blow, Robert Wilson, Brian Eno, Laurie Anderson and by extension, all the artists and philosophers I was reading, out of inanimate pages.

81 "The Watermill Centre", The Watermill Centre, accessed 25th February 2020. <https://www.watermillcenter.org/>.

82 I upgraded to PhD from Masters of Fine Arts in mid-2017

83 Ebe Oke, "Website of Ebe Oke," Accessed 25th February, 2020 <http://ebeoke.be/>.

84 Pippilotti Rist, "Pippilotti Rist: Pixel Forest," (New York: New Museum, 2016). Accessed 25th February, 2020. <https://www.newmuseum.org/exhibitions/view/pipilotti-rist-pixel-forest>.

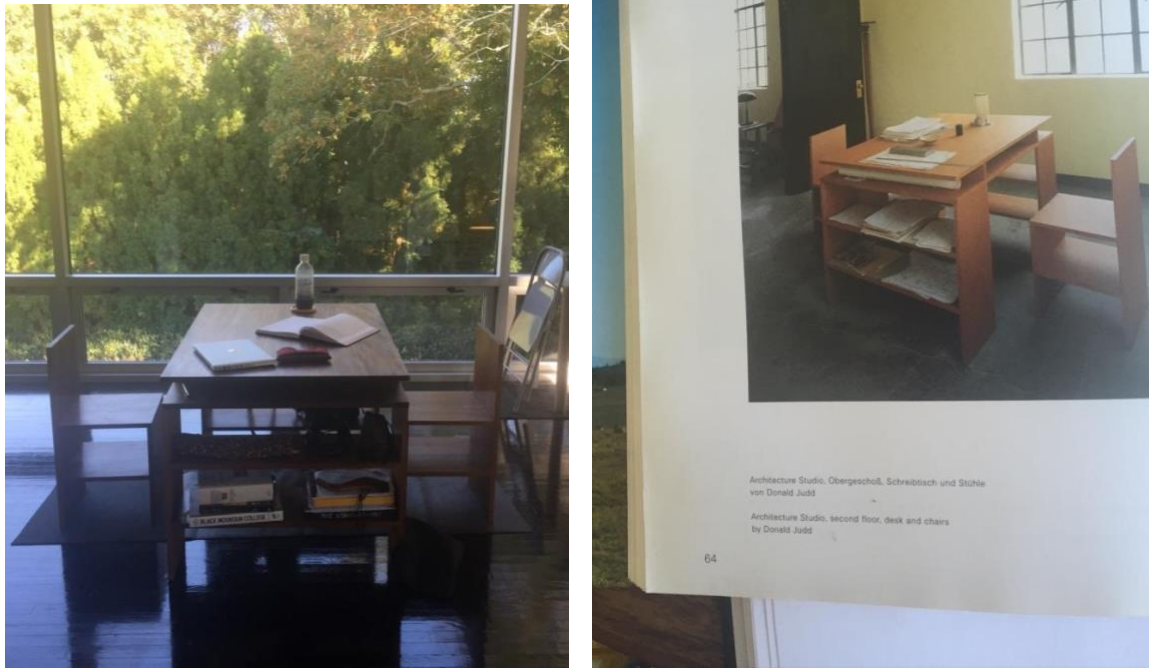


Figure 14. Research image. Watermill Residency, Donald Judd room, 2016

Somehow, regarding these practices from the safe distance of Australia I had come to understand these authors and artists as impressive historical figures as opposed to real people. The residency also transformed the way I understood places like the Watermill Center, the Guggenheim, Dia Beacon, the Hudson River. The effect this had on my practice was that it made me crave work, art and cultural materials that speak to places and people I have lived experience of. The Watermill Residency reminded me that Australia, the Cooks River, Yagoona, Campsie, Botany Bay—all the places I know—are complex and worthy of attention.

In residence at Watermill, I was introduced to the exhibition *Radical Seafaring* curated by Andrea Grover at the nearby Parrish Museum. Using the frame of *Radical Seafaring*, Grover proposed "Off-Shore Art" as a potential rubric for talking about artworks made on the water. Grover noted that works on water operate in a liminal space where the rules are less clear than they are on land. "Off-Shore Art" as Grover describes it has an association with Land Art.

[...] artist-initiated, site-specific projects on the water that seem poised to coalesce in a yet-to-be-named movement, like land art, only afloat. A provisional rubric might be "off-shore art," to identify these enterprises by the setting rather than the material or goal. *Radical Seafaring* proposes that artist-made vessels, waterborne performances and actions, documentation of expeditions and speculative designs for alternative communities at sea all indicate an ancient exploratory impulse and a widespread desire to reconnect with the natural environment.⁸⁵

Radical Seafaring included works by conceptual artists Bas Jan Ader, Chris Burden and land art luminary Robert Smithson among others. Chris Burden's solo crossing of the Sea of Cortez in a canvas kayak, *BC Mexico* and his propositional work *Ghost Ship*, were all included in *Radical Seafaring*. *Ghost Ship* was a concept for a crewless boat that could sail hauntingly alone carrying tea from Charleston South Carolina to Plymouth in England. *BC Mexico*, the 11-day solo kayak trip, Burden described as being "really about isolation more than anything else...it was about being alone".⁸⁶

"*In Search of the Miraculous*" is the title of Bas Jan Ader's final work, tragically more profound because of his failure to complete it. The following image is one of several black and white photographs of Ader shot by his wife Mary Sue Andersen. It hauntingly depicts Bas Jan departing on an attempted solo crossing of the Atlantic he never returned from. In the black and white image, the line of the sky and the sea meet in a familiar, deceptively neat, rectangular join. Ader is pictured alone in his small boat looking seaward. Inscribed in white cursive at the bottom of the image is the phrase "In search of the miraculous".⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Andrea Grover, *Radical Seafaring*, ed. The Parrish Museum (Water Mill: Prestel Publishing, 2016), 14.

⁸⁶ Andrea Grover, *Radical Seafaring*, 94.

⁸⁷ Bas Jan Ader *In Search of the Miraculous: Thirty Years Later* curated by Pedro de Llano (Spain Centro Galego de Arte Contemporánea, 2010). Accessed 25th February 2020. <https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/36854/in-search-of-the-miraculous-thirty-years-later/>



Figure 15. 1975. Bas Jan Ader. *In Search of the Miraculous*, In *Radical Seafaring* Andrea Grover, ed. The Parrish Museum (Water Mill: Prestel Publishing, 2016).

Mary Sue Andersen shot a series of 18 black and white photos of Bas Jan over the course of a single night in Los Angeles⁸⁸. The sequence, also called *In Search of the Miraculous* is unnerving and untethered and in hindsight, along with the image above, seem to contain the information that Ader was going away. The words and sheet music of the sea shanty that bade Ader farewell and were intended to greet him on his arrival in England were incorporated into the *Radical Seafaring* exhibition. Ader's voyage has attracted the attention of many writers and artists. In a catalogue essays for *Radical Seafaring* Alexander Dumbadze and Sacha Archibald discuss the relationship between contemporary artist Tacita Dean's video works *Disappearance at Sea*, Ader's *In Search of the Miraculous* and the story of the fraudulent sailor Donald Crowhurst. *Strange Last Voyage*, a book reporting the story of Crowhurst's doomed journey, was found posthumously in Ader's university

⁸⁸ Soo Jin Jeong. Bas Jan Ader- In Search of the Miraculous. Patrick Painter Inc. 2010. Video. 24:04. Accessed 25th February 2020. <https://vimeo.com/11764389>

locker⁸⁹. In this story, Crowhurst was participating in an around the world sailing competition. He would have been financially ruined if he pulled out of the race, so despite being unready, Crowhurst decided to sail and keep a fake log, intending to "complete" the race but in a low ranking where his logbook wouldn't be scrutinised. His plan came unstuck when several boats withdrew from the competition, and Crowhurst found himself in the lead. Knowing his fraud would be discovered and being alone and unable to discuss his predicament with anyone else, Crowhurst became increasingly desperate, and he threw himself overboard. Reflecting on Dean's video work *Disappearance at Sea II*, Archibald says, that by including the image of a lighthouse, "Dean supplies what Crowhurst lacked: an anchor to civilisation"⁹⁰

The suburban scale of *A Week on the Cooks River* occasionally shifts into the register of something more substantial; inside a small fibreglass rowboat on the water at Botany Bay, Ader, Dean and Crowhurst come to mind. I took this photo sheltering from a storm under the bridge that takes Illawarra Road across the Cooks River. The play between the light, the bird poo covered wall and the river made the wall feel expansive—like looking out to sea.



Figure 16. Research image. Cooks horizon, 2019

⁸⁹ The relationship between the work of artists Tacita Dean, Bas Jan Ader and sailor Donald Crowhurst is also discussed by Rachel Kent, *Pun to Paradox: Bas Jan Ader Revisited*, Parkett 75 2005, 177-181.

⁹⁰ Sasha Archibald, "Lost and Found at Sea". *Radical Seafaring*, 63

Completing this project, I have spent a lot of time alone, rowing in water so shallow my oars scrape concrete river bed. Ader and Crowhurst compel me to consider what it might be like to be alone, not just in the studio, walking or rowing along the river, but alone in a small boat in water so immense that it is possible to disappear. Dean reminds us while we are looking at the Atlantic to keep our eyes on what anchors us to civilisation.

In 1978, Australian performance artist Mike Parr performed *Dream (Light of Empedocles)* on Lake Burley Griffin. For the work, he slept overnight, adrift in a small boat on the lake. In the accompanying essay, Parr writes:

What I wanted to do, was simply provide a framework, of "field" that the audience could fill in in their own way, but a potent one that would galvanise their associations and cathexis identification. It seems that while I drifted through the night in my small boat, that many people found themselves involved in my voyage despite themselves. One person explained how she had driven around the edge of the lake in the early evening, hoping for a glimpse of the boat. It was a piece attenuated, dissolved by the vast emptiness of the lake. Space and emptiness provoked a kind of telepathic union between us.⁹¹

Following my engagement with these artists, I decided to sleep out on the dark water at Tempe in November 2017. I unscrewed the seat from my boat and laid down a camping mat, sleeping bag and pillow. I anchored the boat to the river bed and settled down for the night. I was noticing the flow of traffic on the Princes' Highway, the movement of the incoming tide, the trajectory of the planes

⁹¹ Mike Parr, "Dream (the Light of Empedocles)," ed. National Gallery of Australia (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 1982).

taking off overhead, the whirl of a nearby wind vein, the rocking back and forward of the empty anchored boats and the reflections of the lights bouncing off the surface of the river. Then it started raining, and I rowed back to shore and called for help!

I know that the ocean and even a river as small as the Cooks have a magnitude far more significant than my own. That said, I admire the spirit of adventure that artists like Parr, Burden, Thoreau and Ader display. To manifest this admiration in a performance gesture, and to make up for my earlier failed attempt, I spent a night out on the Cooks River while *River Dreams* my underwater video portrait of the Cooks played on a loop overnight to the empty streets of Marrickville. I hope that this work creates what Parr refers to as a "*telepathic union*"⁹² between me, the video that I have made, the artists I have been studying, and the sleeping residents of Marrickville. This concept coalesced out of the work I was exposed to during the Watermill Residency.



Figure 17. Research image. Dawn, 2019. Photo Matt Prest.

⁹² Mike Parr, "Dream (the Light of Empedocles)", 1982.

For *A Week on the Cooks River*, I have replicated and adapted a residency development model- writing myself four "derives" that have created short periods of contained, deliberate attention. *A Week on the Cooks River* includes wall drawings, video and sound installation, sculptures, walks, photographs and propositional monuments, and could be considered "Offshore Art" as Grover defines it. The work grows out of the lineages of land art, site-specific art and relational aesthetics, and has been shaped by discoveries made at the Watermill Center. Awareness of performance art, artworks made on water and artists that use walking as a part of their methodology all came with me as I headed out to spend a week on the Cooks River.



Figure 18. *A Week on the Cooks River*, Silver Castings dimensions variable. Clare Britton, 2019

The imagination cannot help but pursue a line in the land, onwards in space, but also backwards in time to the histories of a route and its previous followers.⁹³

⁹³ Robert Macfarlane, *The Old Ways. A Journey on Foot*. (London: Penguin Books, 2012), 15.

CHAPTER TWO

My head is resting on a life jacket. I've got a sleeping bag over me and I am lying on a camping mat spread out on the bottom of the boat. The water is dark; it's about nine-thirty pm. The boat is rocking a little, swinging from side to side. There's a visual effect that has caught my eye. My still knees moving against the backdrop of the landscape as the boat makes gentle arcs and takes me with it. There is a slippage between standing still and moving. There is a cement water reservoir that looks like a giant golf tee and dark silhouettes of a few Norfolk pines against grey sky. Someone's bedroom light just went out. One less light apartment light reflecting on the dark water. A couple fighting on the pier just went their separate ways off into the night; sounded like it was probably for the best. I'm sleeping through one full tide cycle. In the morning I'll turn the projections off for the last time. Like counting sheep, I think through people who have crossed my path and helped me with the project

I woke up in the middle of the night. The sky was full of even, hazy clouds or bush fire smoke. Very faintly I could see two stars, the water was black and silver, and there were no cars on the highway.

This chapter outlines the four creative developments for this project that were inspired by Guy Debord's "derive". Also discussed are artworks created in the studio from the observations and images captured in the creative developments. The "derives" are as follows: *A week on the Cooks River*, November 2017—Week-long fieldwork following the Cooks River from Yagoona to Botany Bay; *A week on the Cooks River Drawing Experiment*, September 2018—A durational drawing in the foyer of Sydney College of the Arts; *A River on the other side of the World* June- July 2019—Two river walks on the Vltava River at the Prague Quadrennial of Performance and Space Design and along Wolli Creek and the Cooks River in Sydney with Composting Feminisms Reading Group; and finally, *River Dreams* at Frontyard Projects in November 2019. *River Dreams* was a week-long overnight projection culminating in a performative gesture: sleeping out in my boat on the river at Tempe. The collaborative conversation *Rivers and a Well* with artists Therese Keogh and Kenzee Patterson is also discussed. *Rivers and a Well* saw Keogh, Patterson and I present at the AAANZ Conference, Perth December 2017, Sydney College of the Arts in February 2018 and exhibit work together at Patterson's gallery Cosmopolitan Decline in Broken Hill, May 2018.

A WEEK ON THE COOKS RIVER DERIVE # 1

From the 13th-19th of November 2017, I spent a week taking photos and video while walking and rowing the length of the river from Graf Park, Yagoona to Botany Bay. I have gone back to the river, again and again, adding to my initial observations and watching for changes. In the early days of my study, I mentioned the project to Jeff Neilson, an Associate Professor at Sydney University's Geography Department. Neilson gave me the outline of a field trip he had conducted for geography students to trace the river and look at how engineering and human activity have shaped and changed the Cooks.⁹⁴ I undertook this field trip by myself, on foot or by boat, and also extended it to cover the whole river. I also wanted to create an association between the fieldwork and *A Week on the*

⁹⁴ Included as an appendix

Concord and Merrimac Rivers, and so I conducted the excursion over a week, echoing Thoreau's chapters, and I took the book out with me in the boat. I started in Yagoona, walking and rowing to Botany Bay throughout a week (going home to sleep each night).



Figure 19. Research image, *A Week on the Concord River* on Wolli Creek. 2017

On Monday, I walked along the river from Graf Park, Yagoona through Rookwood Cemetery and Strathfield Golf Club to my home in Earlwood. Tuesday, I rowed from Tempe boat ramp to Canterbury Ice Rink and back. On Wednesday, I took the boat up Muddy Creek and listened on a radio as Australia voted in favour of legalising same-sex marriage. Thursday, I stopped rowing and let the current carry the boat up Wolli Creek while I read *A Week on the Concord and Merrimac Rivers*. On Friday I took on some passengers: my mum for her birthday, designer and writer Ali Crosby,⁹⁵ and artists Therese Keogh and Biljana Novacovic, and we rowed around Tempe, Wolli Creek and Marrickville. On Saturday I rowed up the Alexandra Canal, and on Sunday from Tempe boat ramp out through the mouth of the river to Botany Bay.

⁹⁵ Alexandra Crosby "The Cooks River with Clare and Sally" Mapping Edges blog, University of Technology, Sydney, December 15th 2019. Accessed 25th February 2020. <http://www.mappingedges.org/conversations/cooks-river-clare-sally-conversations/>.

Through spending a week on the river I learned that the layer of water is thin and shallow, and not something to be taken for granted at all. The river is so different along its course; there are places where the water is piped underground or inaccessible on foot, so it is hard to perceive. Sometimes it is the word "river" as opposed to the physical realities of the place that tie this landscape together. The littoral space where the land and water meet is in constant conversation. The Cooks River is a small gap between salt and fresh water, between suburbs, between land and sea, nature and the city. The river changes slowly, but when significant changes occur, it accepts them immediately. When the river takes a shopping trolley, a wall or road under its surface, once the water has found its level, everything looks just as it should. The river is full of things that that shouldn't be in it. There is more life than I'd thought in the river: oysters, jellyfish, mullet, mangrove roots and their seeds. The smell at low tide is pungent. The currents in the river are not as simple as in and out; there are smaller currents and places where the water is running slow or fast and against the main flow.

I attached a camera to the underside of my boat and captured continuous underwater footage of the river. I also made photographs and kept a log in a small notebook. By spending a week with the Cooks River, I shifted modes from how I would usually spend time in the city, and I reconnected with the beauty of that urban waterway. I disconnected from the habitual rhythm of my everyday life and inspired by Thoreau's "deliberateness" and Guy Debord's "psychogeography" and Pauline Oliveros' "experiencing", I found deeply satisfying changes in the quality of my attention. I am making images and artworks that attempt to deliver that experience and those discoveries back to an audience.

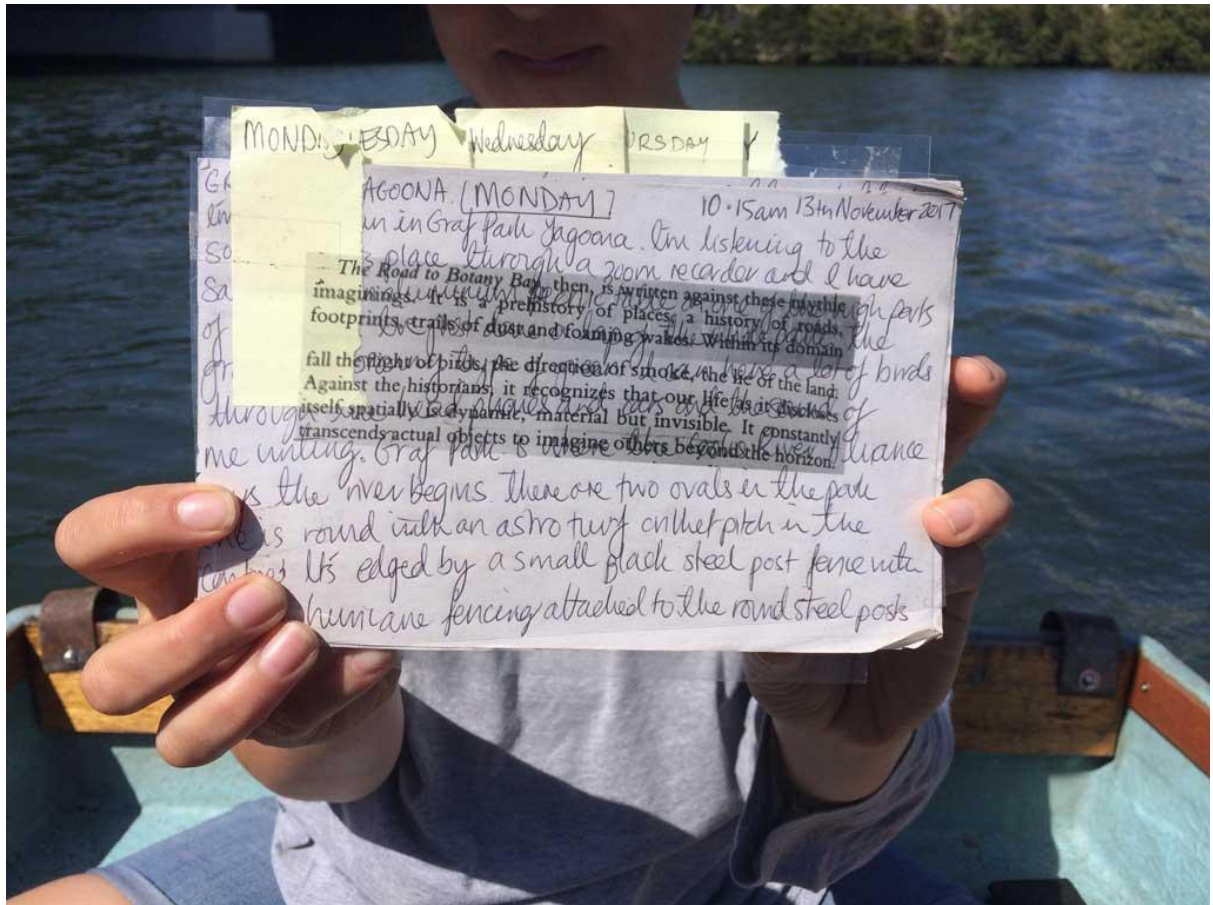


Figure 20. Log Book. 17th November 2017. Photo Ali Crosby



Figure 21. Research images. A Week on the Cooks River, 2017.

DERIVE #2 A WEEK ON THE COOKS RIVER DRAWING EXPERIMENT

For a week in September 2018 I reimagined Debord's "derive" as a container of time spent moving deliberately in relationship to a landscape. I drew a largescale map of the catchment area of the Cooks River on the walls of the foyer at Sydney College of the Arts (based on an image from *Cooks River Environment Survey and Landscape Design* ⁹⁶).

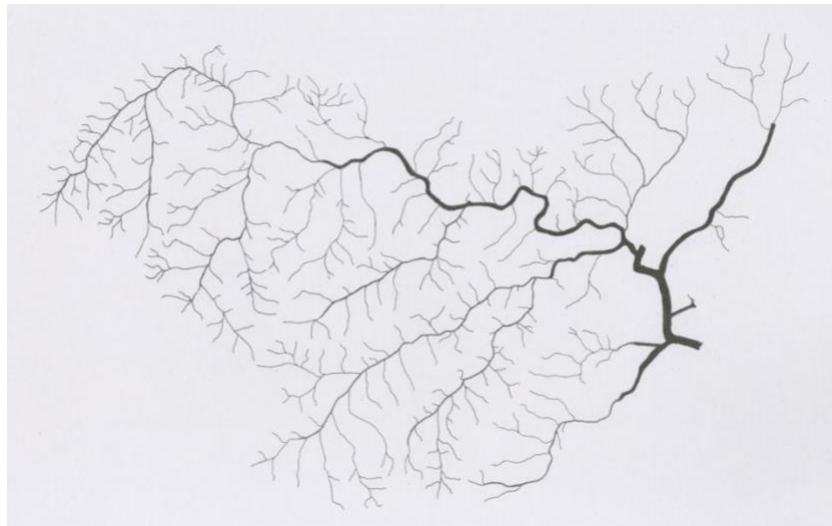


Figure 22. Research image, river with tributaries, 2019.

I created some limitations for this drawing. I drew in lead pencil and in the direction of the water movement: IN from Botany Bay with the tidal action; OUT from where the tide turns at Campsie and from all the smaller tributaries that carry rainwater to the river. I drew every day for a week, I traced the catchment area on one side of the door, and in mirror image on the other. I removed all language, buildings and bridges from the drawing. Retracing the shape of the river over a week, I learned that the image of the catchment is the shape of water. It looks like lungs, like trees, like leaves, like lightning. Performing this drawing is a simple gesture that holds time and space and creates conversations between the work and an audience. Situating this experiment in a thoroughfare meant that other students, university staff and academics engaged with the work. Limiting the language surrounding the drawing also created more space for the audience to discover and wonder

⁹⁶ The Cooks River Project, *Cooks River Environment Survey and Landscape Design : Report of the Cooks River Project*, 130

what it was rather than being told. As a storm broke on my last day drawing, I felt more connected to all those drops of water, making their way to a river. In the final iteration of this work for exhibition, I wished to extend this relationship to the river by drawing the actual water movements on the Cooks, by slowly following the incoming and outgoing tides and using live data from the Bureau of Meteorology to add whatever other rainfall the river receives in the period of drawing.

