

## **JOSHUA NASH**

Joshua Nash is working on the toponymy of Pitcairn Island. He is concerned with philosophical and ontological foundations of language and place, the anthropology of religion, architecture, pilgrimage studies, and language documentation. He has conducted linguistic fieldwork on Norfolk Island, South Pacific and Kangaroo Island, South Australia, environmental and ethnographic fieldwork in Vrindavan, India, and architectural research in outback Australia.

## **DRAWN NAMES: THE AESTHETICS OF LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPES AND LINGUISTIC PILGRIMAGE**

In 2008 Norfolk Islander Bev McCoy drew for me a site-specific depiction of the offshore fishing ground name *Shallow Water*. I explore the ideation and movement of linguistic pilgrimage through naming and explore how this posing is relevant to aesthetic understandings of the study of placenames (toponymy). Toponymy and its site-specificity in terms of drawing as diminished object and the perils of being a spectator to drawing are presented as a creative gesture implicating mobility and emotional interpretations of language and geography.

## Drawn names: The aesthetics of linguistic landscapes and linguistic pilgrimage

A fisherman rarely teaches the art of lining up a specific fishing spot, and a boy's apprenticeship consists largely of curiosity and persistence. While a fisherman is always delighted to have a young apprentice help to augment his catch, he avoids taking him to a preferred spot (Forman 1967, 422).

### Bev McCoy and the drawing of language

The gentleman in question knew a lot about Norfolk Island fishing. To my knowledge, he was not a drawer. However, in my company, and led by my questioning, he drew *Shallow Water* for me (Figure 1).

Bev narrated to me the location, spatiality, and naming import of *Shallow Water* within the Norfolk Island seascape and landscape:

Just at the start of *No Trouble Reef* you find *Shallow Water*. When you line the *Alligator's Eye* with *Mount Pitt* and follow that run out until you get a little narrow gap in the pine trees at Byron Burrell's place at *Duncombe Bay* near the *Captain Cook Memorial*. The reef is very shallow and comes up to about 35 metres' depth. *Shallow Water* is the general name of a fishing area which covers about a mile square (Bev McCoy, personal communication, Norfolk Island, 2009).