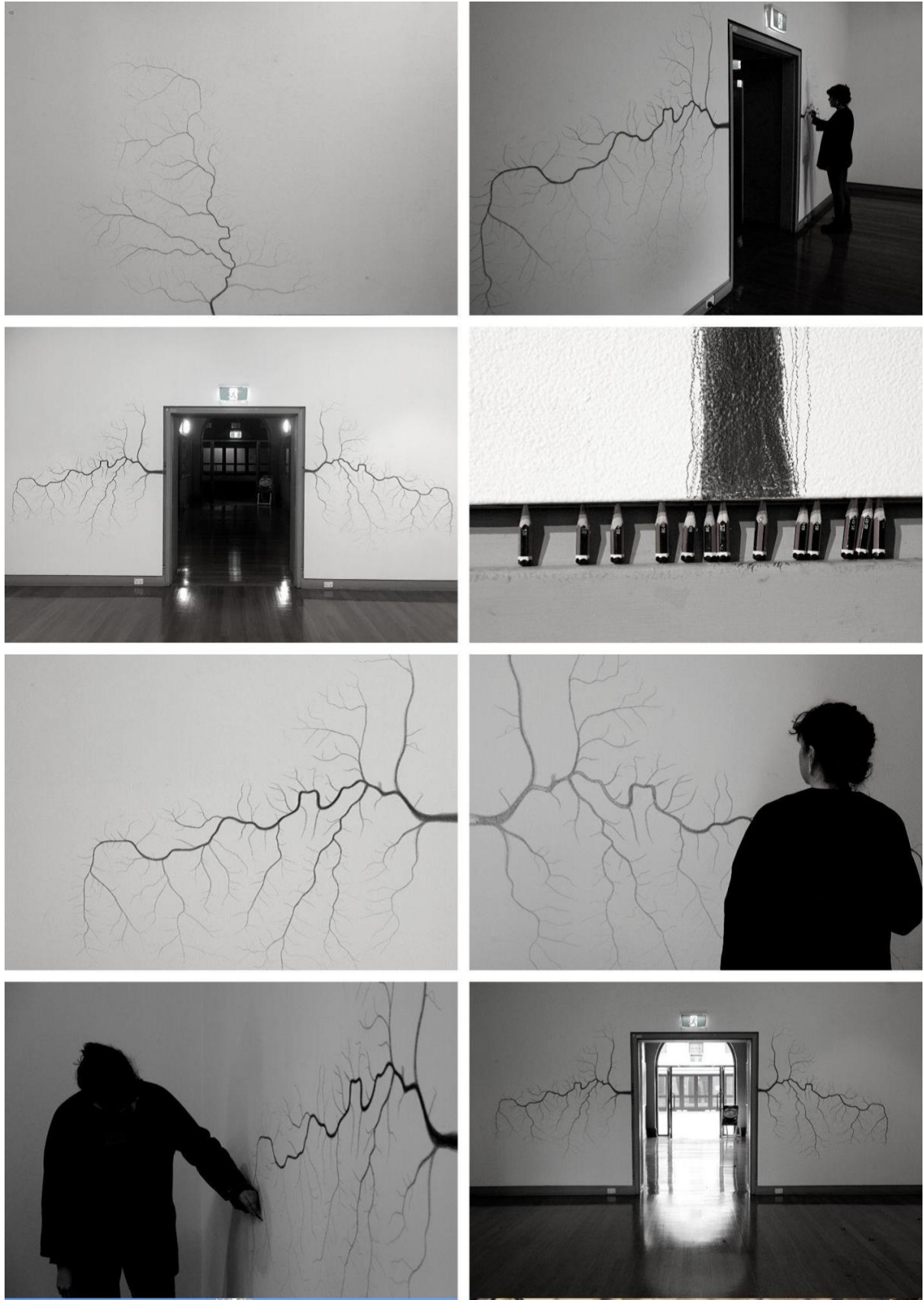


Figure 22. Research images. Drawing Experiment. Sydney College of the Arts Foyer, 2018

DERIVE #3 A RIVER ON THE OTHERSIDE OF THE WORLD

The paired walks that make up *A River on the Other side of the World* were created to share this research and the experience of following a river with groups of people. I led a walk on June the 12th, 2019 following a bend in the Vltava River in Prague as a part of the Australian exhibit at the Prague Quadrennial of Performance and Space Design.⁹⁷ A few weeks later, on July the 1st 2019 I followed this up with a walk along Wolli Creek and the Cooks River in Sydney with the Composting Feminisms reading Group.



Figure 23. Research image, google map of Vltava Walk

⁹⁷ "Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design, Australia 2019". Accessed 25th February 2020, <https://pqau.com.au/events>.

The Prague Quadrennial of Performance and Space Design (PQ) has been held every four years since 1967. PQ is the largest international exhibition and festival focused on scenography, performance design and theatre architecture. The themes of PQ 2019 were Imagination, Transformation and Memory. The Quadrennial focused on "performance design, scenography, and theatre architecture as essentially collaborative art forms – by some thinkers and practitioners subsumed under the single name scenography, by others under design."



Figure 24. Research image, google map of Wollli Creek/Cooks Walk

In preparation for walking on the Vltava, I walked the Wollli Creek to Cooks River path through remnant bushland near my home. While I was walking, I collected several small objects: a flake of rust from the barbie at Wanstead reserve, a casuarina seed cone, a Sydney cockle shell, a piece of plastic from the lid of a water bottle. Each of those objects were cast in silver to flatten the material differences between them and to make them precious. I sanded their sprues in the shed at my house. I made enough of these mnemonic tools to give away to walkers who joined me on the Vltava and the Cooks. These small objects reflect a desire to draw attention to the river and to consider things around us that are easy to overlook. In Prague, the walk was a material exchange. Walkers on the Vltava found something about the same size. I swapped them a silver casting for the object they had picked up. Each walker took a silver object home to put on their bookshelf, forget in their pocket or lose down the back of their couch, only to see it again at some point and remember being a part of a group of people walking along the river.

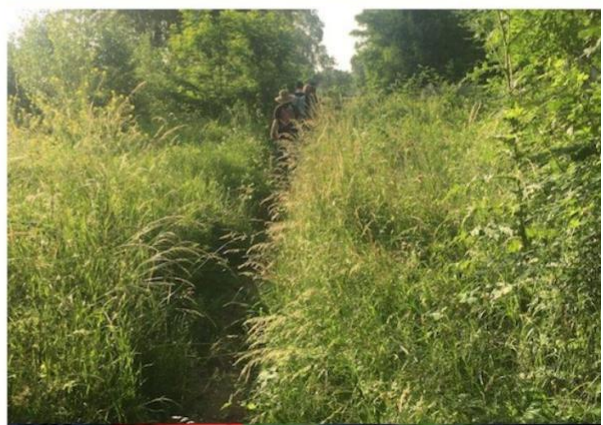


Figure 27. Research images, A Week on the Cooks River Vltava Walk, 2019. Photos Matt Prest

Walking in Prague was an opportunity to make a connection between my emerging visual art practice and my background working in performance, to share this research with an international audience and to bring that experience home to the Cooks River. Walking with the *Composting Feminisms Reading Group* created a constellation of ideas that included the work of Astrida Neimanis, Jennifer Hamilton, Saskia Beudel and Aunty Rhonda Dixon Grovenor.⁹⁸ Aunty Rhonda took part in the walk and welcomed us to Country. Speaking about the possum skin cloak she was wearing as an example of cultural resurgence and also talking about the Indigenous practice of *Dadirri* that comes from the Ngan'gikurunggurr and Ngen'giwumirri languages of the Daly River in the Northern Territory. Defined by Ngan'gikurunggurr Elder Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr, *Dadirri* means “inner deep listening and quiet still awareness.”⁹⁹ As our walk moved past cave shelters and middens—home to Indigenous people living on the river for thousands of years—we walked with respect for this history. We began opposite Undercliff Public School and followed Wolli Creek and the Cooks River to Gough Whitlam Park through bushland where it feels like you have dropped off the back of the city.

We read the first chapter of Neimanis' book *Bodies of Water, Feminist Post Human Phenomenology*, Jennifer Hamilton's review of *Bodies of Water* in the Sydney Review of Books, *All the Worlds a Drain*, a photo essay of mine published on the Sydney Environment Institute Blog and an article of Saskia Buedel's called *Fossils in the City*. Hamilton's review of Neimanis' *Bodies of Water* is embracing. Hamilton doesn't merely review Neimanis' ideas, she considers her own possibility of living by them. Hamilton uses Neimanis' metaphor of bodies of water to think through her own situated body recovering from cancer in relationship to the beauty and life of the polluted water of the Cooks

⁹⁸ Aunty Rhonda Dixon-Grovenor is a Dharug/Yuin elder, daughter of Aboriginal activist the late Dr Charles 'Chicka' Dixon and a long-time mentor and collaborator. We worked together on *Posts in the Paddock*, 2011 and *Fox and the Freedom Fighters* 2014.

⁹⁹ Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr, "Dadirri. Inner Deep Listening and Quiet Still Awareness., "<http://www.miriamrosefoundation.org.au/>.

River, its catchment area and drains and the gaps between aspirations and realities, and the realisation that “My body cannot or does not always practice what my brain knows to be right.”¹⁰⁰

Reading these two pieces of writing together, is a doorway into the intellectual friendship, honesty and rigour of these two scholars. The *Composting Feminisms* reading group is a social and intellectual space they created together. Their generosity, creative practice and welcoming nature has allowed me to wade into deeper waters intellectually; these conversations and activities have led me to stretch my reading and thinking. Reading *Bodies of Water* is something I have had to come back to again and again throughout my study as Neimanis’ understandings of phenomenology, post humanism, feminism and water meet with changes in my burgeoning perceptions. When I first talked with Neimanis about *Bodies of Water* we were sitting side by side in canoes rowing up Wolli Creek. I think of her in this moment reading her words: “We might be a part of, rather than separate from, the mud at our feet and the rain whipping our faces.”¹⁰¹

Buedel's essay *Fossils in the City* is a walking reflection written for the Open Spatial Workshop's 2017 exhibition *Converging in Time*¹⁰². Buedel reflects on the discovery of butchered dugong bones in the Alexandra Canal (a tributary of the Cooks River) in 1896. The bones are material evidence of Indigenous people living on the river dating back at least 5000 years. Through these ancient butchered dugong bones, the stone axes found nearby and the submerged forest unearthed during the excavation of Shea's Creek, early Australian scientists, in the grip of Social Darwinism, had to confront material evidence that challenged prevailing incorrect assumptions that Indigenous people had not been in Australia for very long.¹⁰³ The dugong bones were discovered along with a

100 Jennifer Hamilton, "All the World's a Drain," *Sydney Review of Books* 2017.

101 Astrida Neimanis and ProQuest, *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 14.

102 Open Spatial Workshop (Bianca Hester, Terry Bird and Scott Mitchell), "Converging in Time," Monash University Museum of Art (Melbourne: Monash University Museum of Art, 2017).

103 Saskia Buedel, "Fossil in the City," in *Open Spatial Workshop: Converging in time*, Monash University Museum of Art (Melbourne: Monash University Museum of Art, 2017).

subterranean forest, which taken together, infer that sea levels were between 14.5 and 18 meters lower than current sea levels.¹⁰⁴

The dugong bones were set in a layer of shell-rich estuarine sediment and showed marks of stone axe butchering. The skeleton showed no sign of disturbance associated with a deliberate burial. Aboriginal artefacts were present above and below the bones.¹⁰⁵

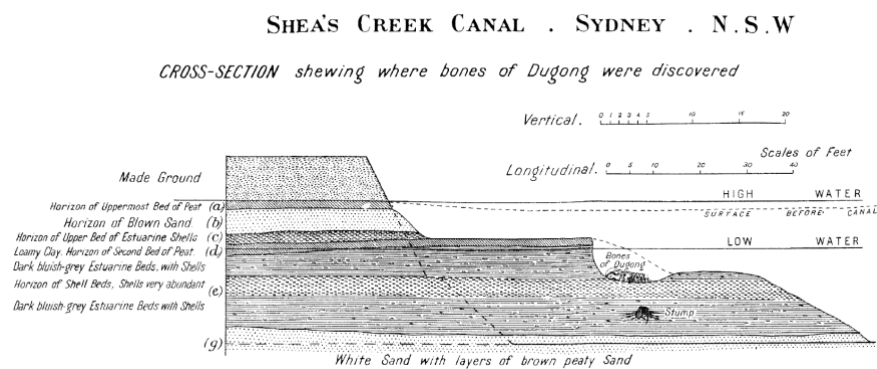


Figure 29. Sedimentary cross section, from Robert Baker, Peter Flood and Robert Haworth, "A 6000 Year-Old Fossil Dugong from Botany Bay: Inferences About Changes in Sydney's Climate, Sea Levels and Waterways," *Australian Geographical Studies* 42, no. March 2004.

Beudel's thoughtful essay and her earlier book *A Country in Mind. Memoir in Landscape*¹⁰⁶ share encounters with site, memory and history through research animated by situated first person descriptions. Thinking through the pollution, evidence of climate change and layers of deep time and Indigenous history that intersect in the Alexandra Canal, Beudel discusses the concept of "solistalgia¹⁰⁷" which describes the feeling of missing a place that has changed and is no longer what it once was. The Cooks River and the Alexandra Canal have both undergone changes that have

104 Robert Baker, Peter Flood and Robert Haworth, "A 6000 Year-Old Fossil Dugong from Botany Bay: Inferences About Changes in Sydney's Climate, Sea Levels and Waterways," *Australian Geographical Studies* 42, no. March 2004.

105 R.G.V. Baker and P.J. Flood R.J. Haworth, "A 6000 Year-Old Fossil Dugong from Botany Bay"; *Australian Geographical Studies* (2004).

106 Saskia Beudel, *A Country in Mind. Memoir in Landscape* (Perth: University of Western Australia Publishing, 2013).

107 A term coined by Glenn Albrecht in 2010 that Beudel encountered when it was cited by Robert Macfarlane in 2016.

rendered earlier versions of the place unrecognisable: “Every city has its ghost landscapes, vestiges of the places the city has been before”.¹⁰⁸

The small silver casts of objects I picked up along the river, as a collection are called *A week on the Cooks River* and were awarded the Cooks River Small Sculpture Prize in 2019¹⁰⁹. I felt like the phenomenological, feminist, landscape, walking, sculptural, temporal and conversational information embedded in these walks were somehow contained within the silver castings and legible to audiences who engaged with them. I will continue the practice of taking these sculptures with me to important events in the hope that they continue to accrue and impart knowledge about the Cooks River.

108 Saskia Beudel, "Fossils in the City," in *Open Spatial Workshop: Converging in time*, ed. Monash University Museum of Art (Melbourne: Monash University Museum of Art, 2017), 25.

109 “The Cooks River Small Sculpture Prize”, Greenway Art Prize, accessed 25th February 2020 <https://www.greenwayartprize.com.au/>.

Cooks River Walk



Figure 30. Research images, A Week on the Cooks River, Cooks Walk, 2019. Photos Clare Britton and Matt Prest

DERIVE #4 RIVER DREAMS – OVERNIGHT AND UNDERWATER SCREENING

From the 18th – 24th of November 2019, I worked in residence at Frontyard Projects. Frontyard is a single-story red brick building located on Illawarra Road in Marrickville. Aware of the bureaucracy that many small arts organisations generate and struggle to stay on top of, the people who started Frontyard¹¹⁰, a "not only artist-run initiative", work to create structures of care, generosity and responsibility that foster access and minimise paperwork. A tangible example of Frontyard's generous and connective philosophy in action is their contribution to the 2019 Hobiennale.¹¹¹ The team from Frontyard hired a van that hosted intimate conversations while transporting people between other festival events.

By supporting the practical and social needs of the public, *ShuttleBus* is an attempt to dissolve hierarchies between "expert" and "audience" often present within institutional organising. Frontyard Drivers will engage commuters in conversation on this topic, and these conversations will be recorded and made public online as a long-form archive.¹¹²

While working at Frontyard, I completed an edit of the underwater footage shot during my first derive. The imagery follows the Cooks River from Strathfield golf course to Botany Bay. This work in progress was rear projected in the windows facing Illawarra Road which crosses the Cooks River from Marrickville to Earlwood. The underwater footage played overnight on a loop from 8pm to 6am.

110 Connie Anthes, Rei Cheetham, Clare Cooper, Alexandra Crosby, Benjamin Forster, Jehan Kanga.

111 a Festival of Artists Run Initiatives across Australia

112 "Frontyard Hobiennale," Hobiennale, accessed 25th February, 2020 <https://hobiennale.com/Frontyard>.



Figure 31. River Dreams, overnight, Underwater screenings at Frontyard 18th- 24th November 2019

On the 21st of November I made popcorn and served it to artists and community members who lay in hammocks, on picnic rugs and in chairs chatting and watching the river roll by. After turning the projector off at 6am each day, I went to the same spot on the river (the seats near the bottom of Macquarie Road, Earlwood) and made a note of what it looked like, smelled like, sounded like and felt like, and bearing witness to the first influx of bushfire smoke from what would become the catastrophic bushfires of 2019/20 and would make Sydney's air hazardous. Joined by local printmaker Ella Cutler, I made a series of limited edition prints on Frontyard's risograph machine and left them out for local residents to come and collect in the night.

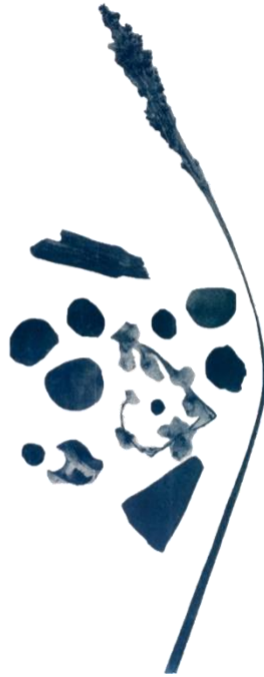


Figure 32, Research image *Moon Walk* limited edition risograph print 2019

On the last night of the residency, I took my boat out on the Cooks River near Tempe, and I slept on the water. Sleeping out on the dark water was the final creative process in *A Week on the Cooks River* and marked the (somewhat arbitrary) end of this research.

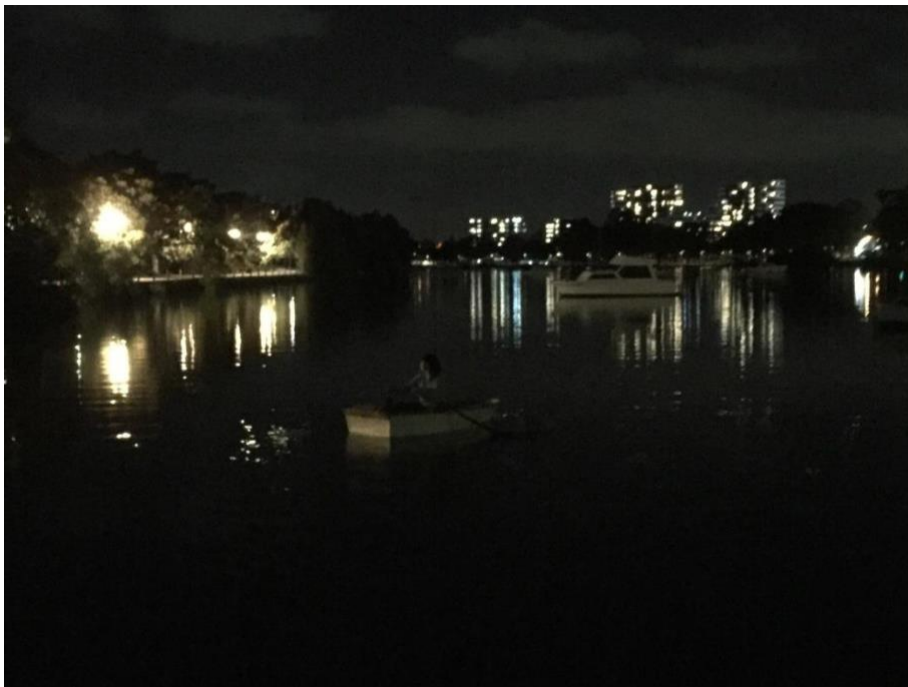


Figure 33. 23rd November 2019 River Dreams photo Matt Prest

RIVERS AND A WELL WITH KENZEE PATTERSON AND THERESE KEOGH

The ethic of paying attention to my every day has informed this project. My every day has included the practices of many artists based out of Sydney College of the Arts. Alongside artists Therese Keogh and Kenzee Patterson, I participated in a series of collaborative, but independent, events that we called *Two Rivers and a Well*¹¹³ where we presented work in progress in conversation. This included convening and presenting a panel at the AAANZ conference at the University of Western Australia, Perth and at Sydney College of the Arts, and exhibiting work in Patterson's Broken Hill Gallery *Cosmopolitan Decline*.

Keogh and Patterson's processes and practices are published in their Master of Fine Arts Papers: Keogh's *Revisiting the LBK Water Wells of Saxony*¹¹⁴ and Patterson's *A Tree Branches, So Does a River: Responsively (Dis)Placing Materialities and Subjectivities in Postcolonizing Australia*.¹¹⁵ Keogh and Patterson have both shaped my thinking and influenced the way I have approached *A Week on the Cooks River*. Alex Martinis Roe is an Australian feminist and artist whose work seeks to participate in the histories and futures of feminism by fostering relationships between different generations of feminists. Martinis Roe's book and film *To Become Two* situate her ideas not just within a disembodied discourse, but also contextualise her observations with her experiences, relationships and understanding of the people who formed the ideas. Martinis Roe writes about authorship as a relational process "where protagonists are appreciated for their distinction, but also where networks, collaborations and dialogue that have made their work possible are heard and valued in each of their voices."¹¹⁶

113 Therese Keogh and Kenzee Patterson Clare Britton, "Two Rivers and a Well," in *Art and its Directions* (University of Western Australia: Art Association of Australia and New Zealand, 2017).

114 Therese Keogh, "Revisiting the LBK Water Wells of Saxony." (University of Sydney, 2018).

115. Kenzee Patterson, "A Tree Branches, So Does a River: Responsively (Dis)Placing Materialities and Subjectivities in Postcolonizing Australia." (University of Sydney, 2018).

116 Alex Martinis Roe, *To Become Two. Propositions for Feminist Collective Practice*, ed. Janine Armin and Susan Gibb (Archive Books in partnership with ar/ge kunst; Casco- Office for Art, Design and Theory; If I can't Dance I Don't Want to Be Part of the revolution; and The Show Room., 2018), 15.

Keogh, Patterson and I worked independently and, in our own small way, formed “networks, collaborations and dialogue.”¹¹⁷ Recognising the synergies between our projects, which included creating artworks situated in a particular watery place and considering material and cultural histories, we started an informal reading group and presented research together at the AAANZ conference in Perth. Keogh and Patterson’s working methods have informed and sustained the creative development of *A Week on the Cooks River*. Consequently, I have spent a lot of time at the door to Keogh's studio absentmindedly pushing a magnet on her bookcase; cradling my kettle; drinking tea out of an elephant mug with a grey trunk for a handle or waiting with Kenzee as water drips slowly through a Vietnamese coffee percolator. After our panel “Rivers and a Well”¹¹⁸ at the AAANZ conference, Keogh, Patterson and I swam in the Indian Ocean, watching in the water as the deep orange sun lowered on the horizon and the water turned dark blue. My reading of Keogh and Patterson's papers is enriched by the time I have spent with them walking, swimming, talking about site and how to understand place and practice.

Patterson's project *A Tree Branches So Does a River* is a site-based exploration that considers the legacy of his family connection to the area surrounding Lismore in the part of New South Wales known as the Northern Rivers: "The merging of a tree and river into the one image is not merely a poetic conflation, it represents ecological, cultural and historical interconnectedness of these two things."¹¹⁹

Patterson contemplates familial connection to land, his material connection to his family and he puts these ruminations into the context of the colonisation of Bundjalung Country. Patterson considers

¹¹⁷ Alex Martinis Roe, *To Become Two. Propositions for Feminist Collective Practice*, 2018, 15.

¹¹⁸ Clare Britton, Therese Keogh and Kenzee Patterson, "Two Rivers and a Well," in *Art and its Directions* (University of Western Australia: Art Association of Australia and New Zealand, 2017).

¹¹⁹ Patterson, "A Tree Branches, So Does a River: Responsively (Dis)Placing Materialities and Subjectivities in Postcolonizing Australia.", 5.

the intergenerational culpability he has inherited and explores both his connection to Lismore and the materials he is drawn to working with sculpturally. Patterson makes an analogy between the shifting perception of his awareness of this history and its materiality using an anecdote from philosopher Val Plumwood. Patterson recounts the canoe trip Plumwood addresses in her essay "Prey to a Crocodile".¹²⁰ Attacked by a crocodile, Plumwood and her canoe were put into a death roll. The crocodile perceived her as meat, and in the moment of panic and empathy, Plumwood did too. Plumwood survived and attributes a shift in her subjectivity to this encounter. Patterson looks to Plumwood for guidance to shift away from a human-centred subjectivity and to honour and acknowledge the agency and creativity of the "more than human world". Considering his own shifts of subjectivity, Patterson uses a metaphor of circling throughout his project, working with the image of a spiral that is used by Bruno Latour to describe poly-temporality¹²¹—the present, past and future coalescing.

The processes that Patterson engaged with to make this work contain literal, physical and conceptual spirals through time. Reflecting on his use of the materials steel and wood, Patterson researches generations of his family who have worked with the same materials—all the way back to his ancestors the Coopers who were timber getters arriving in Lismore in search of red cedar trees. Retracing his ancestor's physical journey up the Wilson River, Patterson contends with the violence of this history: the forests depleted, and his family (literally) inscribed on the landscape through the naming of Coopers Creek, and the erasure of Indigenous history that this naming and depletion occasioned. The gesture of circling through time manifests throughout Patterson's process. We circle his galvanised steel sculptures like the red cedar tip moths they describe. Patterson circles the carved plaster bells he made and cast in bronze remembering the Lismore Post Office belfry which

120 Val Plumwood, "Prey to a Crocodile," *Aisling Magazine* 30 (2002).

121 Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993).

is rendered as an image in a video loop of footage circling the tower. Patterson's silent bronze bells conjure the unspoken aspects of Australian history that conceal colonial violence.



Figure 34. *Sons of the soil*. Kenzee Patterson, 2018. cast bronze
4 pieces; each piece 14.5 cm x 18.5 cm diameter.
<https://www.kenzeepatterson.com/Sons-of-the-soil>

When I look at the Cooks River and the way that different time periods coexist and the responsibilities I have inherited by living my life on its banks, I think about the circling through time that Patterson describes and enacts. The metaphor of circling history is echoed by Therese Keogh's installation *Imaged in Absence* that opened at First Draft Gallery on the 1st of May 2019. *Imaged in Absence* is an iteration of animation and writing from Keogh's Master's research "Revisiting the LBK Water Wells of Saxony." It consists of an elegant diagonal gesture recessing seamlessly into the walls of the gallery, as four screens turn around a long black pole. The black and white animation looping on each screen revolves around the thin surface level 3D scans of an object made by Keogh out of wax, absorbing the impressions of wood she had cut with a replica stone adze. To view the work you have to orbit around the pole and this turning is evocative of a massive drill moving through the ground.



Figure 35. *Imaged in Absence*, Therese Keogh, 2018. 4 channel pole mounted video. Dimensions variable. <https://www.theresekeogh.com/imaged-in-absence>

Throughout her study, Keogh travelled to and engaged with the archaeological excavation of water wells in Saxony, Germany. Through observing and participating in the excavation of the ancient timber construction and experimental archaeology workshops, Keogh's practice involved developing an understanding of the material, historical, gestural and artistic implications of the wells. Keogh considers the ways the wells have preserved knowledge, as well as how their exhumation has generated new understandings, to address the research question: "*How can material histories become mobilised during embodied encounters with site?*"¹²²

Exhibiting together in Broken Hill at Patterson's gallery *Cosmopolitan Decline*, Keogh and I drove across NSW together and experienced water and vegetation becoming less and less plentiful as the landscape became redder and redder and flatter and flatter. We saw the Murray Darling River before

¹²² Therese Keogh, "Revisiting the LBK Water Wells of Saxony." (University of Sydney, 2018), 3.

the 2018 fish kill.¹²³ We couldn't sweep the floor of the gallery because of the lead dust in Broken Hill. In Broken Hill, the chlorinated water piped over from Menindee Lake stung my eyes. We walked along dry creeks, and sat at the top of the slag heap in the centre of town. In the evening the ground reverberated with subterranean explosions. We read a list of all the products we use that come from mining; we know that we aren't separate from it— we are implicated by our batteries, phones, cars and the things we make out of silver and steel. There is a lot of trouble we need to learn to stay with, and we need friends to help us stay the course.



Figure 36. Research image the Darling before the Fish Kill. 2018

Our projects resonate with one another through our shared approach to experiencing knowledge physically and expressing it visually, and our mutual acknowledgment of the complexity of dealing with history, especially Australian history. A desire to understand our pasts leads to our consideration of the physical and material gestures coexistent with site and time; using the literal qualities of water as a metaphor for culture. The opportunity to research and work alongside Keogh and Patterson has deepened, informed, challenged and reassured *A Week on the Cooks River*.

¹²³ Ann Davies, "Murray-Darling Fish Kill: Extreme Weather and Low River Flow Led to Drop in Oxygen Levels," *The Guardian* 2019. Accessed 25th February 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/jan/24/murray-darling-fish-kill-extreme-weather-and-low-river-flow-led-to-drop-in-oxygen-levels>

RIVERS AND A WELL – AT COSMOPOLITAN DECLINE IN BROKEN HILL

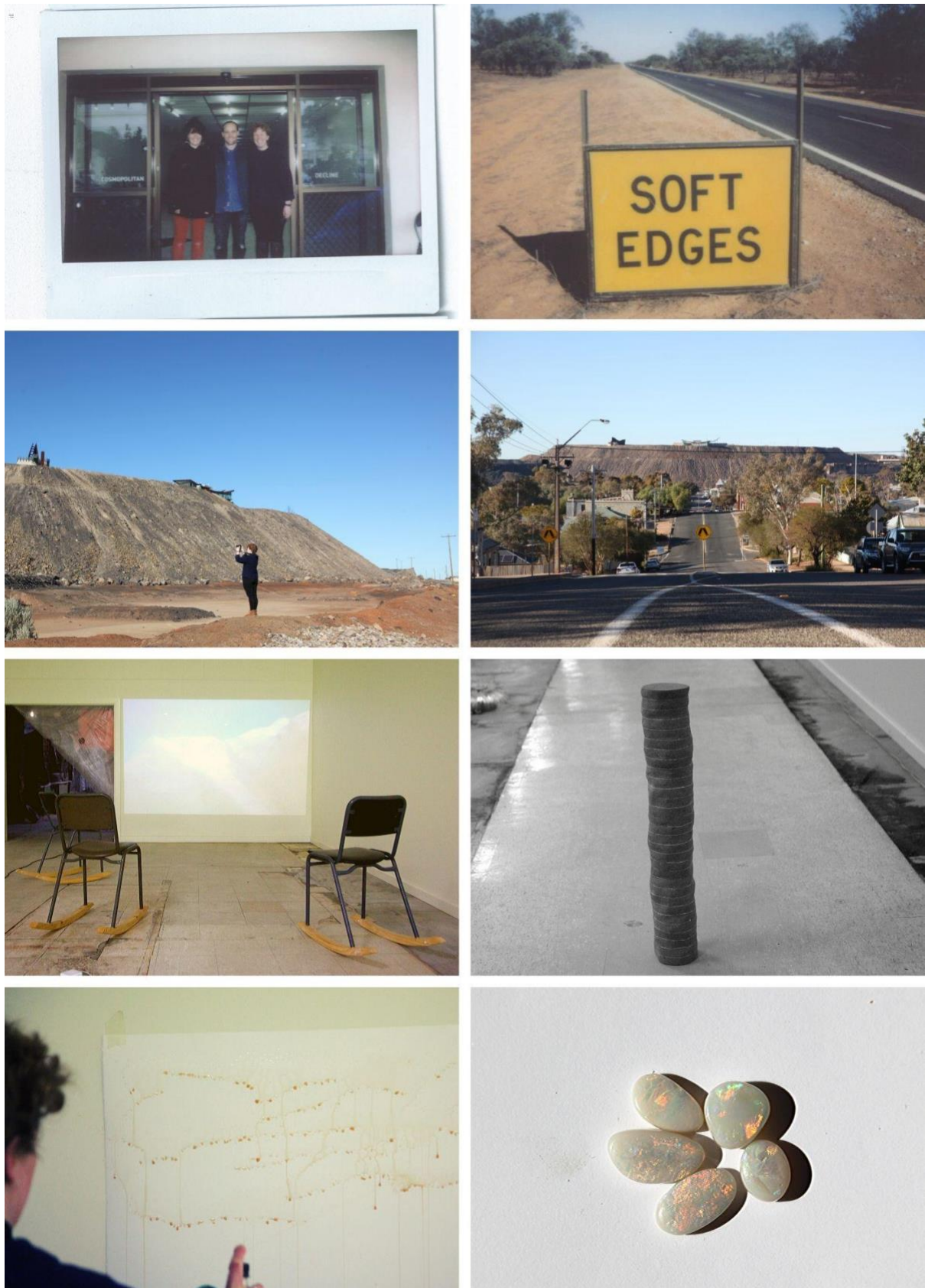


Figure 37. *Research images. Rivers and A Well, 2018.*

Like many other artists, Keogh, Patterson and I became interested in the way that land and water transform each other and the way that places, structures and materials hold their histories. Writing in America in the 1950's, marine biologist and influential environmental writer Rachel Carson describes, in *Edge of Sea* the incremental movement of sand along a shoreline.

No individual grain of sand remains long in any one place. The smaller it is, the more it is subject to long transport, the larger grains by water, the smaller by wind. An average grain of sand is only two and one-half times the weight of an equal volume of water, but more than two thousand times as heavy as air, so only the smaller grains are available for transport by wind. But despite the constant working over of the sands by wind and water, a beach shows little visible change from day to day, for as one grain is carried away, another is usually brought in its place.¹²⁴

Tracking back from the Cooks River to the country where my mum grew up, the place that got me looking into Australian history through site-based research, I have seen this dramatic moment where the line between the land and the water merges. In a video that my aunty Jo O'Brien took in February 2007, which has had more than a million views,¹²⁵ the camera is framed on a bitumen road with very soft edges and there is a distant roaring sound as the camera jolts a little from side to side. Grandpa is wearing a cap, a brown coat and fawn pants, ambling towards the dip in the road. In the mid-ground, it looks like the ground is moving. My uncle Tony's exposed legs are entirely white. Tony and grandpa stand in the middle of the road as this brown, soil laden watery force completely engulfs the bitumen in front of them. Whole trees are moving with the mud and water hitting the opposite side of the road. The embankment forces some of the water back. The trees, dirt and

¹²⁴ Rachel Carson, *The Edge of the Sea* (New York: New American Library, 1971).

¹²⁵ "Kellick Creek Flash Flood", 10th Feb 2007, Uploaded by Robert Smith, filmed by Jo O'Brien, video, 2.56. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MIQrSH6LMgA>

water, churn in front of them. Grandpa and Tony relent and take a couple of steps back. As the camera zooms in and you can see the mud undulating; Grandpa stands with his hands behind his back. Walking back to the camera, Tony has a big smile on his face, and he says "you don't see that every day". Grandpa walks past the camera without looking at it.



Figure 38. Research image. Screen shot from *Kellick Creek Flash Flood*, 2007.

The Cooks River also changes in incremental and dramatic ways; ways that render its previous form hard to conceive. The following image shows engineering of the mouth of the Cooks River. Its ghostly former shape takes sweeping curves as it enters Botany Bay directly under a runway.

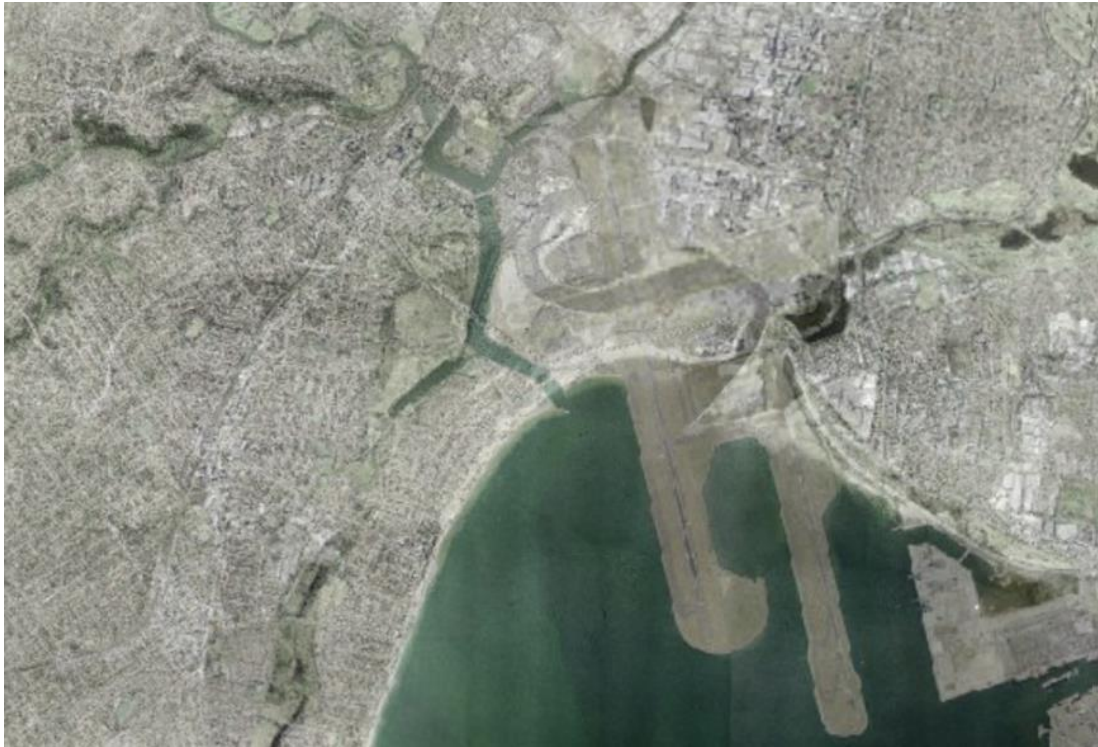


Figure 39. Research image. Screen shot Cooks River, Sixmaps 1943 and today.

In her essay “The Site of Memory”, Nobel Prize winning African American writer Toni Morrison considers rivers, memory and the practice of writing in place:

[...] All water has a perfect memory and is forever trying to get back to where it was. Writers are like that: remembering where we were, what valley we ran through, what the banks were like, the light that was there and the route back to our original place. It is emotional memory - what the nerves and the skin remember as well as how it appeared. And a rush of imagination is our "flooding".¹²⁶

¹²⁶ Toni Morrison, "The Site of Memory," in *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*, ed. William Zinsser (Boston; New York: Houghton Mifflin), 99.

The Cooks River has fallen between the cracks, failing to garner sustained, serious, historic and artistic attention. And yet, this place has given me and a lot of other writers, advocates and activists a “rush of imagination”.¹²⁷ Part of that “rush”, in the last four years there have been several significant publications released that contend with the Indigenous and post-colonial history of the Cooks River. The next chapter discusses historic texts, more recent publications, and existing site-based art work on the Cooks River. Perhaps, *A Week on the Cooks River* can contribute some additional compass points that future artists and researchers can refer back to in the years to come. Perhaps it is possible that the processes outlined in this paper could be adapted by other people who want to learn to pay attention to, and care for, the nature which is local to them. The next chapter presents a literature review focused on existing published content about the Cooks River.

At Chain of Ponds in Strathfield, the river is a canal. Looking inland, back up the river, I saw a woman practicing kickboxing under a bridge. She noticed me looking and did a roundhouse kick in my direction. A lot of people go to the river to be by themselves. At the bottom of the concrete canal, there is a channel that contains the water making its way out to sea. It's only 30 centimetres wide: with a foot on either side you can have the whole river running between your shoes. Still, there are signs around warning about flash flooding because the concrete is a non-porous surface, and when there is a lot of rain, the water has nowhere to go but out.

¹²⁷ Toni Morrison, "The Site of Memory," 99.



Figure 40. Samuel John Neele *Pimbly: A native of New Holland in a Canoe of that Country* in James Grant, *Narrative of a Voyage of Discovery Performed in HM Vessel Lady Nelson 1803-04*, in *Rivers and Resilience* by Heather Goodall and Allison Cadzow.

...a very fine stream of fresh water on the N.
shore of the first sandy cove within the island
before which a ship might lay almost
landlocked, and wood for fuel may be got
everywhere.¹²⁸

¹²⁸ James Cook, *Captain Cook's Journal During His First Voyage Round the World Made in H.M. Bark Endeavour, 1768-71: A Literal Transcription of the Original Mss.*, ed. William James Lloyd Wharton (Adelaide: Libraries Board of South Australia, 1893), 248.

CHAPTER THREE

Drifting with the tide between Marrickville and Tempe there is no need to row. When the boat pivots, sometimes the mangroves and the other trees lining the banks combine with the shape of the valley to obscure the buildings. From the water, all you can see is the river, the mangroves, the casuarinas, the taller trees and the valley cliff face. Near Gough Whitlam Park I saw the city disappear, and a flock of white cockatoos flew overhead. The cockatoos love the seed cones that grow on the casuarina trees on the river bank. Thick, muscly birds with white bodies and a majestic yellow crest. Shrieking and flocking their sound is dynamic—moving as they move—vibrating through the air and making invisible currents. This vibration echoes the wind and the currents in the water. Seeing the river like this is uplifting. It just feels right. A thin window into how beautiful this place must have been when you could swim and eat the fish in the water, have a fire on your boat and watch the birds fly over.

This chapter is a literature review that includes significant publications that, alongside my fieldwork, inform my understanding of the Cooks River. Given the name of the Cooks River, it is impossible to engage with this site without engaging with the colonisation of Australia. In the opening sentence of his book *Landmarks*, English writer Ian Macfarlane writes about the power of naming places. “This book (Landmarks) is about the power of language - strong style, single words - to shape our sense of place”.¹²⁹ Naming this river “The Cooks” is a colonial imposition on the landscape that has the effect of asserting dominance and obscuring Indigenous history. The middens on the banks of the river, the 6000-year-old fossilised dugong bones and the tools found nearby, refute its recent “discovery”. This chapter gathers together existing publications about the Indigenous and Post-colonial history of the Cooks River. It includes publications that are from very different contexts. Drawing interdisciplinary research together is a method from contemporary performance making. This approach is underpinned by the assertion that considering oral histories, historical publications, public artworks and contemporary scholarship together and within the same frame, can generate new insights and provide new understandings of the Cooks River.

This literature review is timely because several recent publications have increased our collective knowledge of the Cooks River. This chapter will critically examine the published works that make up the *Cooks River Aboriginal History Project*. These are: *Oral history project* (2018) by Asher Milgate; *Aboriginal History Along the Cooks River* (2018); and *Hidden in Plain View: Aboriginal People of Coastal Sydney* (2018) by Paul Irish. Also considered is *River Dreams The People and Landscape of the Cooks River* (2018) by historian Ian Tyrell; the video “Preservation of sites in urban areas” (2018) by Nathan Moran and Jimmy Smith¹³⁰; Jason Wing's public artwork *Pemulwuy the Rainbow Warrior* (2019); and a public mosaic, also of Pemulwuy designed by Danny Eastwood.

¹²⁹ Robert Macfarlane, *Landmarks* (London: Penguin Random House UK, 2015). Page 1

Gathering this existing information into one field of view constitutes a unique contribution of *A Week on the Cooks River* to new knowledge; it also expresses an argument for embodied research practices and the role art practices can play in generating productive spaces within the connective tissue between disciplines. The nature of this review of literature reflects the viewpoint of an artist engaging with this material (as opposed to a scientist, landscape architect or historian). This research underpins the sensibility that I have brought to processing my own experience of the Cooks River. The strategies for conducting this research include typical library research techniques: reading books about the Cooks River, consulting the bibliographies of those books, and reading the books those books are referring to, and then pulling the fundamental discoveries together into a written document. Bringing all of these texts together can increase the legibility of the Cooks River as a cultural space and may deepen the way the river is valued. The starting point for this research was to comb through texts from early in Australia's colonisation looking for references to the Cooks River.

EARLY PUBLICATIONS

In *Hidden in Plain View: The Aboriginal People of Coastal Sydney*, Paul Irish notes that if the First Fleet had arrived 10 000 years earlier than they did, they would not have been able to sail into Botany Bay because the bay did not exist yet. However, they still would have found Aboriginal people who had been living in the Sydney region for thousands of years. Irish goes on to say,

Had the First Fleet arrived just two thousand years ago, we would have none of their illustrations of Aboriginal women fishing with Burra (shell fish hooks) and line from flotillas of bark nowie (canoes). Burra had not been invented, and all of the social and economic changes that came with the rise of women's line fishing were yet to unfold.¹³¹

¹³¹ Paul Irish, *Hidden in Plain View: The Aboriginal People of Coastal Sydney* (Sydney: New South Publishing, 2017), 12

The complexity of Australian Indigenous economic, agricultural and social systems is currently being written back into Australian history. Writers including Bill Gammage, Bruce Pascoe, Heather Goodall and Allison Cadzow, Maria Nunget, Val Attenbrow, Jaky Troy, Paul Irish and Henry Reynolds are working their way back through existing Australian records with a renewed focus on the Indigenous history captured in the archives. In Ian Tyrell's *River Dreams, the People and Landscape of the Cooks River*, there is a reference to Bill Gamage's research. This Indigenous Oral History account of Botany Bay squares with the scientific scholarship on the geological changes in this part of Sydney.¹³²

[A] clan that split in two. The elders headed inland while the younger members remained on the then-swampy land near the coast. When the elders later returned they found Botany Bay had become an inlet and the Georges and the Cooks were two separate rivers¹³³

Stories of cultural resurgence and the integration of Indigenous history are taking place all over Australia. In Tasmania, a model of a tied bark canoe made in a concentration camp called Wybalenna on Flinders Island provided the template for hundreds of newly constructed modern bark canoes¹³⁴, like a seed waiting for the right conditions to grow again. Conceiving of Australia as an ancient place with long held traditions that continue today requires a re-examination of Australian archives.

¹³² Paul Irish, *Aboriginal History Along the Cooks River*, 7.

¹³³ Ian Tyrell, *River Dreams the People and Landscape of the Cooks River* (Sydney: New South Publishing, 2018), 18.

¹³⁴ Andy Baird, *Voices of Aboriginal Tasmania Ningeneb Tunapry Education Guide* (Hobart: Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, 2008). Accessed 25th February 2020.

https://www.tmag.tas.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/66766/Voices_of_Aboriginal_Tasmania_ningeneb_tunapry_education_guide.pdf

As well as documenting Australia's colonisation, the journals of Captain James Cook from April 1770 contain vivid accounts of the enormous risks and hunger for new knowledge embodied in Cook's voyages. Cook's account illustrates the immense effort and danger that his journeys encompassed (as well as the imminent threat his presence posed to the Indigenous people he encountered). Reading Cook's journals carefully, I have also been struck by his first faltering moments of description. Cook searches for language to interact with Australia. Language failed Cook when describing unfamiliar landscapes and animals. His capacity to understand failed him in communicating with and acknowledging the sovereignty of Indigenous people. This lack of respect is captured in Cook's observations about watercraft, so sustainably constructed that not even the tree that provides the bark dies in their making.

3 canoes lay upon the beach. The worst I think I ever saw; they were about 12 or 14 feet long, made of one piece of the bark of a tree, drawn or tied up at each end, and the middle kept open by means of pieces of stick by way of thwarts.¹³⁵

Cook describes an interaction with Indigenous people on the banks of Botany Bay on Sunday the 29th of April 1770. Two men stood their ground as Cook approached in a small row boat. Cook threw small objects to the men, nails and beads, and assumed the men were so pleased that: "I thought that they had beckon'd to us to come ashore, but I was mistaken."¹³⁶

By his own account, as Cook approached, the men came to defend themselves and fired a musket shot between them, the men went back to get darts and one threw a stone. Cook fired another two

¹³⁵ James Cook, *Captain Cook's Journal During His First Voyage Round the World Made in H.M. Bark Endeavour, 1768-71: A Literal Transcription of the Original Mss.* Page 243

¹³⁶ James Cook, *Captain Cook's Journal During His First Voyage Round the World Made in H.M. Bark Endeavour*, 243.

times before the men, one injured, retreated. Later, on the same day, April 29th 1770, Cook continued his failed attempts to approach the locals.

I went myself in the Pinnace¹³⁷ to sound and explore the bay, in doing so I saw some of the Natives, but they all fled at my approach. I landed in two places one of which the people had just left, as there were small fires and fresh muscles broiling upon them; here likewise lay vast heaps of the largest oyster shells I ever saw. ¹³⁸

While the local people again avoided Cook, in this passage of writing, we can glimpse a meal—cooked muscles and oysters by the water. Large middens on the shores of the place that was not yet called Botany Bay. A few days later, the 1st of May, we hear Cook's description of the landscape and the animals of the Cooks River. My fieldwork on the river and Botany Bay has helped me to imagine the view described here; Botany Bay without the planes, shipping container cranes and industry. Botany Bay with its botany.

137 A pinnace is a small boat

138 Cook, *Captain Cook's Journal During His First Voyage Round the World Made in H.M. Bark Endeavour, 1768-71: A Literal Transcription of the Original Mss*, 243



Figure 41. Research image. A Week on the Cooks River. Botany Bay. Photo Matt Prest.

In Cook's account of the river that would come to bear his name, we see him develop new knowledge by drawing relationships between all the new things he sees and the world he knows.

I afterwards found a very fine stream of fresh water on the N. shore of the first sandy cove within the island before which a ship might lay almost landlocked, and wood for fuel may be got everywhere. Although the wood is here in great plenty there is very little variety; the biggest trees are as large or larger than our Oaks in England and grows a good deal like them and yields a reddish gum; the wood itself is heavy hard and black like *Lignum Vitae*. Another grows tall and straight something like pines – the wood of this land is hard and ponderous and something of the nature of the American live Oak. These two are all the timber trees I met with; there are a few sorts of shrubs and several palm trees and mangroves about the head as far as we could see and I believe that the

soil is in general sandy. In the wood are a variety of beautiful birds such as Cockatoos, Lorryquets, Parrots etc. and crows exactly like the ones we have in England. 139

Knowing the Cooks River now, it is hard to reconcile these early descriptions of Cook's with the landscape today. Cook's writing gives us a window back to when Botany Bay was named after the richness of its botany, and there were no English words for the trees and the animals in Australia. The river must be the Cooks because it is on the northern side of Botany Bay. The Cooks is not freshwater, and with the river's physical proximity to the tidal movements of Botany Bay, it is confounding to read Cook's description of the river as a freshwater stream. Today the Cooks River receives the incoming tides of the Pacific Ocean, and the water is salty as far inland as Campsie.

In order to further understand the history and the current composition of the vegetation along the Cooks River, I have referred to *Missing Jigsaw Pieces, the Bush plants of the Cooks River Valley* by Doug Benson, Daine Onidinea and Virginia Bear. This book has a particular focus on native plants and the interactions between humans and the river. *Missing Jigsaw Pieces, the Bush plants of the Cooks River Valley* takes the geographic information held in the landscape of the Cooks River valley and analyses those features in relationship to early paintings, photographs, accounts and knowledge of Australian vegetation patterns and estuarine river systems. According to this analysis, the low-lying upper reaches of the river were clay plain scrub forest, while the shallow sandy dirt of the sandstone valley near Marrickville and Earlwood was sandstone vegetation forest and heath. The saltier waters closer to Botany Bay were mangroves and saltmarsh, and nearer the shoreline it was banksia scrub. All this was surrounded by turpentine and ironbark (Cooks "tall and straight" trees) forest, very little of which remains today.