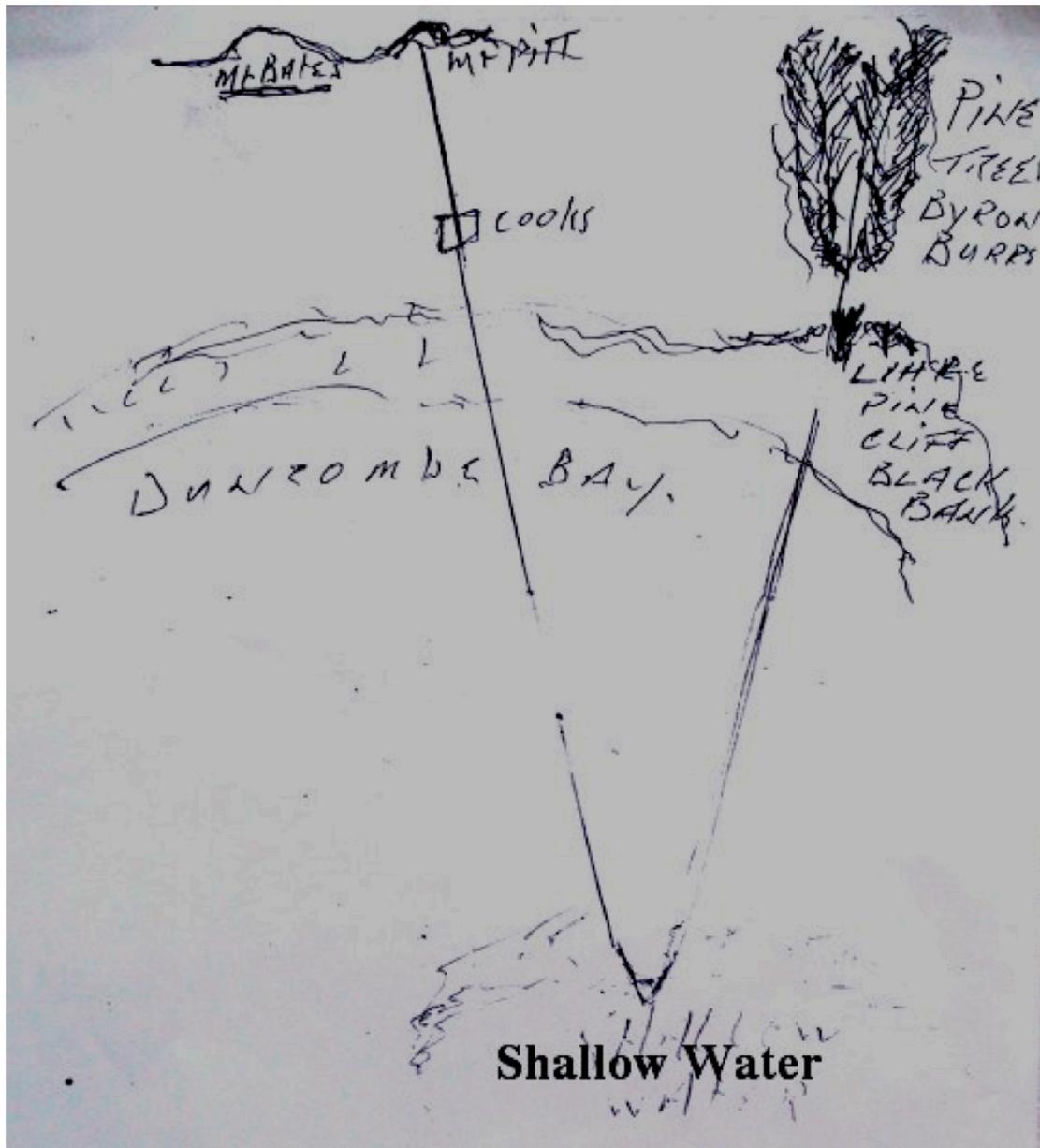


Figure 1: Hand-drawn depiction of Shallow Water (source: Bev McCoy, Norfolk Island, 2008).

The result—a drawing and an egoic manifestation of self in the world—now exists within an interacted whole. Without Bev, no drawing or name; without me, the outsider fieldworker, no reason to recount such anecdotes. The outsider acts within the bounds of the insider. The drawn meets the linguistic; pencilled language. Through this embodiment of sketched art, systematised creativity in-place, memories of the now late Bev McCoy persist. He lived with his wife

Dos on Rooty Hill Road, also known as House Road in the Norfolk Island language. They married in their early twenties in the 1940s. In a scratchy 8 mm wedding film I acquired, Bev appears as a strong, attractive man with a proud wife by his side. They are both dead now but they are well-remembered in the Norfolk community's memory. For me, I remember Bev in the maps he drew, the names he told me.

My narrative begins in early 2008. House Road leads down to the Georgian houses on Quality Row in Kingston, the only flat, low lying area of any significant size on this tiny archipelago. On the way down House Road one passes Queen Elizabeth Lookout, which is known locally as Lizzie's Lookout or simply Lizzie's. From here, one can see down the rolling hills to the golf course, Government House, Nepean Island, Phillip Island, and out to the vast expanses of the South Pacific. Norfolk is an extremely isolated island. You can taste the salt in the warm sea air. Fishing folk have ridden the incessant waves for hundreds of years as they have sought their livelihood in the sea's bounty.

I was stationed on Norfolk as a toponymist to document the local history, land use changes, and linguistic import associated with the many little-known, localised, and esoteric placenames. I am not a drawer, nor am I directly involved in any overtly creative enterprise involving illustration, making drawings related to artistic representation. Still, my presence induces *Shallow Water*. Within this name-event exists a movement; there is a transferral of cultural knowledge from Bev to me, Norfolk Islander to blow-in, mind maps to linguistics manifested in the world. Inside the triangulation points and marks of the maritime geography used in connection to the terrestrial topography of names like *Shallow Water*, I move through spaces and names. It is a linguistic pilgrimage which I am embarked upon, one through aesthetics—the drawn, the actual map (Figure 1)

perceived through scientific and philosophical understandings of the study of placenames—toponymy.