139 James Cook, *Captain Cook's Journal During His First Voyage Round the World Made in H.M. Bark Endeavour*, 248

When Australia was colonised 18 years later, James Cook was deceased, the river that bears his name was not freshwater, and the existence of Indigenous people Cook's diaries record refute the status of Terra Nullius conferred on their country; but they are about to be dealt colonisation's many blows. In an immensely consequential decision for Sydney and the river, Arthur Phillip rejected the brackish Cooks and Botany Bay in favour of Parramatta River and Sydney Harbour.

Writing in Port Jackson in 1788, Watkin Tench's journals shed light on the early days of the colony on the banks of the Cooks River. Within these journals, Tench gives an account of the spearing of McEntire (Governor Phillip's gamekeeper) by the Indigenous warrior Pemulwuy. While out hunting for kangaroo, on the 9th of January 1788, on the north arm of Botany Bay (near where the Cooks River emptied into Botany Bay in 1788). McEntire and the hunting party heard the sound of a group approaching the hut in which they were sleeping. McEntire went out in the darkness to speak with the armed Indigenous men, was speared and cried out: "I am dead".¹⁴⁰ After suffering until the 20th of January, McEntire died of his injuries. Following McEntire's death, the Governor issued an order that no person should "fire on any native except in his own defence."¹⁴¹

However this intended peacefulness would come to contrast heavily with the severity of the retribution for the death of McEntire. Tench quotes the order:

The natives will be made severe examples of whenever any man is wounded by them, but this will be done in a manner which may satisfy them that it is a punishment inflicted on them for their own bad conduct and of which they cannot be made sensible if they are not treated with kindness while they continue peaceable and quiet.

¹⁴⁰ Watkin Tench and Tim Flannery, *Watkin Tench's 1788* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2009), 165.

¹⁴¹ Watkin Tench and Tim Flannery, *Watkin Tench's 1788* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2009), 165.

According to Tench, the list of behaviours that the Governor singles out to curtail are shooting people and stealing property (spears and other articles). The very existence of those bans implies that shooting Indigenous people and stealing their property required banning in the first instance. Tench is called on to be part of the group who were charged to deliver the punishment for McIntire's death. Tench, troubled by this task, suggests that rather than killing ten people (and cutting their heads off and putting them into bags) the party should capture six people and execute a more "reasonable number"¹⁴² in front of the rest of the captives and then release the group. In Tench's account, this is proffered as a more compassionate response. Relative to the Governor's initial suggestion of killing ten, it is more reasonable, but is still a proposal to kill at least two people and intentionally traumatise others. Far from denouncing this murderous mission, Tench participates in the attempted capture of Pemulwuy; the party left from Port Jackson carrying hatchets and the bags intended to carry the severed heads inside. Tench's account of the failed mission becomes almost darkly comical as the heavily armed and clothed Europeans begin sinking into the mud of the Cooks River.¹⁴³ They couldn't even keep up with Pemulwuy let alone capture or decapitate him. From the muddy banks of the river the cries resounded: "I find it impossible to move; I am sinking."¹⁴⁴ Branches were chopped and thrown to the sinking men who pulled themselves out of the mud, and they returned without success to Sydney.

In his writing, Tench comes across as a reasonable person. The violence that he describes (and participates in) provides a glimpse of the severity of Sydney in 1788. What did the unreasonable people do? Many efforts have been made to document colonial violence, as well as attempt to quantify the violence that remained undocumented by those too ashamed to record in their journals. A significant recent project is The Guardian newspaper pairing with researchers from the University

¹⁴² Watkin Tench and Tim Flannery, *Watkin Tench's 1788* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2009), 165.

¹⁴³ Reading *Rivers and Resilience* by Heather Goodall and Allison Cadzow, 44, this may have been the Georges River

¹⁴⁴ Watkin Tench and Tim Flannery, *Watkin Tench's 1788* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2009), 175.

of Newcastle's Colonial Frontier Massacres Project Team¹⁴⁵ in 2019 to record and communicate this Australian history. Referring to the *Colonial Frontiers Massacres Project*, it is important to note that the majority of Indigenous deaths along the Cooks River are attributed to diseases the First Fleet carried to Sydney as opposed to violence from combat.

CONTEMPORARY PUBLICATIONS

Though the Cooks River has been steadily improving since the 1970s, these improvements are now in tension with the high-rise development currently occurring in the flood plain. Construction is currently underway in Strathfield Golf Course, in Canterbury and at Wolli Creek. Potential developments at Canterbury Racecourse, Marrickville Golf Course, Carrington Road Marrickville and Kogarah Golf Course encompassing the length of the Cooks River have been the subject of community debate. It remains to be seen how our increased awareness of the hydrology and ecology of the river will interact with our ambitions for Sydney's future.

Sydney has a high risk of floods with 1.4 million people living in LGAs at high and very high risk of flood due to extensive development in the floodplains of the Hawkesbury, Georges and Cooks rivers and their various tributaries.¹⁴⁶

In 1882 there was a Royal Commission into Noxious and Offensive Trade. Sydney's wealthy areas like Randwick kept noxious trade away while working class Alexandria had a reputation for letting anything go.¹⁴⁷ Sydney's urban rivers (The Parramatta, The Cooks and The Georges) bore the brunt

¹⁴⁵ William Pascoe Lyndall Ryan, Jennifer Debenham, Stephanie Gilbert, Jonathan Richards, Robyn Smith, Chris Owen, Robert J Anders, Mark Brown, Daniel Price, Jack Newley and Kaine Usher "Colonial Frontier Massacres in Australia, 1788-1930," Centre for 21st Century Humanities, University of Newcastle, Accessed 25th February 2020. <https://c21ch.newcastle.edu.au/colonialmassacres/>.

¹⁴⁶ Terry Rawnsley, "The Growing Risk of Natural Perils: Pre-emptive Action Needed," (Sydney: SGS Economics and Planning, 2019).

¹⁴⁷ Shirley Fitzgerald, "Royal Commission into Noxious and Offensive Trades 1882" (Sydney: Dictionary of Sydney: 2008). Accessed 25th February 2020.

https://dictionaryofsydney.org/entry/royal_commission_into_noxious_and_offensive_trades_1882

of the industrial pollution resulting from Sydney's expansion¹⁴⁸. A friend who grew up along the river in the 1970s recounted a game local kids would play where they would see how far they could get out along the river by walking on the trash inside it. Around the time my friend was balancing above the muck, "*The Cooks River Environment Survey, and Landscape Design*" was published.

The survey is the work of The Cooks River project, and its two sections have seven chapters each. The first section, mostly environmental, takes stock of the water and air pollution, the hydrology, geology, bird, marine and plant life of the Cooks River in 1976. The second section is more social and planning oriented, and observes and proposes ways for people to use the Cooks River. We owe much to the people who forged ahead with the publication. *The Cooks River Environment Survey and Landscape Design* is the most concerted and comprehensive engagement we have with the physical state of the Cooks River. The scientists who produced the report continued despite the compromise to their funding following the ousting of Prime Minister Gough Whitlam. *The Cooks River Environment Survey and Landscape Design* hovers between projected and realised futures- it contains proposals that have been enacted as well as suggestions ignored.

The key recommendations of *The Cooks River Environment Survey and Landscape Design* were to preserve a natural corridor along the Cooks River Valley, by increasing vegetation in those areas and minimising new development, particularly near the river. These recommendations encompass the two key findings of the report: that the river health benefits from green space because grass, vegetation and places where water can seep into the ground increase the quality of the water running off into the river. These natural systems also benefit the people living in the catchment area because they make the river and the space around it a more cohesive natural environment. The report acknowledges the benefit natural beauty has for all people who live close to it.

¹⁴⁸ Tyrell, *River Dreams, the People and Landscape of the Cooks River*, 93.

All existing open space should be preserved. All existing open space should be made accessible to the public wherever possible. The areas of open space in the valley should be increased, particularly in those areas which are not at present served by any open space.¹⁴⁹

New constructions currently underway at Canterbury, Wolli Creek and Strathfield are changing the river. This construction is in conflict with the 1976 recommendation that "all open space should be preserved."¹⁵⁰ While it is obvious that increased population density will put pressure on the river, less obvious is the fact that we are replacing porous surfaces—where water could seep into the ground and run through vegetation—with hard surfaces and little to no filtering process that will result in depositing silt and other urban waste directly into the river. These new constructions and the added pressures they create, and the green space they remove, may see the river health suffer in the future unless further measures are taken to address these issues.

The members of the Cooks River Canoe Club in Tempe will not go out on the river until two weeks after a significant rain event because the level of sewerage in the river increases to hazardous levels.¹⁵¹ Toxic heavy metals prevent dredging; disturbing the bed would make life impossible for the small fish, birds, and jellyfish that live in the river now. ¹⁵² Stirring the bed would result in physical problems: mud dispersing in the water would block sunlight preventing photosynthesis of the plants in the river that are at the bottom of the food chain; as well as chemical problems from releasing heavy metals and toxins from industry lying dormant in the mud. Dr Ian Hay, the Metropolitan Medical Officer of Health, illustrates the extent of the pollution in one of the most damaged parts of the Cooks River in a quote he issued following a sewerage spill in the Alexandra Canal in the 1970s:

149 Project, *Cooks River Environment Survey and Landscape Design : Report of the Cooks River Project*.

150 Project, *Cooks River Environment Survey and Landscape Design : Report of the Cooks River Project*, i.

151 "Beginners Program", The River Canoe Club of New South Wales. Accessed 25th February, 2020. <https://www.rivercanoeclub.org/beginners>

152 The Cooks River Project, *Cooks River Environment Survey and Landscape Design : Report of the Cooks River Project*, i

“Pollution of the Canal is so bad that it (the sewerage) is unlikely to create a direct hazard to health. Disease-carrying bacteria cannot live with this degree of chemical contamination.”¹⁵³

The Cooks River perfectly encapsulates so many of the tensions and contradictions: The knowledge that water is essential to life; a thorough report, written in the 1970s, that outlines how to care for the river; and decisions that continue to compromise this waterway. And I recall Jennifer Hamilton’s words when she was thinking about The Cooks, phenomenology, Feminism and Astrida Neimanis’ *Bodies of Water*: “My body cannot or does not always practice what my brain knows to be right.”¹⁵⁴

By Tranquil Waters is a painting of the Cooks River completed by Sidney Long in 1894 and held in the collection of the Art Gallery of NSW.



Figure 42. Sidney Long *By Tranquil Waters*, 1894.
Oil on canvas on hardboard. 111.3 x 185.4 cm stretcher; 156.5 x 225.8 x 13.2 cm frame. Art Gallery of NSW..
<https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/689/>

¹⁵³ The Cooks River Project, *Cooks River Environment Survey and Landscape Design : Report of the Cooks River Project*. 11
¹⁵⁴ Hamilton, "All the World’s a Drain."

Long's painting is a step back in time to a moment when the water of the Cooks River could touch the skin of the people who live by it. Paintings sometimes operate like simple time machines: as a viewer we can echo the choreography of the painter themselves, stand where they stood and see what they saw when they painted the image. *By Tranquil Waters* captures a version of the Cooks River that is almost unimaginable today. The reedy edge meanders into the distance while the water reflects the trees, and people in the fore, mid and back ground of the painting stand in the water. Paintings, obviously, aren't always "true" and this image might be a fantasy of how Long wished the river to be. In this image, Long has captured a moment in time that is at once static and moving; one that captures how the river has changed.

River Dreams, the People and Landscape of the Cooks River is the first substantial history of the Cooks River. Published in 2018 and written by historian Ian Tyrell. *River Dreams* was a labour of love, compiled over ten years and bolstered by Tyrell's life's work as a Professor of History at the University of New South Wales. In the introduction to *River Dreams*, Tyrell states:

No other river is as closely associated with the nation's colonial (dis)possession, the Federation era's emerging nationalism and the 20th-century ordeals related to water pollution in Australia. No other river had been 'manufactured' in the way the Cooks has, yet continued to flow and to defy its appropriation for human needs.¹⁵⁵

Tyrell maps the changes that have been made to the Cooks River in chronological order, beginning with the late Pleistocene era and ending with the threat posed to Fatima Island (in the river near Tempe) by rising sea levels. The frame through which Tyrell considers the river's history is both environmental and cultural. Tyrell's history puts the Cooks into a global context (considering the

¹⁵⁵ Tyrell, *River Dreams, the People and Landscape of the Cooks River*. Pg 3

concreting of the Cooks in relationship to the concreting of the Los Angeles River in California) as well as making observations about how philosophy is lived through engineering throughout the river's history since Sydney's colonisation. *River Dreams* is a substantial recent contribution to knowledge of The Cooks River.

The Cooks River Alliance is a political structure that exists today across the council borders to advocate for the river especially as it crosses several council jurisdictions. As a part of the research process for *A Week on the Cooks River*, I participated in a recent initiative: seven-weeks of community meetings called the *Cooks River Changemakers Course*.¹⁵⁶ I also examined the Cooks River Alliance archives. The archive includes documentation of the work that the Alliance has done including: constructing rain gardens throughout the catchment area; monitoring and publishing reports on the river's health; creating a festival that celebrates the river; commissioning research into the Indigenous history along the River; building playgrounds and engineering banks of the river that imitate natural banks. The Cooks River Alliance published and funded the *Cooks River Catchment Aboriginal History Project*. The methodology used in the Cooks River Catchment Aboriginal History Project included archival research (represented in Paul Irish's publication *Aboriginal History Along the Cooks River*) and the oral history research (published in Asher Milgate's *The Oral History Project* and accessed online through the Cooks River Alliance Website). The findings of Milgate and Irish's publications are intended to be considered together.

Archaeologist Paul Irish's *Aboriginal History along the Cooks River* was published in 2017 alongside Irish's *Hidden in Plain View: The Aboriginal People of Coastal Sydney*. *Aboriginal History along the Cooks River* is a 44-page document that presents the findings of the *Cooks River Catchment Aboriginal History Project*.

¹⁵⁶ The Changemakers Course resulted in my being involved with two grass roots community groups. The Moonsters who lead full moon community walks along the Cooks, and the Mulletts who pull rubbish out of the water in the Cooks in canoes.

Irish was researching in his capacity as a historian working for Mary Dallas Consulting Archaeologists (MDCA). MDCA was commissioned by the Cooks River Alliance to complete the report along with Indigenous artist Asher Milgate who completed oral history interviews and took portraits of Indigenous people living in the Cooks River catchment today.

Irish spoke about the process of creating the document *Aboriginal History of the Cooks River* at the publications' launch at the Addison Road Community Centre (ARC). Along one wall of the hall, a green ribbon was stretched out to create a timeline—a physical sense of the length of Indigenous history on the river. Indigenous occupation of the river dates back at least 20000 years.¹⁵⁷

Walking along a green ribbon stretched out in the community hall, critical moments in history are noted. The overall effect of the timeline demonstrates how sparse understandings of the last 20000 years on the Cooks River are. Between 20000 years and 6000 years ago, there is only one reference point on the timeline—a fireplace at Wollie Creek (dated to 10500 years ago).¹⁵⁸

Aboriginal History Along the Cooks River begins with a map describing the possible earlier course of the river. The thin layer of water now covering Botany Bay was not yet there. The ancient river took a path along the south side of Botany Bay to meet with the Georges and the Hacking Rivers and to enter the Pacific Ocean as one large body of water several kilometres south-east of the current mouth of the Cooks. As discussed by Saskia Beudel in her essay *Fossils in the City* and R.J. Haworth, R.G.V. Baker and P.J. Flood, in their 2004 publication *A 6000-Year-old Fossil Dugong from Botany Bay: Inferences about Changes in Sydney's Climate, Sea Levels and Waterways*, the butchering of the dugong sheds light on historic water levels, temperatures and the types of tools that were used as well as being evidence of Indigenous occupation in Sydney 6000 years ago.

¹⁵⁷ Paul Irish, *Aboriginal History Along the Cooks River*, 7.

¹⁵⁸ Paul Irish, *Aboriginal History Along the Cooks River*, 7

The complexities of Sydney's Indigenous history as the place in Australia impacted first, and for the longest time, by colonisation, combined with the oral history traditions of Indigenous Australians means that there are gaps in knowledge. Some storylines remain, some become thin with providence that is difficult to determine, others are lost because people have died or were forcibly removed from their families without being able to pass histories on to the next generation completely. The depth of trust and dialogue that would have been required for this publication to be released is significant. Although Paul Irish is an Archaeologist with European heritage, *Aboriginal History Along the Cooks River* was produced with the support and active involvement of the Metropolitan Land Council.¹⁵⁹ CEO of the Metropolitan Land Council, Nathan Moran, spoke in support of the project at the launch and is one of the Indigenous residents of the Cooks River Catchment area who contributes oral history to the project. *Aboriginal History Along the Cooks River* records and discusses middens at Kendrick Park; a fireplace near the junction of the Cooks River and Wolli Creek; dugong bones and axe heads found when Shea's creek was excavated and ancient rock art featuring hand stencils painted on the walls of a sandstone cave near the river.¹⁶⁰

Asher Milgate's *Oral History Project* documents living oral history along the Cooks River to create a dynamic contemporary portrait of Indigenous people living along the Cooks River today. The exhibition, comprised of twelve printed portraits of current Indigenous residents of the Cooks River by Asher Milgate, were hung in the small gallery of the Addison Road Community Centre in Marrickville and also in the gallery at 107 Projects, Redfern. Each picture was taken along the banks of the river. In and of themselves, they speak of connection to culture, continuity and complexity. A video showing textural shots of river flows and reflections played with recordings of oral history interviews. Taking these oral histories together, several overarching themes emerge. Colonisation in

¹⁵⁹ "About us", Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council. Accessed 25th February 2020. <https://metrolalc.org.au/about-us/introduction/>

¹⁶⁰ Irish, *Aboriginal History Along the Cooks River*, 10.

Australia impacts connection to country, language and displacement of people. Moran speaks about genocide and murder; aghast that smallpox was spread in vials and intentionally given to Indigenous people in blankets.¹⁶¹

Academic and former President of the Cooks River Valley Association, Jenny Newman talks about the legacy of Bennelong, who was a Wangal man who established a relationship with Arthur Phillip and travelled to England. Newman recounts how scathing and disrespectful Bennelong's obituary was. In an anecdote that encapsulates the complexity of Australian history and Indigenous lineage, Newman describes how her white ancestor James Squires stepped in to assert that Bennelong's treatment was a travesty, and buried him in his orchard at Putney.¹⁶² Michael Ingrey speaks to the frustration of being taught history in the Australian school system. He recounts learning at school that Indigenous people in Sydney had died out, whilst at the same time he was going home every day to live on Botany Bay with his Indigenous family and learning from his mum about the relatives from the South Coast who had always travelled up to Botany Bay and camped and fished there (and still do).¹⁶³

Many people move to Sydney for work and the Indigenous residents interviewed are no different. Listening to all the interviews in the Oral History Project, it is striking that landscape bounds conception of country. Interviewees Nathan Moran, Jenny Newman, Aunty Ann Weldon and Nardi Simpson all describe the country they are from with the rivers as the landmarks. When fellow interviewee, Uncle Allen Madden, gives the project's welcome to country, he acknowledges the

161 Asher Milgate, "Cooks River Oral Histories Project," in *The Cooks River Catchment Aboriginal History Project*, ed. Cook River Alliance (Cook River Alliance, 2018). Nathan Moran Interview

162 Asher Milgate, "Cooks River Oral Histories Project," in *The Cooks River Catchment Aboriginal History Project*, ed. Cook River Alliance (Cook River Alliance, 2018). Jenny Newman interview

163 Asher Milgate, "Cooks River Oral Histories Project," in *The Cooks River Catchment Aboriginal History Project*, ed. Cook River Alliance (Cook River Alliance, 2018). Michael Ingrey interview.

physical boundaries of the Hawkesbury, the Nepean and The Georges Rivers at the furthest reaches of Gadigal Country.

Artist Jason Wing and Moran both point out how offensive it is to have the river named after Captain Cook. Wing describes this naming as "memoricide".¹⁶⁴ Wing's critique forms the foundation of his 2013 bronze bust of James Cook wearing a balaclava named "Captain James Crook".¹⁶⁵ Inscribing colonial language into our landscape contributes to what Wing describes as the "erasure of Aboriginal history".¹⁶⁶ Wing elaborates on his frustrations by describing his failed attempts at finding the Indigenous name of the Cooks River. Although the word "goolay'yari"¹⁶⁷(meaning pelican) is proposed as the Dharawal name for the Cooks River, there is no consensus around this term. The land council approved *Aboriginal History Along the Cooks River* states "unless it (the name goolay'yari) can be independently corroborated it should not be used".¹⁶⁸

The early writing of Cook and Tench demonstrate the power of language to record, impose and conceal. The Cooks River also prompts consideration of the power of language to inscribe names on to a landscape. The naming of places was contested, political and policed in the early days of the Colony. In her history *Sydney*, Delia Falconer talks about Governor Macquarie setting up signs saying that the streets of Sydney were "henceforth only to be known by the new names given".¹⁶⁹ In describing the process of naming places on the east coast of Australia, Australian historian Paul Carter reminds us that English names were given to much of the East Coast of Australia by people observing from aboard a moving tall-ship. From a distance, these European explorers were trying to

¹⁶⁴ a term coined by Mirko D. Grmek to describe the purposeful destruction of the cultural treasures of others. This language was developed to describe an attack on the National Library in Sarajevo.

¹⁶⁵ *Captain James Crook*. Website of Jason Wing. Accessed 25th February 2020.
<http://www.jasonwing.net/works/?category=Sculpture>

¹⁶⁶ Asher Milgate, "Cooks River Oral Histories Project."

¹⁶⁷ Gawaian Bodkin-Andrews Frances Bodkin, "Guwarra and Goolay'yari the Whale and the Pelican," accessed 25th February, 2020, www.dharawalstories.com.

¹⁶⁸ Paul Irish, *Aboriginal History Along the Cooks River*, 38.

¹⁶⁹ Delia Falconer, *Sydney* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press Ltd, 2010), 194.

quickly inscribe the landscape on their memories as a navigational tool. These are not the sort of names that arrive from a close understanding of terrain and resources and, as Carter says they “embody the existential necessity the traveller feels to invent a space they can inhabit. Without them, punctuating the monotony, distinguishing this horizon from that, there would be no evidence he had travelled.”¹⁷⁰ Carter also observes the violence of the assertion of English names on the landscape: “to place the Aborigine (sic) in possession of English was simply to possess him, to help him forget that he was ever at home.”¹⁷¹ While British writer Robert Macfarlane writes: “Words act as a compass. Place speech serves literally to enchant the land; to sing it back into being and to sing one’s being back into it.”¹⁷² “Cooks” is the wrong word for this river. It calls back to our colonial history and is an enduring record of the attempt to erase Indigenous culture. In the words of prominent Wiradjiri journalist Stan Grant: “I should not have to cross a river named in honour of a man who wanted us exterminated.”¹⁷³

Paying attention to the Cooks from 2016 – 2020, I have borne witness to rapid change. When I started studying in 2016, several of the books in this literature review were yet to be published. The whole time I have been writing, I have been writing to catch up. On the Cooks River today there is a new development at Wollie Creek. It has grown substantially in the time I have been studying the river. Viewed from the bridge that carries Bayview Avenue across the river, apartment blocks have begun to dominate the skyline.

170 Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay. An Exploration of Landscape and History*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988), 47

171 Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay*, 64

172 Macfarlane, *Landmarks*.

173 Stan Grant, “It is a 'damaging myth' that Captain Cook discovered Australia” (Sydney: ABC News, 2017. Accessed 25th February, 2020. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-08-23/stan-grant-damaging-myth-captain-cook-discovered-australia/8833536>)



Figure 43. Research image. Construction at Wolli Creek 2017 and 2019.

Though it is exciting to see culture develop and grow the character of Wolli Creek, choices are being made that compromise the health of the river and continue the practice of supporting and enabling the erasure of Indigenous history in Australia. The new development at Wolli Creek, visible in the above photograph, is called "Discovery Point". Despite being located a stone's throw away from a significant midden in Kendrick Park and the site of the ten-thousand-year-old fireplace referred to by Irish and Attenbrow. Under Captain Cook's feet in Hyde Park, Sydney, carved in stone is the phrase "discovered this territory". The use of the word "discovery" at Wolli Creek chimes with latent racism in Australia. Ian Macfarlane made an observation that the word "discovery" is about uncovering and revealing what's buried in a landscape. Conversely, maybe we can think about 'unburying', and exposing the ancient history of this place. Perhaps when we think about discovery, we can think about this river and the way that it holds, and is beginning to expose, its buried history. Like all the other seeds in Australian landscapes that wait for rain.

PEMULWUY AND ROCK ART

Jason Wing writes Indigenous history back into the landscape of the river with his public artwork, a mural called *Pemulwuy: The Rainbow Warrior* which opened in 2019.



Figure 44. Research image, *Pemulwuy: The Rainbow Warrior* by Jason Wing.

The mural is painted on the convex surface of a concrete water tank. The palette is vibrant and fluorescent. Most of the mural is spray-painted using stencils. A repeated image encircles the tank: a man in a canoe with the head of a crow holding a black feather. It's almost like a foot-powered animation. I recognise the torso in the image, the nowie, and the pose from an engraved etching of Pemulwuy.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁴ Samuel John Neele, "Pimbloy: Native of New Holland in a Canoe of that Country, in James Grant, Narrative of a Voyage of Discovery Performed in HM Vessel Lady Nelson 1803-1804: Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW.



Figure 45. Research image, detail of *Pemulwuy: The Rainbow Warrior* by Jason Wing

The plaque says:

Pemulwuy was an Aboriginal man born around 1750 in Botany Bay. He is noted for his leadership in uniting many clans for resistance from Botany Bay to the Blue Mountains and would have used the Cooks River to navigate the region. Pemulwuy was a clever man, magic man. And there are stories about him escaping incarceration by transforming into a crow and flying through the bars, leaving crow feathers behind.¹⁷⁵

There are two iterations of the story of Pemulwuy visible along the banks of the river.

In Gough Whitlam Park there is a mosaic that was designed by Danny Eastwood and produced by Steven Vella as part of Canterbury City Council's multicultural mosaics program. Danny Eastwood is an Indigenous artist born in Sydney and descended from the Ngemba Tribe of Western NSW.

¹⁷⁵ Jason Wing, *Pemulwuy the Rainbow Warrior*, 2019. Mural plaque. Canterbury Bankstown Council.



Figure 46. Research image, *Respect. Unity. Peace* by Danny Eastwood and Steven Vella.

The mural is a wall approximately 3 metres long—a mosaic monument with tiles in soft shades of brown and pink. Depicted in the tiled image are figures, animals and the river landscape. In 2004 the mayor of Canterbury unveiled it. The plaque says:

Pictured in the mosaic is the father of local Aboriginal resistance Pemulwuy and his son Tedburry. Also depicted in the mosaic is Cook's river with native fish, middens and seashells in secret places and hand stencils from a local rock shelter.



Figure 47. Research image, detail of *Respect. Unity. Peace* by Danny Eastwood and Steven Vella.

These images refer to rock art in a local cave. The mural is a quiet assertion of Indigenous history on the Cooks River. There is a lack of general knowledge about Pemulwuy, Tedburry and the rock art the mural refers to; so many people who see the wall could miss the history the mosaic alludes to. Both depictions of Pemulwuy are public artworks created by Indigenous artists to write Pemulwuy back into the Cooks River landscape. The repetition and visibility of these images along the Cooks River may, in time, increase public awareness of Pemulwuy and the Indigenous history of the river.

Completing the Cultural Competency Module at Sydney University, I watched Nathan Moran, Biripi/Dungatti man from the North of NSW and CEO of the Metropolitan land council (and participant in Asher Milgate's Oral History Project) give Sydney University Students a guided video tour inside a cave near the Cooks River.¹⁷⁶ The cave is an empty lot sandwiched between houses on a sleepy suburban street.¹⁷⁷ The nearby homes follow the cliff line. Sandstone and remnant eucalypts make it possible to imagine the cliff as it would have been. At night, the river creates a dark space that follows the ridgeline. Although I live nearby, I have not ventured towards the cave out of respect for the site and its history. This description of the cave is from the New South Wales Office of Environment and Heritage website.:

[The site]comprises a midden in a rock shelter with stencils of hands and feet on the rock walls of the shelter. There are 23 white hand stencils, two of which also depict forearms. Also included are two white foot stencils, a rare occurrence in the Sydney area and throughout Australia. The Midden is largely undisturbed although soil and rubbish lie on top of the midden."¹⁷⁸

176 Jimmy Smith and Nathan Moran. "Preservation of Sites in Urban Areas." *Cultural Competence- Aboriginal Sydney*. University of Sydney. Video, 7:48. Accessed 25th February, 2020. <https://www.coursera.org/lecture/cultural-competence-aboriginal-sydney/preservation-of-sites-in-urban-areas-VOgR2>.

177 Irish, *Aboriginal History Along the Cooks River*. Page 17

178 "Earlwood Aboriginal Art Site." Office of Environment and Heritage, NSW Government. Accessed 25th February 2020. <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/heritageapp/viewheritageitemdetails.aspx?id=5060975>

In "Preservation of Sites in Urban Areas" Moran invites the camera inside the cave which is the closest cultural site registered to the Sydney CBD. The sandstone is covered with mint green lichen that spreads out like a galaxy. This place was a campsite, a living spot and a shelter. There is a line of dark sediment that follows a bend in the rock. The shadow of three handprints- dark shapes surrounded by subtle white specks of paint. Fingers are immediately recognisable in the negative space inside the white flecks. They reach out over the dark sections of the sandstone. Moran's index finger traces blunt and shallow cuts in the rock. The cut parts of the sandstone look yellow against the grey of the cave. Moran tells the viewers that foot stencils accompanied the hand stencils, but the foot stencils were chiselled out of the rock and stolen. Moran's fingers trace the space where the footprints used to be.

One of the risks of writing about this site is the possibility of exposing it to more vandalism. This vandalism is not unique to the stolen foot stencils on the Cooks. In her book *The Colony*, historian Grace Karskens discusses Bull Cave near Campbelltown. In Bull Cave, the vandalism and the underlying racism it stems from is much more explicit than the blunt cuts in Earwood. Bull Cave contains similar white hand stencils and also a painting by Muringong artists of a bull—documenting, from an Indigenous perspective, the early days of the colonisation of Sydney. In 1993 someone cut the durable steel mesh erected to protect the painting and, as Karskens puts it,

Scrawled over the bulls in flaming orange paint: 'THIS IS BULLshit, Fuck off...they even spray-painted stencils of their own hands, scoffing orange beside the ghostly white: we can do that, anyone can do that, you are nothing special, you have no claim. This is not mindless vandalism: it's too pointed, too deliberate, too articulate¹⁷⁹

179 Grace Karskens, *The Colony. A History of Early Sydney* (Sydney Allen and Unwin, 2010). Page 547

Following Moran's lead, and Karskens research, it is important to talk about this vandalism and the entrenched lack of respect or awareness it is testament to. The empty lot hiding the cave reminds me of the posts on the farm where my mum grew up; physical history waiting in our midst. Can this cave and this river be valued, and our ancient histories integrated into our story of ourselves as Sydneysiders and Australians? In 1969 W. E. H. Stanner coined the phrase "the great Australian Silence"¹⁸⁰ to describe how oppression and violence were given an acceptable public face by being unrecorded and undiscussed. In 1999 Indigenous historian Henry Reynolds asked about Australia's Indigenous history "Why Weren't We Told?"¹⁸¹ In the last days of 2019, tourists rushed to Central Australia to be a part of the last group of people to climb Uluru¹⁸² in defiance of the wishes of the Traditional Owners.¹⁸³ Written in 2017, The Uluru Statement from the Heart talks about Indigenous Sovereignty:

This sovereignty is a spiritual notion: the ancestral tie between the land, or 'mother nature', and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who were born therefrom, remain attached thereto, and must one day return thither to be united with our ancestors. This link is the basis of the ownership of the soil, or better, of sovereignty. It has never been ceded or extinguished and co-exists with the sovereignty of the Crown. How could it be otherwise? That peoples possessed a

180 W. E. H. Stanner, *After the Dreaming: Black and White Australians : An Anthropologist's View*, vol. 1968 (Sydney: A.B.C, 1969).

181 Henry Reynolds, *Why Weren't We Told?: A Personal Search for the Truth About Our History* (Ringwood, Vic: Viking, 1999).

182 Lorena Allam and Mike Bowers, "Tourists Rush to Climb Uluru on Last Day before Permanent Closure," *The Guardian* 2019. Accessed 25th February, 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/oct/25/uluru-climb-opens-two-hours-late-on-last-day-before-permanent-closure>

183 Lorena Allam and Mike Bowers, "New Dawn for Uluru as Climb Closure Ends Decades of Disrespect," *The Guardian* 2019. Accessed 25th February 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/oct/26/new-dawn-for-uluru-as-climb-closure-ends-decades-of-disrespect>

land for sixty millennia, and this sacred link disappears from world history in merely the last two hundred years? 184

Acknowledging the ancient history of the Cooks River and integrating that understanding into the way Sydney is perceived could have a profound effect on the way culture and artmaking manifests. If Australia's ancient history is acknowledged and Australia confronts the violence and oppression that underpins modern Australian Society, a humbler, deeper, more nuanced understanding might emerge and begin to develop the "national self-respect"¹⁸⁵ that architect Robin Boyd talks about in his book *The Australian Ugliness*.

Prolific local historian Lesley Muir published a short "A History of the Cooks River"¹⁸⁶ in 1978 for the Cooks River Festival Committee. In it, Muir describes the burning of the middens¹⁸⁷ along the mouth of the Cooks River for the lime used in early colonial buildings. Botany Bay and the Cooks River was one of the Colony's significant sources of lime. Working as I have been, surrounded by large rectangular blocks of Hawkesbury Sandstone inside Sydney College of the Arts, Muir's history has turned my attention to the cracks between those blocks. There is an article, published in 1874, "Burning Shells to make Lime"¹⁸⁸ that details the process of transforming Botany Bay and the Cooks River middens into building material for early colonial buildings. This photograph taken in 1870 documents the lime kilns and dam on the Cooks River at Tempe.

184 Delegates at the Referendum Convention at Uluru, "Uluru Statement from the Heart" (paper presented at the Referendum Convention at Uluru, Uluru, 26 May 2017). Accessed 25th February, 2020. <https://www.referendumcouncil.org.au/event/first-nations-regional-dialogue-in-ularu.html>

185 Robin Boyd, *The Australian Ugliness* (Melbourne: The Text Publishing Company, 2010).

186 Lesley Muir and Cooks River Festival Committee, *A History of Cooks River* (Belmore, N.S.W.: L. Muir, 1978).

187 A midden is a mound of shells and other food remnants accumulated by eating in the same place over thousands of years.

188 Australian Town and Country Journal, "Burning Shells to Make Lime," *Australian Town and Country Journal*, no. 13 June 1874 (1874).



Figure 48. Lime Kiln, Cooks River Dam Tempe. Anonymous. c.1870

Designed in 1877 and built between 1880 and 1884¹⁸⁹ the Sydney College of the Arts buildings, the Kirkbride Complex, was constructed in the period of time that this lime kiln was operational. This leads me to wonder about the glue that holds this building together as the material Indigenous history of Sydney. Looking not just at the large blocks of sandstone, but also in the cracks between—cementing them together. Through this frame, there is an under-acknowledged role that the material, Indigenous history of Sydney plays in its colonial architecture; middens hold the buildings that “demand their archive”¹⁹⁰ together. The following image is a studio experiment, a propositional design for a brass plaque that could be attached to colonial sandstone buildings built in the period that the Tempe Lime Kiln was in operation.

¹⁸⁹ Peter Reynolds and Ken Leong, “Callan Park Mental Hospital, Dictionary of Sydney”, 2008. Accessed 25th February, 2020. http://dictionaryofsydney.org/entry/callan_park_mental_hospital,

¹⁹⁰ Karskens, *The Colony. A History of Early Sydney*.544.

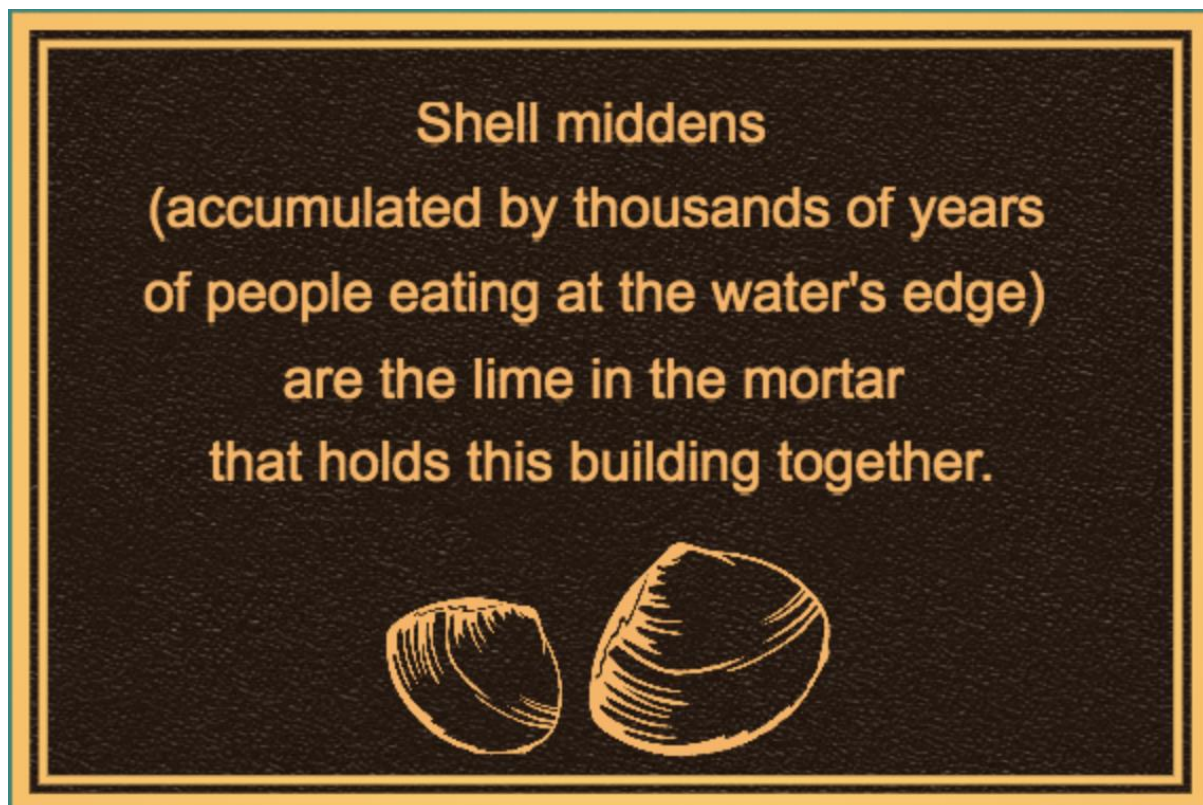


Figure 49. Research image, Propositional monument, 2019

Completing this research, these are the significant impressions I have gleaned. Firstly, the recent history of the Cooks River is a story of colonisation. Geologically and culturally, the river has a long history. Insights into that history extrapolate from anecdotal and archaeological evidence. The landscape of the river holds the physical history of ancient fireplaces, meals, bodily remains and rock art, but is named after the man who determined that Australia was Terra Nullius. The Indigenous history of the Cooks River is not sufficiently integrated into the modern-day conception of the Cooks River. Still, public art, education, publications and shifts in perspective are slowly including the river's Indigenous history. The name "Cooks River" is unnecessarily offensive to Indigenous Australians and should be reconsidered.

The Cooks River has been damaged by pollution since 1788. Today, projects are repairing the river alongside projects that are detrimental to it, and it remains to be seen whether the consistent improvements in river health that we have seen since the 1970s¹⁹¹ will continue. The Cooks River is the subject of an increasing level of care and attention. This can be seen along the banks of the river as well as in the aforementioned recent publications. The Cooks River has not been documented visually from start to finish in a way that considers its cultural ramifications as well as its historical ones. This paper and body of work is a contribution to this gap in our knowledge. The research that I have conducted into the Cooks River is a part of a long tradition of people caring for and paying attention to this body of water. The next chapter discusses contemporary Australian academic practices that use walking, conversation and following watery edges as a research methodology.

¹⁹¹ Evidenced by comparison between the 1976 Landscape Survey and most recent River Health Report Card.



Figure 50. Research image. A line made by walking at Wollie Creek, 2019

Some of us who live in arid parts of the
world think about water with a reverence
others might find excessive.¹⁹²

¹⁹² Joan Didion, *Vintage Didion* (New York: Vintage, 2004).

CHAPTER FOUR

“NONDESCRIPT SUBURBS OF EARLWOOD, HURLSTONE PARK AND UNDERCLIFF”¹⁹³

Our place is weatherboard—a long-term rental with a veranda that runs along one whole side of the house. I have become very fond of the sight of the lights from our loungeroom projecting shadows of iron lace and hanging geraniums on the windowless rectangular planes of our neighbour's fibro house. Our side of the road is brick, fibro, weatherboard one storey—remnants from an earlier time in Sydney. The homes on the opposite side of the street have the sandstone ridgeline climbing out of their backyards and are notably more impressive. Following the gutter downhill, it takes less than five minutes to walk to the river. At the bottom of the street, the water takes a sweeping curve. Rusted steel panels determine the banks; the water and the metal join like two sides of a zipper. At the edge of the golf course on the opposite side of the river there is a tall gumtree. The reflection of its white trunk and branches spread out across the water. The surface of the river varies: sometimes grey and rough with small waves; smooth and mirror-like; transparent golden at the edges fading to olive green in the middle or brown like milky tea after rain.

The tides start affecting the Cooks River near Hurlstone Park a few kilometres inland. I have watched the tide approach, water slowly spilling out of the concrete channel until it picked up a faded yellow tennis ball and carried it slowly inland. The current in the canal does not look strong enough to carry a tennis ball out to sea. It might get stuck in a loop a couple of hundred metres long, moving slowly inland and slowly back out until the water runs away, and it touches down on the concrete. A big storm might flush it out. It might get caught in a rubbish trap. Or the ball might start to disintegrate, letting the salty water inside, and sink to the bottom and become a part of all

¹⁹³ Gavin Souter and George Molnar, *Sydney Observed* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1965), 82.

the other stuff that makes up the bed. Ambiguous shapes are visible in the bed: bricks? Round tyres? The thin wire spokes of an old bike. They all get covered with silt, absorbed into the sediment and become a part of the river.



Figure 51. Research image Macquarie Road Earwood, 2019.

This chapter is about writers and artists who use walking, observation, and conversation as tools to generate knowledge. The writers discussed in this chapter strengthen an argument for the relationship between physicality and understanding. Each writer locates their work in a specific place that they know well, and the poetry of their work is deepened by their tacit knowledge of the landscapes they describe. This chapter discusses some examples of writers who situate their work in particular landscapes before discussing several contemporary academic projects that use walking, conversation and following watery edges as a research methodology. The discussion then returns to the work of walker, rower and writer Henry David Thoreau. This chapter locates the process I have undertaken for *A Week on the Cooks River* within a broader field of research with traditions that have manifestations within Australia and globally. These case studies demonstrate that *A Week on the Cooks River* is part of an emerging field of interdisciplinary research building on a well-established lineage of artists and philosophers who use walking and conversation to generate knowledge.

This research has been physical as well as archival: I went on walks, presented research at symposiums, attended excursions, exhibitions, a survival skills workshop, and had conversations. I also referred to published work on websites, and in essays and books. I read the work of Vanessa Berry, Delia Falconer, Nadia Wheatley and Gavin Souter and held their observations about less tangible histories in Sydney up against my own. I got involved with *Walking Upstream, Mapping Edges, Composting Feminisms, The Sydney Environment Institute* and Diego Bonetto's *Weed Walks*. I read *A Week on the Concord and Merrimac Rivers* in my boat when I spent a week on the Cooks River. The following are examples of writers who, addressing the Cooks River, Sydney and places they know, create an understanding of Sydney's "psychogeography". The following discussion also considers how knowing a place and reading about it creates an *experience* for the reader.

SYDNEY PSYCHOGEOGRAPHY

The publications discussed in this chapter chart personal and temporal geographies. *My Place* by Nadia Wheatley and Donna Rawlins, *Mirror Sydney: An Atlas of Reflections* by Vanessa Berry, *Sydney Observed* by Gavin Souter and *Sydney* by Delia Falconer each use narrative and personal observations to reflect on changes in Sydney. In the context of *A Week on the Cooks River*, these works are viewed as a map of particular times in Sydney. I am interested in how these works capture something of Sydney's "psychogeography" and in what time has done to the observations contained within these reflections. I am writing about this subject because I am creating work that deals with personal Australian history, and also because I know that the archive of images and observations that I have made about the Cooks River will become inaccurate over time. I want to hold the Sydney described in Souter, Berry, Rawlins/Wheatley and Falconer's work up against the Sydney I know, to try to understand more about its history. By paying attention to existing subjective, embodied accounts of Sydney it is hoped that it may shed new light on the river as a result of new research.

In the pages of Gavin Souter's *Sydney Observed*, there is a personal description of the Cooks River in the 1960s.¹⁹⁴ Souter talks with a resident on O'Riordan Street and recounts lived experience of the pollution, the sound of the airport, the feeling of soot ash and acid in the air, the maggots in the ground at Tempe tip and the sense of desolation at the state of the river, which, in the final passage of this description, Souter says is analogous to a corpse. This is an incredibly valuable piece of writing because there is very little information about what it was like, in times past, to breathe, hear and sleep on the Cooks River.

The smell from the galvanisers is the worst... It gets in your throat. I think it must be acid or something. It's terribly noisy here too. Father works on night shift at the paper mill. He starts at eleven and works until seven o'clock in the morning. He

¹⁹⁴ Souter's full description of the Cooks is provided as an appendix.

comes home, and he's just getting off to sleep and the Boilermakers over the road start work. They make a terrible lot of noise. Half an hour later. The first of the day's overseas jets taxis out to the runway on its enormous wheels. With the noise of a blizzard, it hurtles across the field and the corpse of the Cooks River and rises steeply trailing black downward smoke over Botany Bay.¹⁹⁵

Souter brings a gritty and humorous eye for detail to Sydney in the 60s. In the introduction to *Sydney Observed*, Souter makes the point that his aim is to turn his attention to some under observed aspects of Sydney's history. Souter is writing about intangible, physical, lived history the "history of roads, footprints, trails of dust and foaming wakes".¹⁹⁶ The following is Souter's description of the Cooks in the '60s:

The groundwater lakes are surrounded by 21 tanneries, and 15 evil-smelling wool scours and the Cooks River has lost almost all of its charm. Its source is now dotted with tombstones of Rookwood cemetery, and its upper reaches are lined with concrete; from Canterbury Racecourse it flows in its own bed through the respectable, but nondescript suburbs of Earlwood, Hurlstone Park and Undercliff, but farther down the stream its bed has been rudely diverted to make way for a new runway at Kingsford Smith airport. St Peter's garbage tip nourishes the seagulls and maggots near the junction of Cook's river.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁵ Souter, *Sydney Observed*. Pg 82

¹⁹⁶ Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay. An Exploration of Landscape and History*, xxi

¹⁹⁷ Souter, *Sydney Observed*. Pg 83

Souter goes on to say that he found an old newspaper article and is incredulous at it recommending the Cooks River as the perfect place to float downstream reading Tennyson's *The Lotus Eaters* and also that Shea's Creek and the Mill Stream provided clean, fresh drinking water. Comparing the Cooks River of today with the one that Souter is describing draws many improvements into focus. The tanneries and wool scourers have gone, planes are less noisy, and Sydney, for the most part, has less air pollution.¹⁹⁸ With the engineering of rain gardens, garbage booms and re-naturalised riverbank, the river has even regained some of its charms. Souter's capturing of the Cooks River at its worst is so evocative it's like being able to take a walk alongside the river. Souter's subjective, embodied observations bring the Cooks River of the 60s back to life and are an argument for the value of writing personally about places you know.

In his essay *On Winning the Melbourne Prize, 11th November 2009*, fiercely local Australian writer Gerald Murnane recounts his dismay at the prospect of being nominated by his agent for a literary award celebrating Melbourne that required the recipient to travel overseas: "I told him to stop at once."¹⁹⁹ Reassured that the Trust encouraged local travel as well as international travel, Murnane was nominated and won the award. Murnane's acceptance speech was a cantation of the addresses he had lived at in Melbourne. Murnane used the travel component of the prize to revisit these sites of his personal histories. They were humble addresses and, as author, Helen Garner tells it²⁰⁰, amounted to a poem about the personal geographies of the overlooked areas of the city of Melbourne. This impulse of Murnane's to look for poetry in his every day is reminiscent of Henry David Thoreau

198 Though the air quality is choking again, but now it is from the biggest bushfires Australia has seen. January 2020.

199 Gerald Murnane, "On Winning the Melbourne Prize, 11 November 2009," *Freemans: Home: The Best New Writing on Home* 2017.

200 This American Life, "624: Private Geography," (2017). Accessed 25th February, 2020. <https://www.thisamericanlife.org/624/private-geography>

travelling "widely in Massachusetts".²⁰¹ *A Week on the Cooks River* pays attention to both the refusal and the acceptance these artists demonstrate.

Specific to Sydney, Australian writers Vanessa Berry and Delia Falconer look for a poetic language to attend to their experience of the landscape they grew up in. In their respective works *Mirror Sydney: An Atlas of reflections* and *Sydney*, Berry and Falconer both deliberately observe, remember and map the Sydney they know. Falconer describes the Sydney of her youth and young adulthood in the 1970s and 1980s. Recounting an idiosyncratic, funny and melancholic Sydney and her resignation to its beauty and shortcomings, Falconer acknowledges that she loves and hates the place at once. Recognising that from the outside, Sydney seems superficial, brash and unplanned, whilst comparing its beauty to the aching brightness of Mozart's music—a fundamental temperament of melancholy. Describing a walk home through Sydney's summer streets, Falconer says: "the moon rose from the invisible harbour into a sky of such deep royal blue it was hard to believe in. The street smelled of low tide. For all its beauty the city could return in an instant to pulp. And that thought was strangely cheering."²⁰²

Each of these thoughts are animated by the walking I have done in Sydney throughout my life. I know that blue. The smell of low tide and summer air in Sydney. I know that sense of precarity and the "strangely cheering" thought that none of it might matter very much. The knowledge of Sydney that Falconer embeds in her writing joins with my memory of the places she describes, and reading her words, I *experience* them.

²⁰¹ Christopher Lydon, *A Wild and Disobedient Life*, Henry David Thoreau at 200. Podcast audio, Radio Open Source 2017. Accessed <https://radioopensource.org/a-wild-disobedient-life-henry-david-thoreau-at-200-pt-1/>

²⁰² Falconer, *Sydney*. Page 12.

Mirror Sydney: An Atlas of reflections is a collection of essays and drawings that trace Sydney. Berry positions herself as a “psychogeographer” and credits Debord’s terminology for giving language to the “act of examining the urban environment and connecting to the latent forces within it.”²⁰³ Berry is a connoisseur of suburban detail and turns her attention to aspects of Sydney that are overlooked and hard to love. Berry dedicates a chapter of *Mirror Sydney* to Sydney's alternately clogged and abandoned main artery Parramatta Road, likewise turning her attention to Hornsby, Tempe, and the underground footway at Martin Place. By carefully drawing and giving Sydney her attention, Berry renders visible aspects of the city that are hard to see or discuss. Her attention, like Murnane's and Souter's, transforms these taken for granted landscapes into something we can recognise and, therefore, give pause to reflect on. This sense of connection to place might be taken for granted in cities like Debord’s Paris or de Certeau’s New York City, but Berry bestows her attention on the suburban streets of Sydney.

This took on personal significance for me as I saw in the drawings of *Mirror Sydney* the shape of four terraces on Campbell Street, St Peters²⁰⁴. Before my son was born, I lived in a terrace on Campbell Street, St Peters.

²⁰³ Vanessa Berry, *Mirror Sydney: An Atlas of Reflections* (Sydney: Giramondo, 2017), 8.

²⁰⁴ Vanessa Berry, *Mirror Sydney*, 146.

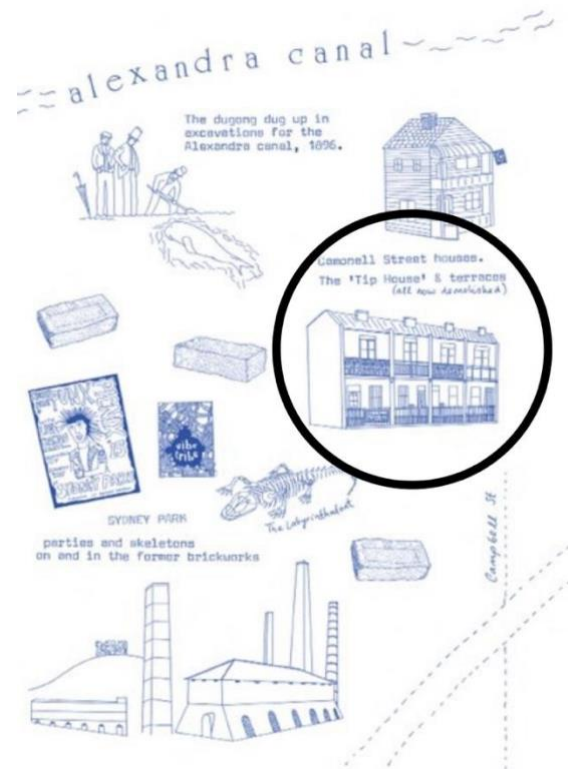


Figure 52. Mirror Sydney, St Peters, 2017 Vanessa Berry

Seeing Berry's picture of those houses recalls in me the smells that would gurgle up from deep in the pipes at night as hollow, subterranean belches. The dark front room lined with my flat mate's feminist books and rising damp. Stovetop coffee that would curdle soy milk, so it looked like a brain floating in the dark liquid. Warm evenings under coloured festoon lights outside. The house was cold and musty, even in the summer. There was a puff of white flowers spilling off a vine on the second story balcony where I would sit at night and consider the mannequin protruding out of the bonnet of a car advertising the mechanics across the road. In *Mirror Sydney* Berry notes, with an asterisk, that the Campbell Street terraces have been knocked down to make way for the West Connex motorway. Berry observes this change with a graceful detachment. I took this photo of the house I lived in when I knew it was going to be demolished.



Figure 53. Research Image, 88 Campbell Street, St Peters, 2017

The experience of seeing Berry's drawings and reading her words is filled out by my embodied experience living inside those thin blue lines. The terraces pictured in *Mirror Sydney* are also drawn in Nadia Wheatly and Donna Rawlin's *My Place*. *My Place* was the book council of Australia's book of the year in 1988. Written for children, *My Place* traces the area of St Peters back through time to before colonisation. The river referred to in *My Place* (Shea's Creek/Alexandra Canal) is a tributary of the Cooks and joins the river near Sydney Airport.

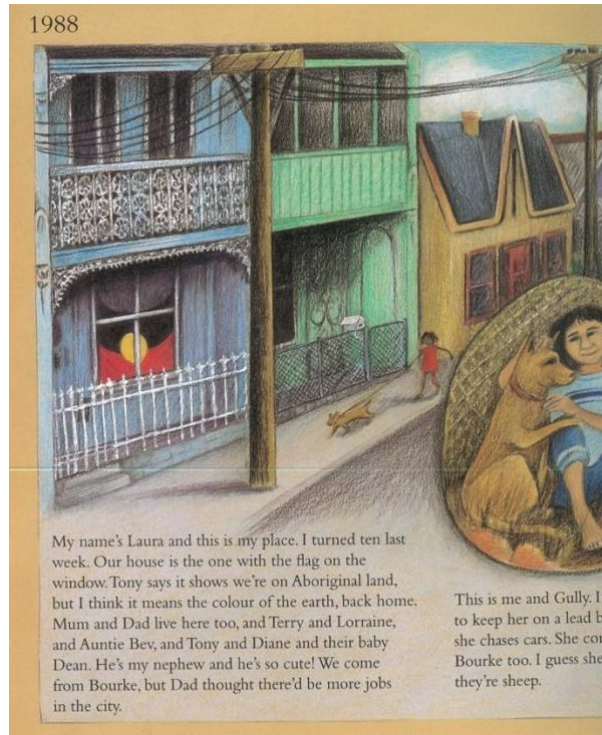


Figure 54. *My Place*, Nadia Wheatley and Donna Rawlins.

The narrative of *My Place*²⁰⁵ begins in the terrace on Campbell Street in the 1980's, and a much-loved home. From this present, the story tracks back in time and considers the lives in that place in earlier iterations of Sydney. In another city, the terrace where this popular, award-winning story takes place might be protected or acknowledged. If the story and imagery were updated and the most recent chapter of *My Place* was added it would open with a picture of a motorway; it would be hard to maintain the conviction that our progress is improving things. The observations of Wheatley, Souter, Falconer and Berry capture something essential to understanding the history of Sydney: they speak to the experience of living here—the churn, the pace of change, the many iterations of this city. To put this place writing into a broader context, I have consulted the work of other historians who write about Sydney's history.

²⁰⁵ Wheatley was drawn back to the Cooks River in a more recent children's publication called "Going Bush". Written by Wheatley and illustrated by Ken Searle "Going Bush" is a working document written for children and intended as a road map for teachers and young people to engage with the Indigenous history along the Cooks River.

I have also reflected on the writing of Australian historian Denis Byrne, in particular a paper, he presented at *Hacking the Anthropocene II* in 2017 titled “Weathering in common: the erosion of sandstone, brick and the human body”.²⁰⁶ Byrne’s paper explores a personal, bodily and material engagement with a retaining wall in Sydney Harbour. Noticing the grains of sand Byrne carries away on his fingers, and the slow erosion caused by lapping water on the rocks and the gradual changes in his face and body Byrne considers the timeline of evolution that this wall, and consequently us all, are subject to. Byrne thinks about this site’s history as a beat and considers sexuality, the city and erosion in the same frame. The effect that creating this physical connection between history and place creates in me, is one of a more empathic relationship to history as well as a thicker²⁰⁷ relationship to place. Byrne’s writing changed the way I see that wall. A desire to think about personal histories, “psycho geography” and the layers of experience that make up Sydney, are all ways of caring for places—watching and paying deliberate attention as a way of becoming part of it.

Melbourne based historian Maria Tumarkin wrote *Traumascapes: The Power and Fate of Places Transformed by Tragedy*. In her writing, we see that the ethic of connecting to place is atmospheric as well as physical. Tumarkin’s *Traumascapes* is a study of how places (Sarajevo, Ground Zero, Port Arthur, Shanksville, Berlin, Bali and Moscow) hold history. Tumarkin asserts that those places had a 'feel' to them. A charge in the air. When Tumarkin started working in those places with deliberate attention, the history contained revealed itself to her. Tumarkin expresses it like this: “I stood in places where terrible things had happened, and even though at every one of these places, it was all over—over and done with—it was still there waiting for me.”²⁰⁸

²⁰⁶ Denis Byrne, "Remembering the Elizabeth Bay Reclamation and the Holocene Sunset in Sydney Harbour," *Environmental Humanities* May 1, no. 9 (2017).

²⁰⁷ Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1949).

²⁰⁸ Maria Tumarkin, *Traumascapes: The Power and Fate of Places Transformed by Tragedy* (Carlton, Vic: Melbourne University Publishing, 2005). Page 242

The writing of Australian artist and academic Ross Gibson has been a constant companion during this research process. Introducing *Seven Versions of an Australian Badland*, Gibson explores the way memories can be triggered by places and objects. Gibson writes about the atmosphere that Turmarkin also identifies.

Whatever colonialism was and is, it has made this place unsettled and unsettling. Between the physical geography and the cultural settings that get created in imaginative tale-telling and picture-making there always lies a landscape, a place where nature and culture contend and combine in History.²⁰⁹

Gibson's *Seven Versions of an Australian Badland* considers a tract of land in far north Queensland back through time. In Gibson's telling, different *versions* of this place sit side by side, informing one another. In *26 Views of the Starburst World* Gibson looks at the history of Sydney's colonisation using the frame of the Astronomer William Dawes' notebooks; Gibson foregrounds the limitations of the history that he is compiling and by doing so, his voice becomes more trustworthy. Gibson's approach to this history (his versioning) allows conflicting perspectives to sit side by side on the record. I have absorbed Gibson's concept of "versioning". There is a version of the Cooks River that was and always will be Indigenous. There is also a suburban version. We can glimpse a version from the '60s and '70s with the help of the *Cooks River Landscape Survey* and the writing of Gavin Souter. There is a version of the Cooks River that will carry the decisions we make today about the river into the future and perhaps the Cooks River is also "disturbing enough and beautiful enough to goad us into thinking more boldly about how the past produces the present."²¹⁰

209 Ross Gibson, *Seven Versions of an Australian Badland* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press 2002), 2
210 Ross Gibson, *Seven Versions of an Australian Badland*, 2.

WALKING, CONVERSATION AND DELIBERATE ATTENTION

The term “the Anthropocene” is a term that describes the moment that we are currently living in as an era where human impacts on the world (constructions in plastic, concrete and steel as well as pollution) will be visible, geologically, as an epoch. This emerging term positions the current moment in relationship to a far-off future and a long gone past; it is a way of imagining and discussing time frames much longer than what is perceptible in a single human life span. Learning from the landscape of the Cooks River through the frame of the Anthropocene brings human (and colonial) interventions to the fore. We can see the ebb and flow of different philosophical and geographical relationships to the river: Sea levels 14 metres below current levels are evidenced in the location of butchered dugong bones in the Alexandra Canal; deciding the Cooks River and Botany Bay were sites for the colony at Sydney, and changing to Port Jackson and the Parramatta River; damming the river at Tempe and undamming the river at Tempe; excavating a canal from the Cooks River to Sydney Harbour and giving up on excavating the canal; relocating the mouth of the river to make way for the airport; concreting the banks and bed of the river; lining the banks of the river with steel; building banks that imitate natural banks on the river; destroying marshland and rebuilding marsh land. These changing attitudes to the Cooks River are also readable by looking at the river bed and the water. The pollution in the river, the O-Bikes, the shopping trolleys, the bicycles, bricks and tyres will all be absorbed by the river and settle into its geological history.

Historian Grace Karskens, in her impressive history of Sydney, *The Colony*, acknowledges the limitations of historical writing. Karskens writes about the “material nature of power”²¹¹ noting how wealthy people built to last in stone and less advantaged people built in more temporary materials. Wood that rots, bark that falls away, corrugated iron that corrodes or was repurposed and as such, power made its mark. Material stability used to mean money and power and influence. In the age of the Anthropocene, the material nature of power is transforming, and our detritus is going to sustain

²¹¹ Karskens, *The Colony. A History of Early Sydney*, 545.

in ways cheap things never have. The implications of this change are immaterial as well as material. For the last two years, I have had an alert on my phone. I get an email every time there is a new reference to the Cooks River added to Google. The networked research libraries and search engines allow me to feel reasonably confident that I have gathered together the most significant publications on the Cooks River into this thesis. There are thousands of accumulated digital images, emails and drafts of writing on my computer. The nature of power and the archive is undergoing a seismic shift (even since Karskens was writing in 2010). This research into the Cooks River is happening at a time where, for the first time in human history, things we used to throw away, sustain.

Mississippi. An Anthropocene River is a collaborative research project (2018-2019) taking place in America that aims to understand the Mississippi River as a storied and complex place, and to make those understandings legible. The team collaborating on the project are transdisciplinary and their research includes field work, locally situated conversations and reflections on the confluence of ecology, history, technologies, and worldviews visible in the river system. *Mississippi. An Anthropocene River* recognises that “the Anthropocene” requires us to create new practices of research and education. Contributing researcher Roopali Phadke observes that as The Mississippi River is currently “de-industrialising” there is an opportunity to imagine this infrastructure (dams, bridges, engineered banks) differently because it doesn’t need to do what it used to do anymore. As the relationship between humans and this planet evolves, projects like *Mississippi. An Anthropocene River* recognise the opportunities for positive change opened up by the age of the Anthropocene.

Classical preconceptions of Western thought—the divisions of nature/culture, cause/effect, inside/outside—falter. As the world is shifting, so its knowledge base is becoming entangled in issues of pluralistic meaning, of values, facts and counter-facts, awareness and access. In order to hold ground in such transitory times, novel forms of

collaboration and bottom-up research approaches are required if we are to navigate successfully the critical spaces of knowledge formation.²¹²

A Week on the Cooks River seeks to adapt knowledge practices that are collaborative, interdisciplinary and apply them to spatial site-specific research. *The Mississippi. An Anthropocene River* team followed the Mississippi River from the source near Lake Itasca to the Gulf of Mexico in 2018 and have published all the project material on a website which operates as an open research platform making visible all the networks comprising the research. The resonances between the methodology of *A Week on the Cooks River* and the substantial, international research project *Mississippi. an Anthropocene River* is encouraging to this small study. As contributing researcher Brian Holmes says, “to get closer to this thing. This river. This tangle of relationships. It’s got to include getting your feet wet.”²¹³

The interdisciplinary, embodied academic practices I have “got my feet wet” with during this project include: *Walking Upstream* by Lucas Ilhien, Kim Williams and Brogan Bunt based out of the University of Wollongong; *Hacking the Anthropocene* and the *Composting Feminisms* Reading Group led by Astrida Nemaimis and Jennifer Hamilton working out of the Environmental Humanities Department at the University of Sydney; *The Sydney Environment Institute* working out of Sydney University; *Mapping Edges* a transdisciplinary research studio led by Alexandra Crosby and Illaria Vanni Accarigi at the University of Technology, Sydney; and Diego Bonetto’s *Weed Walk*. The following discussion reflects on experiencing the practice of these Australian artists and academics.

²¹²“In Situ Anthropocene Curatorial Statement” *Mississippi An Anthropocene River*. Accessed 25th February, 2020. <https://www.anthropocene-curriculum.org/contribution/in-situ-anthropocene>

²¹³ Sadie Luetmer “Mississippi. An Anthropocene River Short Film” Video 4:37, Accessed 25th February 2020 <https://www.anthropocene-curriculum.org/contribution/14603>.

*Walking Upstream*²¹⁴ is a mapping and walking project where artists and academics Kim Williams, Lucas Illhien and Brogan Bunt lead walks tracing creeks in the Illawarra²¹⁵ from the ocean until the water peters out or dives underground. In 2018, I attended two of the walks and their exhibition at Wollongong Regional Art Gallery. As our Corolla pulled up to Werri Lagoon, the group was unmistakable; we added our hats, backpacks, water bottles and sensible shoes to the others already assembled. The park was the size of a house block, covered in short grass and bordered by low, round treated pine fences. In their recent essay “Two Places. Working and Walking with Waterways”, Kim Williams and Lucas Illhien write: “Wilfully following a creek line upstream, we cannot help being aware that these waterways were flowing long before Europeans began reshaping the local landscape. The active practice of walking reveals how degraded the waterways of the Illawarra have become since European invasion.”²¹⁶

We stood in a rough circle and were welcomed to country by local Indigenous academic Uncle Les Bursil. We began our walk and followed a paved path down to a bridge that crossed the Werri Lagoon. The trail continued through a field of thigh-high grass in their shades of green, grey, brown and yellow. The movement of the thin blades in the wind made the paddock appear soft but the clumps of grass were brittle and spiky. Where the ground was dry, it sparkled with salt crystals left behind after the water containing them had dried up. Where it was wet, the dirt was black and very soft, sucking my feet in ankle-deep. Other spots held small bits of gravel just under a thin layer of water strong enough to stand on without giving way. My boots became covered with a dusty salt encrustation, and their firm lines a little wobbly. The highway, off in the distance, came closer and we followed the creek under it. Not made for people, we had to duck in places where the concrete beams supported the road. We scrambled down a rocky embankment and followed a line of

214 Brogan Bunt, Lucas Ihlein, and Kim Williams and collaborators, "Waterways of the Illawarra," University of Wollongong, <http://walking-upstream.net/>.

215 An area 2 hours South of Sydney on the New South Wales Coast

216 Lucas Ihlein, and Kim Williams "Two Places: Working and Walking with Waterways," in *100 Atmospheres. Studies in Scale and Wonder* (London: Open Humanities Press, 2019).

casuarinas growing alongside the creek. The first time I walked with Kim, Lucas and Brogan, we followed a creek where the rocks were lush boulders covered in green moss. Crossing the paddock to get there, we passed a gnarled old lemon tree. As I was navigating my way over a barbed-wire fence, I remember my delight when Lucas and Kim started lobbing small, thick-skinned lemons at us. It made me feel like a kid. Both walks had the same atmosphere. The space created at the intersection of the friendship between the three collaborators: intelligent, curious, practical, and affable. Lucas asked me about my project, and how I was going to present it. I used a lot of words to say "I don't know". Robert Smithson's "A provisional theory of Non-sites"²¹⁷ came up, talking about ways to communicate real-world experiences and sites inside the confines of a gallery. Over lunch, Lucas unwrapped a package he had found discarded near the overpass. An adult-sized superman cape. The day was windy, and the red cape popped against the cornfield backdrop.

With Smithson in mind I stepped into the Wollongong Regional Art Gallery and the *Walking Upstream Exhibition*.²¹⁸ The *non-site* components of the exhibition were a pallet of books containing hand drawn maps and carefully described walks, which dispersed from the gallery as they were sold and taken away. Included also was a collection of artefacts that Williams, Bunt and Ihlein used in their travels and exhibited alongside maps, videos and photographs from the walks. The exhibition extended out of the gallery as a program of public walks. Being immersed in the Illawarra landscapes, using our bodies to navigate the rocks, water and obstacles, talking with only the information we can carry around inside our heads is an experience that has stayed with me. With *A Week on the Cooks River*, I wonder, can performance methodologies be relevant to communicating about a site in a gallery context? Or, like *Walking Upstream*, should the gallery act as an anchor and frame for experiences that take place outside of it?

²¹⁷ Smithson, Robert, editor Jack Flam. "Robert Smithson, the Collected Writings." Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996

²¹⁸ Brogan Bunt, Lucas Illhein and Kim Williams, *Walking Upstream. Waterways of the Illawarra*, 2018. Wollongong Regional Art Gallery.

Artist Diego Bonetto attended *Walking Upstream*, and I caught up with him along the banks of the Cooks River. Bonetto's *Weed Walks*²¹⁹ grew out of his practice as an artist engaging with and identifying edible plants in an urban environment. He now works at the intersection between tour guide, artist and activist. Bonetto's walk along the Cooks River goes for two hours and travels less than a kilometre. At this slow pace, Bonetto exposes the abundance of edible plants (native and otherwise) available to you if you know what to look for and take the time to look. The other attendees at the workshop were chefs hoping to educate themselves in the qualities and varieties of Australian Native plants so that they could begin to incorporate flavours particular to Sydney into their menus. Perhaps they are responding to an urge similar to the one I have but in a different form; teasing out the specific flavours of living and working in this time and place.

Mapping Edges is a research studio also located in Marrickville and based at the University of Technology, Sydney. It is helmed by writer/designers Ilaria Vanni Accarigi and Alexandra Crosby. Crosby and Vanni Accarigi have expertise in “design, cultural history, ethnography, visual communication and education”²²⁰ and turn deliberate attention to the edges of the urban environments around them. Inspired by permaculture design strategies which aim to foster abundant, self-supporting systems. As the name, *Mapping Edges* suggests Crosby and Vanni Accarigi work lightly, thoughtfully and at the intersection of disciplines.

While I was completing my week travelling along the Cooks River in November 2017, Crosby came out on the boat with me and wrote about it on the *Mapping Edges* website.²²¹ Conversations with Crosby have helped me to articulate questions and concerns. On the river in November 2017, Crosby asked the following questions: “So can you tell me what you brought (out with you in the

219 “About Diego Bonetto”, Diego Bonetto Website. Accessed 25th February 2020, <https://www.diegobonetto.com/about>.

220 Alexandra Crosby and Ilaria Vanni Accarigi, "Mapping Edges". Accessed 25th February 2020. <http://www.mappingedges.org/>

221 Alexandra Crosby and Ilaria Vanni Accarigi, "Mapping Edges". Accessed 25th February 2020. <http://www.mappingedges.org/>

boat)? And how about the boat (what can you tell me)? Where are we now? How have you been handling the days in the week? And you've been describing as you go? What is so different between how you are on the river and in ordinary life? What else has have you noticed? What happens if you go down there?"²²²

Looking back over this list of provocations I can see that Crosby is keeping me present by asking simple, honest questions about the here and now. *Mapping Edges* is a container for the cultural information, poetry and imagery that the places we call home can offer up if we pay attention. Crosby and Vanni Accarigi situate their practice within discourses around design and the urban environment, using and creating methodologies that make knowledge present and bodily. They also archive and process this material into tangible forms of knowledge to which other artists, students and academics can refer. This research output, for them, takes the form of writing, interviews, maps, walks, photos and conversations. Through interacting with these artists and academics, I have come to realise that a walk is subject to the same conditions as a performance. People arrive, they experience something together in real-time and they depart. This observation may seem obvious, however, I didn't think of applying my dramaturgical practice to walking until I had the experience of wanting to give performance notes at the end of a *Mapping Edges* walk; notes about what landed with the audience, what felt unclear, what I wanted more of, what I wanted less—a methodology from my performance practice. Rather than departing from my previous practice this experience has allowed me to reconstitute my skill base and to see how I am building on it.

²²²Alexandra Crosby, "Cooks River with Clare and Sally", blog Mapping Edges, December 5th 2017. Accessed 25th February 2020. <http://www.mappingedges.org/conversations/cooks-river-clare-sally-conversations/>

With the *Sydney Environment Institute*, I published a photo essay that follows the Cooks River from Yagoona to Botany Bay²²³ as well as attending two interdisciplinary workshops both convened by Ann Elias.²²⁴ Elias is Associate Professor, History and Theory of Contemporary Global Art, in the Department of Art History at Sydney University and author of several books including the recent *Coral Empire. Underwater Oceans, Colonial Tropics, Visual Modernity*. Elias reflects on the role that underwater photography has played in both exulting and dominating coral reefs in Australia and the Bahamas, thinking through the work of photographers Frank Hurley and John Ernest Williamson. Much like the legacy of colonialism playing out in the Cooks River, Elias observes that “the underwater of tropical islands and coral reefs that Williamson and Hurley went out in search of was not undiscovered, as they liked to think, but was instead, the traditional home for generations of peoples, marine animals and plants.”²²⁵

At Elias’ invitation I presented research in the *Oceanic Thinking* Workshop where American Academic Steve Mentz was keynote speaker. In his lecture, *Swimming into the Blue Humanities* Mentz talked about the role that swimming plays in his academic practice and how it helps him move between feeling and form, experience and allegory. Completing this research and body of work, I have been striving to deepen what I know by researching and paying attention to a place. Considering the Cooks River with Guy Debord’s *Theory of the Derive* in mind requires giving attention to how that place feels. Steve Mentz frames this attention to feeling within the discourse of phenomenology. Reflecting on Astrida Neimanis’ book *Bodies of Water, Post Human, Feminist*,

223 Clare Britton. “Photo Essay: Travelling The Cooks River, From Yagoona to Botany Bay” Sydney Environment Institute, blog, 16th Jan, 2019. Accessed 25th February, 2020. <http://sydney.edu.au/environment-institute/blog/photo-essay-travelling-cooks-river-yagoona-botany-bay/>.

224 Elias has also been auxiliary supervisor for *A Week on the Cooks River*.

225 Ann Elias. *Coral Empire. Underwater Oceans, Colonial Tropics, Visua Modernity!* (London: Duke University Press, 2019), 231.

Phenomenology, Mentz suggests that Neimanis' central question is "How do we understand what we feel?"²²⁶

Scholars Astrida Neimanis and Jennifer Hamilton founded the *Composting Feminisms Reading Group*. Inspired by Donna Haraway's provocation "We are all compost"²²⁷ and based out of the Environmental Humanities and Gender Studies at Sydney University, the reading group crosses institutions and disciplines. *Composting Feminisms* was formed with the aim of creating connections between the fields of Inclusive Feminism and the Environmental Humanities. Haraway's metaphor of composting is adopted as the moniker for the reading group because this concept acknowledges that new ideas and scholarship are indebted to the thinking that has gone before and that it is in the messy practice of breaking down and digesting existing information that we create new understandings.

The artist Pierre Huyghe made use of the metaphor of a compost heap for his contribution to Documenta 13. *Untilled* 2012 saw Huyghe intervene in a vacant lot installing plants, insects, animal life and sculptures. In doing so, Huyghe reframed processes of growth, composition and decomposition through an artistic frame and questioned the distinctions between where a making process begins and ends.

²²⁶ Steve Mentz, *Sydney Environment Institute Keynote Lecture*, podcast audio, Swimming into the Blue Humanities, 1:16:03/2019. Accessed 25th February, 2020. <https://soundcloud.com/sydneyenvironmentinstitute/swimming-into-the-blue-humanities>.

²²⁷ Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).161.

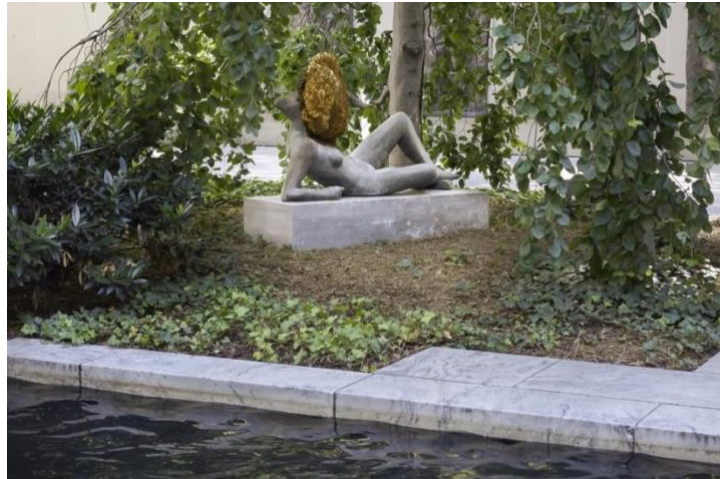


Figure 55. Untilled (*Liegender Frauenakt*) 2012 Pierre Huyghe

Composting Feminisms challenged me to have an alive and embodied relationship to my research, and to explore ways in which a visual arts practice might contribute to and engage with other forms of academic practice. I was invited to be the artist in residence on the symposium *Feminist, Queer and Anti-Colonial propositions for Hacking the Anthropocene II* and provided photographs from my research in progress as visual material for the website and program of the event. I also participated in and created a photo essay of a *Survival Skills Workshop* conducted in the Cooks River Canoe club and have contributed photographs, video and writing to the “living book” that is being made to hold all the contributions to *Hacking the Anthropocene II* together in one publication that can be added to and grow with time. Reading, walking and practicing alongside Neimanis and Hamilton I have felt like I am remembering new information rather than learning it.



Figure 56. Research Images, *Hacking the Anthropocene Survival Skills Workshop*, April 26th, 2017.

Mapping edges, Walking Upstream, The Sydney Environment Institute the Composting Feminisms Reading Group and Diego Bonetto's *Weed Walk* have all shaped *A Week on the Cooks River* by asking pertinent questions about how to develop and share knowledge and have led by example showing me how to break concepts down and incorporate them into my understanding of the Cooks River. This community of scholars are asking questions about knowledge, learning and research output, and are confident enough in their own methodologies to be able to take their intelligence off-road and into a variety of contexts that challenge and provoke communication. Each of these projects advocates for creative and academic practices that use relational strategies to support knowledge generation. The methods these practitioners use in common are simple but powerful phenomenological tools: walking and conversation. These basic and innately human activities expose the topography of understanding both the thin areas that you can't remember or fully explain and the areas that are deeply understood. The artists and process outlined in this chapter, taken together with the historical and studio-based research described in earlier chapters, form the basis of the methods and materials of *A Week on the Cooks River*: Walking, conversation, water, material movements, archives, writing about place, monuments and performance making strategies.

REVISITING *A WEEK ON THE CONCORD AND MERRIMAC RIVERS*

The pace of change that we are living through at the moment is analogous to the exponential change that took place during the Industrial Revolution; writers like Henry David Thoreau can help us understand how to interact with the shifting nature of power and materiality. From *A Week on the Concord River and Merrimac Rivers*, one passage in particular stood out to me:

Generally speaking, the political news, whether domestic or foreign might be written today for the next 10 years with sufficient accuracy. Most revolutions in society have not the power to interest; still less alarm us; but tell me that our rivers are drying up or the genius pine dying out in the country, and I might attend.²²⁸

While completing this study, I had the experience of being in New York and booked into to see Hillary Clinton's victory speech on the night Donald Trump was elected the President of the United States of America. I couldn't predict the political news for tomorrow let alone ten years into the future. I travelled to Broken Hill and saw the Murray Darling River before the massive fish kill event in 2018. Our rivers are drying up. As I am writing this, Sydney's air is thick with bushfire smoke so devastating Sydney University Professor Chris Dickman estimates that a billion animals have died.²²⁹ Thoreau's writing sounds an alarm. We can't eat the fish in the Cooks River or the plants along the river bed, we can't swim in the water, and our trees are dying. In the last 200 years we have lost something vital and free that we used to have. Paying attention to our local landscapes, enjoying them and working to tell their stories might be something we can do to convince people to value the intangible joys of life: engaging with artworks, walking, swimming, eating fresh food, talking, being in the sun and under the stars.

²²⁸ Thoreau, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimac Rivers*. Page 111.

²²⁹ Chris Dickman, "A statement about the 480 million animals killed in NSW bushfires since September" Sydney University News, 3rd January, 2020. Accessed 25th February, 2020 <https://sydney.edu.au/news-opinion/news/2020/01/03/a-statement-about-the-480-million-animals-killed-in-nsw-bushfire.html>



Figure 57. Research image, Botany Bay, 2017 Photo Matt Prest

Have you learned that secret from the river
that there is no such thing as time? ... The
river is everywhere at the same time, at the
source and at the mouth, at the waterfall, at
the ferry, at the current, in the ocean and in
the mountains, everywhere, and that the
present only exists for it, not the shadow of
the past, nor the shadow of the future.²³⁰

²³⁰ Hermann Hesse and Hilda Rosner, *Siddhartha* (London: Pan Books, 1973).

BOTANY BAY. CONCLUSION.

With an oar in each hand, I am moving out of the mouth of the river. I see a plane coming in. A little while later the sound hits me, immense. The water, as I round the head, is moving in small waves, but it feels powerful; the push of the ocean behind it. I think of Moby Dick. "We gave three heavy-hearted cheers and blindly plunged like fate into the lone Atlantic."²³¹ Except, I am not plunging like fate into the lone Atlantic. I am rowing, very slowly, by myself, out of the Cooks River. The sandstone rocks that make up the headland are dotted with people sitting perfectly still looking at their lines in the water. I can see a school of fish under the boat...maybe 20 of them? They look like a handful of glitter. Moving around the large rocks, my boat feels like a twig. I row towards the sandy edge of Botany Bay. The water meets the sand in clear, ankle-high waves. There are people riding bikes, fishing, smoking hookah pipes, cooking meat, swimming (from what I have read, they really should not be swimming). There are people in full niqab and people in swimmers. A constant stream of planes coming and going. It's a profound view. I remember an article about an old woman, whose dying wish was to see the sun go down one last time over this view.²³² What a beautiful woman. On the opposite side of the bay, I can make out the shipping container terminal beyond the airport. The light blue of the sky meets the dark blue of the sea. The water moving in and out of the Cooks River meets the salty water of Botany Bay. Botany Bay becomes the Pacific Ocean which connects Australia to the rest of the world.

²³¹ Herman Melville. *Moby Dick*. (Oxford:Oxford University Press, 1988), 114.

²³² Rhian Deutrom, "NSW Ambulance Grant Woman's Dying Wish to See the Sunset One Last Time," news.com.au, 20th February 2019. Accessed 25th February 2020 <https://www.news.com.au/lifestyle/real-life/nsw-ambulance-grant-womans-dying-wish-to-see-the-sunset-one-last-time/news-story/31c399572a4e8a2601f5ad5b7a0bd1f1>

THE RESEARCH EXPERIENCE - OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Standing on the bank of the Cooks River, it's challenging to perceive its twenty-three-kilometre trajectory as a whole. At a sports ground in Yagoona, it is difficult to hold in your mind its relationship to Botany Bay and the Pacific Ocean. *A Week on the Cooks River* targets gaps in understanding, attempting to create or highlight connections between artistic, geographic, historical, and embodied knowledge. *A Week on the Cooks River* is part of a growing body of work that places attention on the Cooks River. So much recent material has been published about the Cooks River that it required my literature review to be updated many times.²³³ Personally, turning attention to the Cooks River has been an immensely satisfying experience. It has allowed me to adapt aspects of my existing creative process to studio practice and site-based research, situated me in the city I grew up in and has tied me back into a place I look at every day but had never focused on. I have laid down significant parts of my life in the landscape of the Cooks River. Living alongside it, following it, rowing it, documenting it and researching it; I have made "odd kin"²³⁴ with the Cooks River.

When my video work *River Dreams* was installed at Frontyard Projects, I went to the gallery and turned the projections off each morning and then walked down to the bottom of my street to observe the river. The week I did that (18th – 24th November 2019) was the first week this year that bush fire smoke affected Sydney. In this context, the practice of learning how to read and attend this urban river has grown increasingly urgent. I felt the smoke in my lungs; I saw it turn the blue sky a glaring white. Ecologist Professor Chris Dickman from Sydney University has estimated that we have lost more than a billion animals²³⁵ and are losing trees, people and houses too. The fires are

²³³ Two recent developments that I would have loved to write about are the Essay "On the Margins of a Good Swamp" by Sue Castrique published in the Griffith Review and the removal of 13 tonnes of rubbish from the Cooks River by the Group Ocean Crusaders <https://au.news.yahoo.com/powerful-message-after-horrifying-find-cooks-river-053914182.html>

²³⁴ Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*.

²³⁵ Liz Cox, "A Billion Animals: Some of the Species Most at Risk from Australia's Bushfire Crisis," *The Guardian*, 14th January 2020. Accessed 25th February, 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/jan/14/a-billion-animals-the-australian-species-most-at-risk-from-the-bushfire-crisis>

compounded by and compounding Australia's drought-affected rivers. As Paul Carter observes in *The Road To Botany Bay*, humans establish cities near rivers: "Rivers more than any other feature brought with them the prospect of arrival and ending. They were a kind of travelling that repeated itself: they anticipated the commerce of settled nations."²³⁶ There are towns in Australia (even ones I have visited during this study like Broken Hill) that don't have water. This research has encountered many challenges, but this is perhaps the most significant challenge: none of this research, the artworks, small breakthroughs, discoveries and new understandings that I have developed matter at all if we don't have clean air to breathe and water to drink. Through the frame of the Cooks River, we see some of the shortcomings of capitalism as the things the river used to give us for free—oysters, fish, the joy of swimming in water—are rendered inaccessible as a result of the river's mistreatment as it has been capitalised on (for industry, houses, recreation and farmland).

I have worried about the river. On the 2nd of February 2020, I went out with a community group called "the Mullets" pulling rubbish out of the river. On the 4th of February, I led a walk with a group of scholars along the river. We saw there had been a fish kill. I counted 39 dead fish, many of them mullet. On the 9th of February, there was a king tide, and it rained like it was never going to stop. The water flushed the rubbish and dead fish out. In my gumboots, I stood on the path ankle deep in water as the river determined its own new edge, ignoring the back fences, the manmade river banks and the footpath. The water in the river moved rapidly both in and out in sturdy, competing waves. The surface puckered with heavy drops and the wind turned my umbrella inside out, which was useless anyway because the rain was horizontal. I saw other people in raincoats and gumboots marvelling as the king-tide and rain forced the water close to the top of the bridge crossing the river at Illawarra Road. I realise it is patronising for me to think of the river as fragile, damaged and in need of human care. The river is powerful. We humans will either figure out how to pay attention,

²³⁶ Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay*, 54.

value and enjoy it, or we won't. "For all its beauty the city could return in an instant to pulp. And that thought was strangely cheering"²³⁷



Figures 58 and 59. Research Images. *Mullets Row the 2nd of February 2020*



Figures 60 and 61. Research Images. *Fish Kill the 4th of February 2020*



Figures 62 and 63. Research Images. The river from the same place on the Wardell Road Bridge. 10th and 9th
February 2020

²³⁷ Falconer, *Sydney*, 12.

Studying the Cooks River has provided a frame small and local enough to make it possible for large ideas applicable to a specific place. Bearing witness to, and documenting a small urban river, is a tiny gesture, but it has given me ways to be active and positive. This research proposes that turning attention to and caring for whatever slivers of nature we have around us might be a manageable methodology for being optimistic and productive at a moment when it is hard to know where to start. *A Week on the Cooks River* engages with the work of Marxist philosopher Guy Debord and civil disobedient Henry David Thoreau, both of whom embody different expressions of the refusal of capitalism. Their critiques ring alarm bells through the ages. Reading Thoreau's words from *A Week on the Concord and Merrimac Rivers* that trees dying and rivers drying up is what would urge him to action²³⁸ is sobering. *A Week on the Cooks River* is a small contribution to valuing the nature that endures in our cities. The landscape of the Cooks River is itself a document of climate change and a testament to a time when water levels were between 14- 18 metres lower than today.²³⁹ Indigenous Australians did not divide this country up into rectangular, walled plots of yours and mine. Landscapes of rivers and mountains delineate the borders of the Indigenous countries referred to by the people who contributed to the Cooks River Oral History Project.²⁴⁰ Traditionally, when conditions changed, people relocated. This observation, along with a lot of the knowledge turned over and pulled together in this research, is not new knowledge, and my understanding is "situated and therefore, partial".²⁴¹

²³⁸ Thoreau, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimac Rivers*, 111.

²³⁹ Haworth, R.G.V. Baker R and P.J. Flood. "A 6000 Year-Old Fossil Dugong from Botany Bay: Inferences About Changes in Sydney's Climate, Sea Levels and Waterways." *Australian Geographical Studies* 42, no. March 2004 (2004): 46-59.

²⁴⁰ Milgate, Asher. "Cooks River Oral Histories Project." In *The Cooks River Catchment Aboriginal History Project*, edited by Cook River Alliance: Cook River Alliance, 2018. Accessed 25th February, 2020. <http://cooksriver.org.au/oralhistory>

²⁴¹ Moreton-Robinson, *Talking up to the White Woman. Indigenous Women and Feminism* (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 2000) xxiii

HOW WAS THE RESEARCH QUESTION ADDRESSED?

The question guiding this research is:

What Australian history and attitudes are exposed through embodied observation of the Cooks River and can these findings be communicated visually?

To address the aspect of the research question “what Australian history is exposed through embodied observation of the Cooks River?” I completed fieldwork along the Cooks River. The fieldwork component of this research saw me follow the river on foot and in a rowboat, draw the catchment of the Cooks River on the walls of Sydney College of the Arts for a week, observe the river every day for a week at the same time in the same spot, and sleep out on the dark water at Tempe. At every stage of this process, I took photos and wrote about what I noticed. In addition to focused periods of attention, I walked or ran along the river most days and engaged with many community activities along the river. Observing public artworks both led by Indigenous artists, both honouring Pemulwuy, I researched this history. As well as these embodied research strategies, I conducted extensive library-based research. I needed to answer: What is already published on the Cooks River? And what do visual art methodologies have to contribute to our understanding of the Cooks River?

To understand the aspect of my research question that is more intangible: “What Australian *attitudes* are exposed through embodied observation of the Cooks River?” I observed, contemplated and documented the physical properties of the river. The concreted bank. The steel retaining walls. The places where the houses front on to the river and the places where they turn away. The language written into the landscape of the Cooks River: “Yagoona”, “Botany Bay”, the name “the Cooks” itself. I followed the river as it meanders through Rookwood Cemetery, sports fields, industrial areas and Sydney’s suburbs. I rowed up Alexandra canal until it came to a dead end—the legacy of an abandoned engineering dream to connect the Cooks with Sydney Harbour. I researched the way that

Indigenous History is present in the landscape of the river. I reflected on and studied the mouth of the Cooks River which was moved over a kilometre to make way for Sydney's Airport. I noticed the cars in the river, the motorbikes, the shopping trolleys, the bike share bikes, the coffee cups, the keep cups. I've seen the river flood. Guy Debord with his theory of the derive and the concept of "psychogeography" gave me a starting point for thinking about Australian attitudes to this site. I also sought out site-specific Australian writing, artists and academics whose work is based on personal experience of landscapes. I worked in the library to answer this question: *What artists and writers have focused their attention on rivers and the Cooks River?*

My studio practice focused on the question: Can the experience of embodied observation of the Cooks River be communicated visually? To address this, I worked in the studio, on the river and through these questions: What is the Cooks River like today? What visual arts practices and theoretical frameworks inform this site-based research? How can these findings be expressed in a compelling visual art exhibition? How can my background working in contemporary performance inform my visual arts practice? What do visual art methodologies have to contribute to our understanding of the Cooks River?

KEY DISCOVERIES

Chapter One discusses many artists and writers who use walking, observation and conversation as phenomenological research tools. This discussion locates *A Week on the Cooks River* within an existing field of research and artistic output. *A Week on the Cooks River* considers the Cooks River's "psychogeography". In a research approach indebted to lineages in conceptual art practices such as the work of Francis Alys, Bas Jan Ader, Chris Burden, Mike Parr as well as the "land art" processes exemplified in the work artists like Richard Long and Robert Smithson and the concept of "Social Sculpture" as defined by Joseph Beuys. *A Week on the Cooks River* also draws influence from the site-

specific work of artists like Hamish Fulton, Tom Polo, Sara Morowetz, and David Watson. I have considered *A Week on the Cooks River* as a possible example of “Off-shore Art”²⁴² as proposed by Andrea Grover with the exhibition *Radical Seafaring*; the project certainly resonates with the theoretical underpinnings of that exhibition. As well as identifying the linages of discourse that this project has absorbed and grown out of, Chapter One also reflects on the specific development processes used in the studio, fieldwork and library research that comprise this work.

Creative development techniques that I have cultivated in my career working in contemporary performance have been adapted to visual art and studio practice. When performance or theatre is effective, it creates an *experience* and the potential for audience members to develop their own new knowledge out of that experience. My practice developed over time, out of the experience of enduring and critiquing work that failed and the transcendent experiences I have had when artworks have changed what I understand and how I view the world. Adapting this knowledge of contemporary performance process to site-based research. I have identified some tools that could be useful to other artists and researchers. First, the dual concepts of “sustained” and “contained” deliberate attention. These terms are inspired by the residency-based development model typically used in developing a performance that alternates through phases of ambient and focussed attention. Secondly, consideration of the sensory experience of the audience who encounter the work (by actively taking into account the lighting, sound, space design as well as the concept) and finally, a small but essential creative development strategy—new work made of components critiqued *after* they are attempted. “Typical”²⁴³ creative development processes take place over a two to three-year period. What is “typical” in the development of contemporary performance in Australia has evolved in the Australian context, informed by the field-based research of many preceding artists and, of course, the arts funding model.

242 Andrea Grover, "Radical Seafaring."14.

243 “Projects”, Clare Britton Website.. Accessed 25th February 2020 <http://clarebritton.net/projects>

The final conclusions drawn in chapter one chart the development of my practice. Working at the Watermill Centre saw a subtle but profound shift in my understanding that changed the way I saw the Cooks River and made me crave more cultural materials that reflect on it. The studio and group critique processes that I engaged in with my supervisors Mikala Dwyer and Julie Rrap at Sydney College of the Arts have also given me confidence that knowledge generated in the studio can be imparted through artworks to audiences. This transference of knowledge was demonstrated to me repeatedly as I heard fellow artists listen to the work of peers and pick up on the many cues embedded in the material choices, scale, images and ordering of the work. The existence of this exchange of knowledge between object and audience was reassured for me when the small silver sculptures *A Week on the Cooks River* generated through this creative development process, received the Cooks River Small Sculpture Prize.²⁴⁴ These little mnemonic tools had absorbed the thinking, walking and observation that this research has demanded; they have taken it out into the world, communicating these concepts to other people without language and without me there. Developing confidence in this transference of knowledge has been an immensely satisfying creative experience, and all these discoveries informed the way I structured the creative development process and will continue to support future work.

A Week on the Cooks River, utilised the creative development model outlined in chapter one, writing myself four creative development processes inspired by Guy Debord's "derive" that created short periods of focused development. These creative development processes and the body of work that has developed out of them is considered in Chapter Two. Also discussed is a collaborative conversation with artists Therese Keogh and Kenzee Patterson called *Rivers and a Well*. This chapter argues that interdisciplinary creative practice methodologies can be applied to site-based research

²⁴⁴ "The Cooks River Small Sculpture Prize", Greenway Art Prize, accessed 25th February, 2020 <https://www.greenwayartprize.com.au/>.

and that processing research into images and spaces can be an effective method for communicating that research to a general public audience. This chapter also acknowledges that this process has taken place on fertile ground in conversation with artists and researchers at Sydney College of the Arts.

A Week on the Cooks River includes wall drawings, video and sound installation, sculptures, walks, photographs and propositional monuments. As the new gallery at Sydney College of the Arts does not exist yet and this process has been built on the principles of site-specificity and presence, the final installation will continue to develop over the coming months in-studio and following the principles laid out in Chapters One and Two. This body of work is drawn from the archive of images, observations, writing, sculpture and video produced through this process and focused on the Cooks River, and is a contribution of this research to new knowledge. These images are the product of my embodied research into, and understanding of, the Cooks River. Also informing this understanding is existing literature about the Cooks River. These sources are addressed in Chapter Three, which is a literature review of work published about the Cooks River.

The significant impressions I have absorbed into my work from this review of literature are: firstly, that the story of the Cooks River is a story of colonisation. Geologically and culturally, the river has a long history. Insights into that history extrapolate from anecdotal and archaeological evidence. The landscape of the river holds the physical history of ancient fireplaces, meals, bodily remains and rock art, while named after the man who determined Australia to be "Terra Nullius". The naming of the "Cooks River" asserts colonial dominance over this body of water and continues to be unnecessarily offensive to Indigenous Australians. Indigenous history is not adequately integrated into the modern-day conception of the Cooks River. However, there are examples where education, publications, public artworks and shifts in perspective are slowly integrating the river's Indigenous history.

The Cooks River has been manipulated to its detriment and compromised by pollution since 1788. Today, projects are repairing the river concurrent to projects that are damaging it, and it remains to be seen whether the consistent improvements in river health that we have seen since the 1970s will continue. The Cooks River is the subject of an increasing amount of care and attention. This care can be seen along the banks of the river as well as in the aforementioned recent publications. The Cooks River has not been documented from start to finish in a way that considers its visual, cultural and historical dimensions. This paper and body of work is a contribution to this gap in our knowledge. The research that I have conducted into the Cooks River is a part of a long tradition of people caring for and paying attention to this body of water.

The final chapter discusses contemporary Australian academic practices that use walking, conversation, and following watery edges as a research methodology, before considering Australian writers who turn their attention to atmosphere and history, and finally returning to *A Week on the Concord and Merrimac Rivers* and the work of Henry David Thoreau who followed a river in the 1840s and wrote about time, place and civil disobedience against the backdrop of the Industrial Revolution. This chapter also acknowledges persistent contradictions. We have known since the '70s that building in the floodplains is detrimental to the health of the river,²⁴⁵ but in the last ten years, construction has increased significantly. We have known since 1770 that Sydney and the Cooks River was home to Aboriginal people,²⁴⁶ but we continue to call it the "Cooks". In doing so, we casually dismiss the thousands of years of Indigenous history that precede Cook landing at Botany Bay. Though these problems are entangled and worldly, they could be remedied if they were prioritised as such (by halting construction, prioritising care of the river in all future designs and re-naming the river).

²⁴⁵ Project, *Cooks River Environment Survey and Landscape Design : Report of the Cooks River Project*.

²⁴⁶ Cook, *Captain Cook's Journal During His First Voyage Round the World Made in H.M. Bark Endeavour, 1768-71 : A Literal Transcription of the Original Mss*, 243.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE THESIS

Engaging with this site, over time, through research, observation, photography, sculpture and video, allows future changes in the Cooks River to be communicated and, therefore, reflected on. As an artist working in relationship to the Cooks River, this contribution is a personal, visual and kinetic understanding of the river as well as historical and theoretical. The contributions of *A Week on the Cooks River* to new understandings of the Cooks River are as follows:

- A NEW BODY OF VISUAL ARTWORK ABOUT THE COOKS RIVER

One of the propositions of this study is that making images and spaces inspired by embodied site-research can be a useful tool for generating, consolidating and disseminating knowledge for a non-academic audience. This project so far has disseminated research to non-academic audiences through exhibitions at Est Gallery, The Seaview Gallery, Bankstown Arts Centre, Cosmopolitan Decline, Frontyard Projects, the Sydney College of the Arts Foyer and Gallery and the Prague Quadrennial of Performance and Space Design. The sculptures, video, installation and images produced are this study's most substantial contribution to new knowledge.

- LITERATURE REVIEW ABOUT RECENT PUBLICATIONS ABOUT THE COOKS RIVER

The literature review included in chapter three of this thesis includes contemporary and historical publications and writing about three artworks on the river's banks. This material has not previously been considered together and as such, this is a contribution to new understandings of the Cooks River.

- STRATEGIES FROM PERFORMANCE APPLIED TO SITE BASED RESEARCH

A Week on the Cooks River identifies research strategies inspired by the process of creating interdisciplinary performance that may be of use to other artists completing site-based research. These include an emphasis on multidisciplinary research, alternating between sustained and contained deliberate attention, and eliminating ideas only after they have been tested in studio.

- ARCHIVE OF PHOTOS AND WRITING ABOUT THE COOKS RIVER

A Week on the Cooks River has produced an archive of images and writing documenting the Cooks River in the years 2016-2020. This database may be of use to future researchers interested in the Cooks River.

POSSIBILITIES FOR FUTURE WORK

Following the exhibition of *A Week on the Cooks River* at the new Sydney College of the Arts gallery for the examination of this thesis, I'd like to develop a site-specific public exhibition of this work. I will also maintain a studio that allows me to keep working with the Cooks River, rivers more broadly and the practice of walking, writing and paying attention.

This study has changed my approach to my creative process. I will make sure that the writing reflection and engagement with the academic discourse that I have consolidated at Sydney College of the Arts continues into the rest of my art practice. This increased emphasis on theory will bring a new depth of writing and reflection on my process. I will keep testing and expanding and adding to the methods for creative development that I have identified in this study. The first processes that I am committed to following this study are the development of *Brightness* with choreographer Kristina Chan. The third in a trilogy of works we have collaborated on, following on from *A Faint Existence* (2016) and *Mountain* (2018). I am also directing a new experimental sound work called *One Space*

One with virtuosic pianists Aura Go (head of piano at Monash University) and Tomoe Kawabata. Collaborating with these artists will provide an opportunity for me to test further and refine the creative process outlined in *A Week on the Cooks River* and learn how these ideas behave when put into practice in a new context. Personally, *A Week on The Cooks River* has consolidated, recalibrated and extended my art practice and will provide the methodological and conceptual foundations for all my future work going forward.



Figure 64. Research image, *The Cooks in Flood*, 2020

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APPENDIX

GEOS3018/GEOS3918 Cooks River Field Trip April 21, 2010

Aims of the Field Trip

The field visit provides an opportunity for students to observe various issues related to urban river management in one of Sydney's most densely populated catchments—The Cooks River. Following European settlement in the area, the Cooks River underwent a steady process of degradation and loss of natural river function with disruptions to hydrological, ecological and geomorphic processes. The river channel was primarily viewed as a conduit for stormwater and waste, and as a means to achieve flood mitigation. However, in recent years, attitudes towards the river have started to change, as it has become increasingly valued by the community for its aesthetic, recreational and ecological attributes. The field trip will visit several sites along the river where attempts are being made to rehabilitate the system. We will meet with representatives of local councils and community groups to discuss the physical aspects of rehabilitation projects and the institutional constraints of effective river management in an urban environment.

Schedule of Visits

8.30am: Bus departs Sydney Uni

9.00am: Burwood Rd, Campsie - the Cooks River as a **concrete channel**

10.00am: Ewen Park, Hurlstone Park and Cup and Saucer Creek, Earlwood - **bank naturalisation** projects.

11.00am: Warren Park, Marrickville - Jean Brennan (Environmental Services Officer, Marrickville Council) on **Water Sensitive Urban Design**.

12.00pm: Thornley St, Marrickville - Michael Easton (Bush Pockets Community Group) on **community involvement in bush regeneration** and restoring riparian vegetation along the Cooks River.

1.30pm: Gough Whitlam Park, Undercliffe - Nell Graham (Team Leader of Environmental Issues at Canterbury City Council) on **restoring wetland ecology**.

3.00: Turrella Reserve, Wolli Creek - Peter Stevens (Wolli Creek Preservation Society) on **habitat preservation and enhancement** along the riparian zone.

4.30: Return to Sydney Uni.

APPENDIX

Description of the Cooks from Gavin Souter's *Sydney Observed*.

I said earlier that there were no rivers to speak of in the inland suburbs, but this was not always so. Anyone who wishes to read and enjoy the "Lotus eaters" suggested one of Sydney's first literary journals about a century ago. Must put Mr Tennyson's volume in his pocket and float falling asleep in half a dream up and down the Cooks River. In those days, the Cooks River district might indeed have passed for Tennyson's land of streams. Shea's creek carried the purest water in Sydney and the Millstream and underground lakes of botany were never dry. Cook's river itself lacked the downward smoke of Tennyson's waterfalls, but it used to wind its way prettily into botany bay between banks of green rushes. All of this has been, changed by the process of compression. Shay's creek has been turned into a canal. The ground water lakes, are surrounded by 21 tanneries and 15 evil smelling wool, scours and the Cooks river has lost almost all of its charm. Its source is now dotted with tombstones of Rookwood cemetery and its upper reaches are lined with concrete from Canterbury Racecourse, it flows in its own bed through the respectable, but nondescript suburbs of Earlwood, Hurlstone Park and Undercliff, but farther down the stream its bed has been rudely diverted to make way for a new runway at Kingsford Smith airport. St Peter's garbage tip nourishes the seagulls and maggots near the junction of Cook's river and Shea's creek and often the air of this district is heavy with soot and ash from the factories on either side of the aerodrome. O'Roidan Street, the most direct route from the aerodrome to the inner city is undoubtedly the most noisome street in Sydney. Visitors arriving by air are thus obliged to run the fettered gauntlet of three boiling down works, three fertilizer plants and several other O (offensive) class industries, but who cares? Only the few people who still live in O'Roidan street Sydney. As a whole it is sublimely indifferent to the opinions of others. The smell from the galvanizer's is the worst, says one woman who has lived on O'Roidan street for 18 years. " It gets in your throat. I think it must be acid or something. It's terribly noisy here too. Father works on night shift at the paper mill. He starts at 11 and works until seven o'clock in the morning. He comes home and he's just getting off to sleep and the boiler makers over the road start work. They make a terrible lot of noise. Half an hour later. The first of the day's overseas jets taxis out to the runway on its enormous wheels. With the noise of a blizzard it hurtles across the field in the field in corpse of the Cooks river and rises steeply trailing black downward smoke over Botany Bay.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁷ Gavin Souter *Sydney Observed*. (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1965).

APPENDIX

List of professional performance work completed during study period

RESIDENCIES

Aura Go's Musica Viva Future makers Program at Monash University sound gallery with Aura Go, Tomoe Kawabata, Kristina Chan and Maddie Flynn.

Role: Director.

<https://www.aurago.net/one-space-one>

Critical Path Choreographic Residency with choreographer Kristina Chan and fashion designer Donna Sgro, 2019.

Role: Collaborating artist, design.

<https://criticalpath.org.au/program/kristinadonnaclare/>

Real Real. Campbelltown Arts Centre with Natalie Rose, Sally Lewery and Alice Osborne. 2019 Role: Collaborating artist, design.

<https://c-a-c.com.au/real-real-6/>

PERFORMANCES

Speak Percussion's *Polar Force*. Experimental Sound.

E. Ughetti, P. Smartzis, C. Britton, N. Roux, K. Tucker and M. Schack-Arnott.

Performed at: Victorian Arts Centre, Melbourne, 2018; PICA, Perth, 2019; CyberArts exhibition, The Prix Ars Electronica, Linz, Austria, 2019; Transart Festival, Bolzano, Italy, 2019; Ruhrtriennale, Essen, Germany, 2019; Noorderzon Festival, Groningen, Netherlands, 2019.

Role: Co-Director

<https://speakpercussion.com/work/polar-force/>

Ros Oades' *The Nightline* Experimental Sound.

R. Oades, B. Scott with K. Molino, C. Britton, F. Brusamolino & G. Cameron, B. Hackett D. Hawkes, D. Kirkpatrick and the Nightline Brainstrust

Performed at Urban Theatre Projects and Blacktown Arts Centre's Right Here Right Now Festival, 2018

Role: Site Design

<http://www.roslynoades.com/the-nightline>

Kristina Chan's *A Faint Existence*. Contemporary dance.

K. Chan with C. Britton, J. Brown, B. Cistern, V. Hunt

Performed at: Liveworks Festival, Performance Space at Carriageworks, Sydney 2016; Unwrapped Festival,

Sydney Opera House, Sydney 2018; Dance Massive Festival, Dance House, Melbourne, 2019;

Role: collaborating artist, design

<https://www.kristina-chan.com/choreography#/a-faint-existence-1/>

Kristina Chan's *Mountain*. Contemporary dance.

K Chan with C. Britton, J. Brown, M. Marshall, M. Polamares, M. Polamares, V. Hunt.

Performed at Campbelltown Arts Centre, Sydney, 2018

Role: Collaborating artist, design

<https://www.kristina-chan.com/choreography#/mountain/>

Speak Percussion's *Assembly Operation*. Experimental sound work.

E. Ughetti with C. Britton, C. Tang, N Roux, R. Dinnen, J.J. Chen,

K. Melville and M. Schack-Arnott.

Performed at Art House, Melbourne, 2017

Role: Dramaturg, design

<https://speakpercussion.com/work/assembly-operation/>

Christian Thompson's *Tree of Knowledge*. Performance

Performed at Liveworks Festival, Performance Space at Carriageworks, Sydney 2017

Role: Dramaturg

<http://clarebritton.net/tree-of-knowledge>

Martin Del Amo's *Champions*. Contemporary dance

M. Del Amo and collaborators

Performed at Sydney Festival, Sydney, 2017

Role: collaborating artist, design

<https://2017.sydneyfestival.org.au/champions>

Urban Theatre Project's *Home Country*. Site base performance

Performed at Sydney Festival, Sydney, 2017

Role: collaborating artist, design

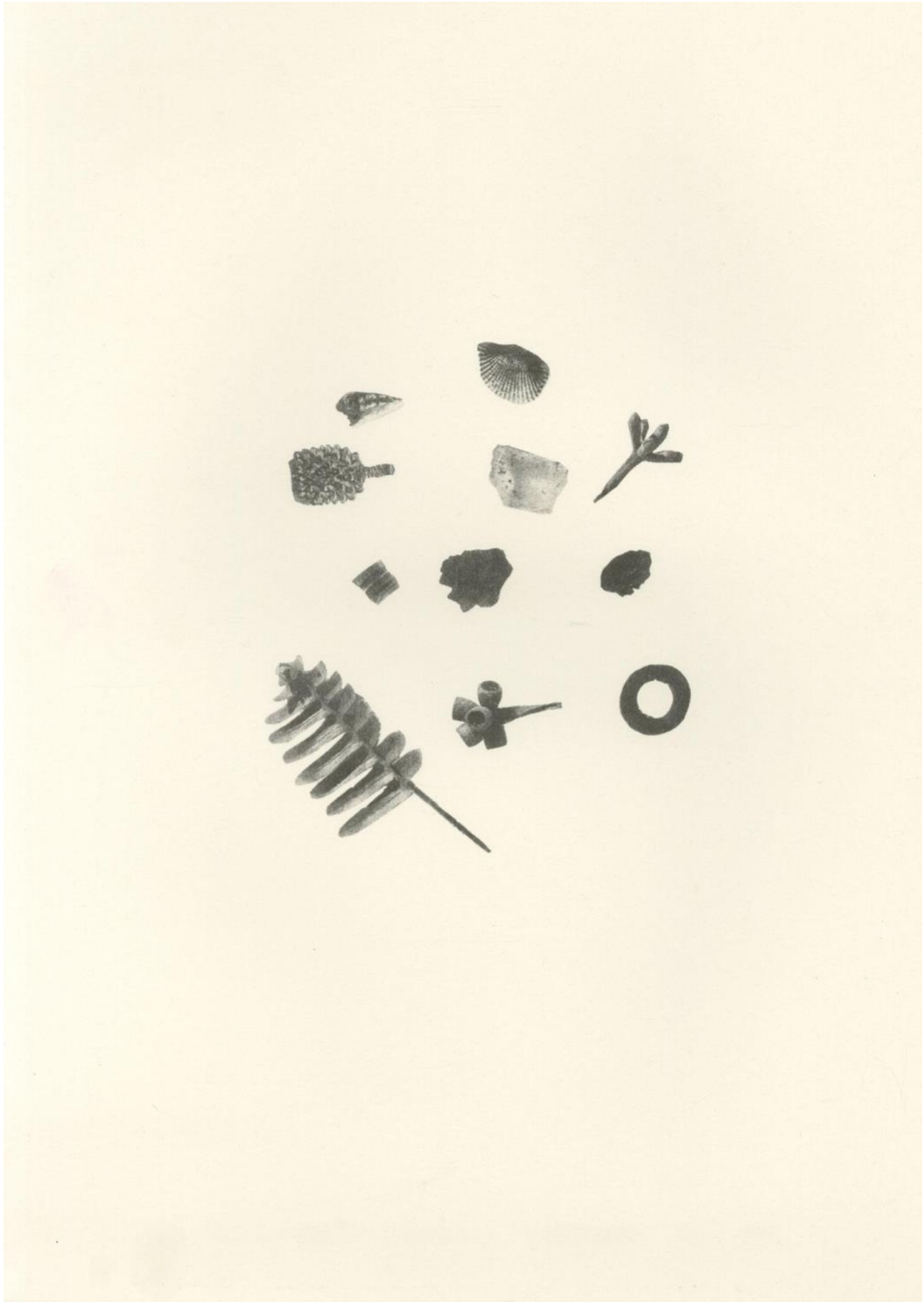
<http://urbantheatre.com.au/news/home-country/>

CATALOUGE OF WORK FOR EXHIBTION

The following is documentation of works created for *A Week on the Cooks River*. I will continue to work in the studio towards the exhibition in May which will be finalised as the new gallery itself is completed.



A Week on the Cooks River. Silver castings. Dimensions variable 20mm- 40mm



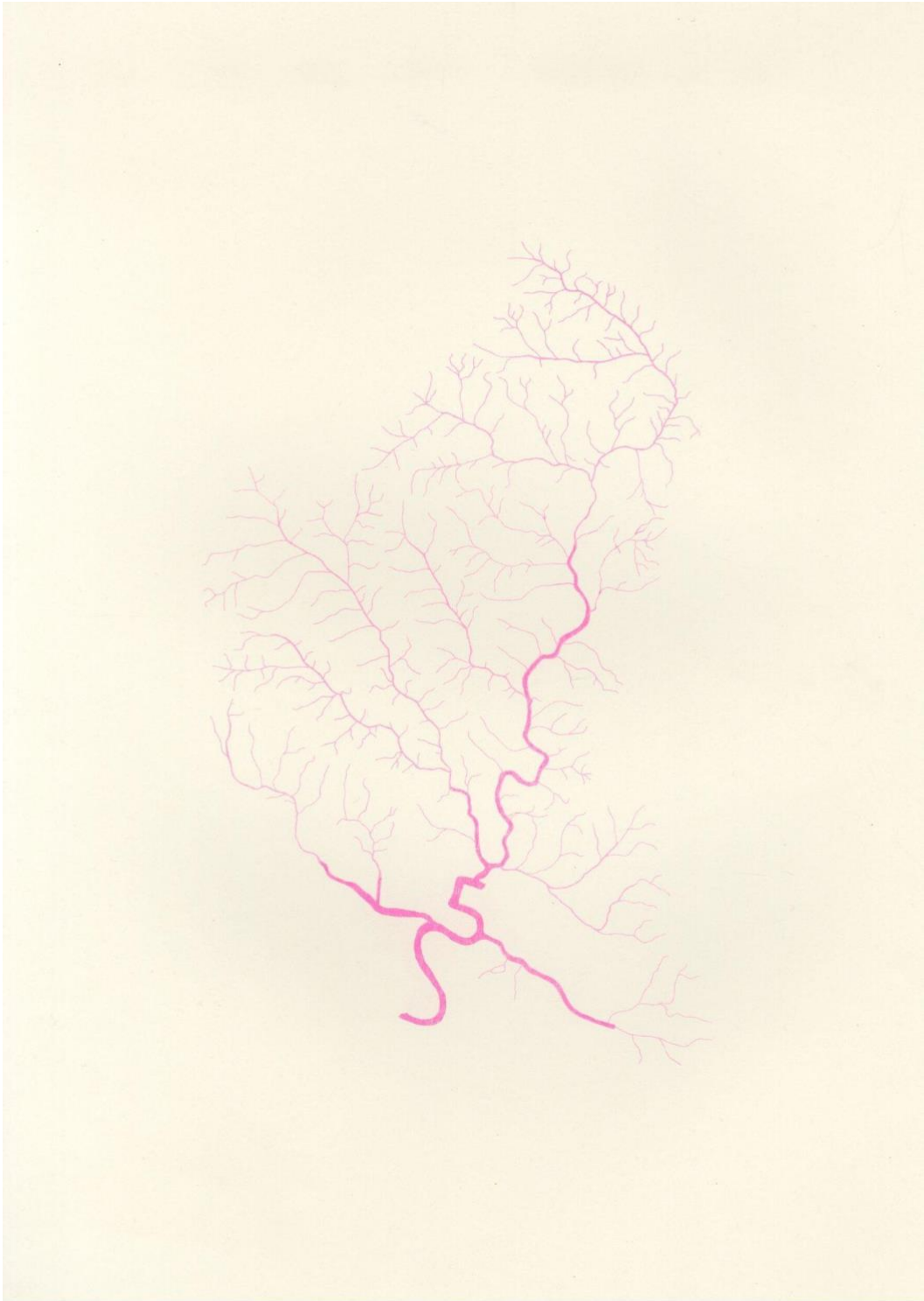
A Week on the Cooks River. Risograph Print. 320mm x 450mm



A Week on the Cooks River. Risograph Print. 320mm x 450mm



A Week on the Cooks River. Risograph Print. 320mm x 450mm



A Week on the Cooks River. Risograph Print. 320mm x 450mm



A Week on the Cooks River. Photograph.

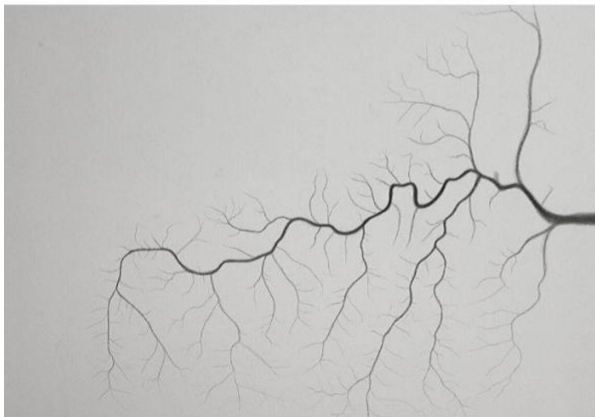
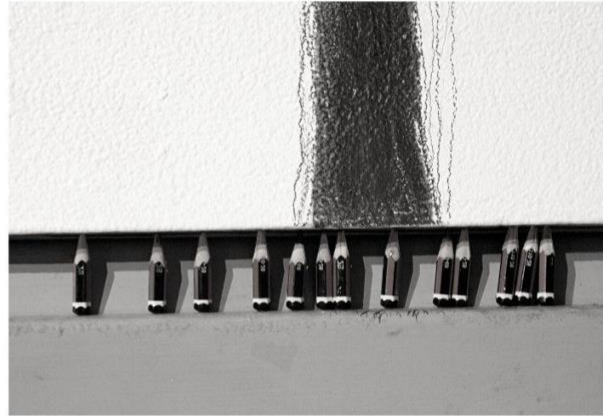
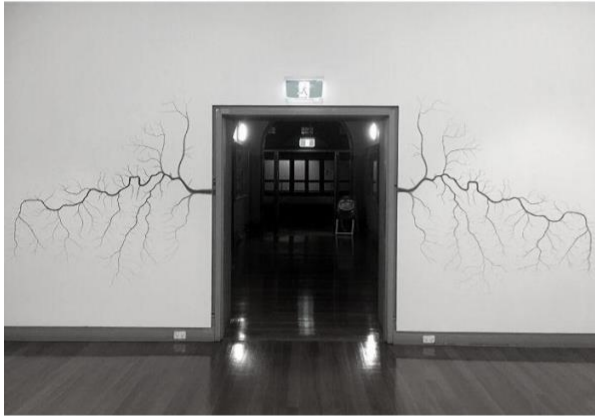
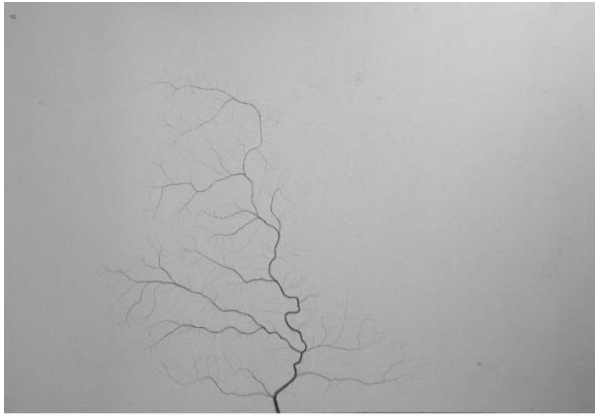


A Week on the Cooks River. 2 Chanel Video and sound installation with rocking chairs.

Dimensions variable



River Dreams. Overnight projections. Dimensions variable.



A Week on the Cooks River wall drawing, Sydney College of the Arts Foyer, 2018



A Week on the Cooks River examples from photo archive. 2016-2020

A RIVER ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WORLD

THE COOKS RIVER

YOU NEED: WALKING SHOES, A HAT AND WATER

The walk is an easy bush walk (2.6kms)- there are sections that are rocky and uneven

MEETING POINT:

CORNER OF WAVELL PARADE AND
BAYVIEW AVENUE, EARLWOOD, SYDNEY 9.30AM
1st of July, 2019.

Drawing lines with our bodies on opposite sides of the globe, this walk, will complete the call and response
GPS drawing *A river on the other side of the world*,
echoing the bend walked on the Vltava River in Prague on June 12th (as a part of the Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design).

These paired walks are an opportunity to think about drawing, bodies, water, The Cooks River, walking and understanding place.

Hosted by the Composting Feminisms Reading Group, this walk share's aspects of artist Clare Britton's PhD research *A Week on the Cooks River*.

Readings: Astrida Nemiamis' *Bodies of Water*, Jenn Hamilton's *All the World's a Drain*, Saskia Beudel's *Fossils in the City*, Asher Milgate's *Oral History Project* and Clare Britton's *Travelling the Cooks River from Yagoona to Botany Bay*

Welcomed by Aunty Rhonda Dixon-Grovenor, walkers on the Cooks are given silver casts of detritus- shells, plastic and rust - collected along the banks of the river.

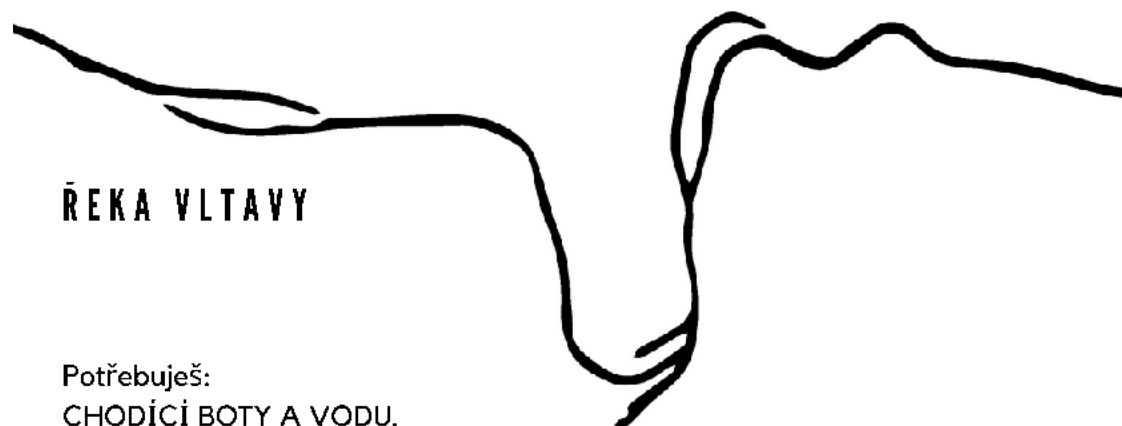
REGISTRATION ESSENTIAL:

<https://www.eventbrite.com.au/e/composting-34-river-tickets-61981520396>



A River on the other side of the world. Cooks River walk. 1st July 2019.

ŘEKA NA DRUHÉ STRANĚ SVĚTA



ŘEKA VLTAVY

Potřebuješ:

CHODÍCI BOTY A VODU.

Procházka je krátká a snadná (2,6 KMS)

MÍSTO KONÁNÍ:

PRAHA: PRAŽSKÁ TRŽNICE (LEHKÁ ŽELEZNIČNÍ STANICE) HOLEŠOVICE,
170 00 PRAGUE 7, CZECHIA, 6 hodin, 12. června, 2019

Kreslení čar s našimi těly na opačných stranách zeměkoule,
Řeka na druhé straně světa je volání a odezva GPS, kde se obrat na řece
Vltavy v Praze 12. června (Praha Quadrennial Performance Design) bude kreslit
spolu s ohybem řeky Cooks v Sydney

Tyto spárované procházky jsou příležitostí k popřemýšlet o kresbě, tělech,
vodě, městských řekách, chůzi a pochopení místa.

Chodci v Praze se scházejí brzy před tím, než se město probudí, a dostanou
stříbrné odlitky které reprezentují věci shromážděné po březích řeky Cook v
Sydney.

REGISTRACE Je to důležité:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/a-river-on-the-other-side-of-the-world-tickets-62243201090>



A river on the other side of the world. Vltava Walk, Prague. 12th June, 2019