I am purposefully convoluting my argument, conflating site writing and spatial writing, drawing, toponymy, linguistic pilgrimage, and the aesthetic.<sup>1</sup> I blend and conglomerate elements of the aesthetic import of a literal name like *Shallow Water* through my own drawing with words and ideas in the abstract. Toponymy and its site-specificity in terms of drawing as diminished object (the informant) and the perils of being a drawing spectator (the fieldwork) weave a creative gesture implicating mobility and emotional interpretations of language and geography. I am a mover, a shaker, a documenter, a writer. Bev is the drawer, his product our subject, his art the artefact.

The worthiness of Norfolk toponymy is its confined nature, its insularity, and the contradictions between known–unknown and insider–outsider relating people to place through language. I interpret an extensive complex of name, place, and people links built up over time made available only to those allowed access to family properties and onshore and offshore fishing places. There is a lot of wisdom contained within Norfolk placenames. It is this content (what they mean culturally) more than the location and form of the names (their grammatical stature) which attracts my attention. Bev got mine, and he drove his ideas home through his own drawing of *Shallow Water*.

---

<sup>1</sup> Regarding theoretical work on site and spatial writing, see special issue entitled ‘On Writing Architecture’ of *Architectural Theory Review* (2010) 15:3. The introduction to this issue (Stead & Stickells 2010, 233-241) provides ample references, methodological insight, and practical summary of work into spatial writing and architecture-writing. Rendell (2006) details an excellent treatise on the workings of spatial writing within art and other creative fields.

## Linguistic pilgrimage and/to *Shallow Water*

I see *Shallow Water* as place, a marine-cum-maritime setting I visited some time after Bev had gone, after he drew his account. Such fieldwork engages in pilgrimage to and through locations of linguistic interest and indeed pilgrimage *to language*, where language is a possible pilgrimage site. When I was in *Shallow Water*, that mile square of sea, I perceived a nexus of experience within the name-world created by Bev's drawn statement and my own self-reflection and introspection during the pilgrimage process to this drawn name-place. This encounter reminded me of other fishermen I had read about:

These are the fishermen who stand sentry over the cod stocks off the headlands of North America, the fishermen who went to sea but forgot their pencil (Kurlansky 1999, 1).

The trope of the pencil, that employed to draw, that used to remember, a tool of the fisher's trade made toponymically dextrous. I had observed Bev's drawn instance, now I grasped it as a composition in the linguistic landscape, under the guise and pretext of a language—Norfolk—which exists within a specific cultural and ecologically embedded context: the small island environment of the easternmost constituent of modern political Australia. Linguistic pilgrimage affects and informs my own conceptions of this language and the linguistic landscape itself. Although I am strapped in for the sometimes choppy ride, a journeying which offers others and me new systems of questions and novel perspectives of analysis and hypothesising about language philosophy and the aesthetic appraisal of sea-based and drawable environments, I am yet stuck at Bev's image, thought, and drawing.

*No Trouble Reef*, an excellent source of offshore fish, *Mount Pitt*, Norfolk's second highest peak, *Alligator's Eye*, an indentation in the topography of the

north coast, *Duncombe Bay*, a colonial name, and *Captain Cook Memorial*, a remembrance monument to the European discovery by Cook in 1774, are all implicated and are part of the linguistic and aesthetic appeal of *Shallow Water*. While Bev's seemingly tired scratching cannot be taken at first glance as established art, I sense an underlying beauty in what this representative-representable-representational episode narrates; *Shallow Water* as Bev's moniker is beautiful, artful. He named a part of the sea, he drew it as linguistic and creative precipitate, and inadvertently heralded a minor beautification of the world for a brief moment. It is unlikely anyone would be overly uncomfortable with Bev's effort, nor would many apparently register the ability of his humble imaginative treatise to realise him as a toponymic artist.

Modern technologies like Global Positioning Systems (GPS) have rendered physical triangulation markings and offshore fishing ground names that Norfolk fishers like Bev McCoy knew antiquated. The removal of the importance of such labels deems the authorship of names and that which can be drawn as defunct and valueless. What I learned through the object drawn, through interaction with person, language, space, emotion, and place, and through the recording of drawing is far from fruitless. An artistic arena was established on paper, a name-place of pilgrimage-worth in the world as an index of the drawing as performance, a locale I met and with which I interacted. Through the interaction of self (ego)-artefact (drawing)-arena (placename), a nucleus involving language-pilgrimage, artist-documenter, and insider-outsider has been realised. The production of placenames and linguistic data is art, is artistic. The enticement of the production of grammatical maps using pencil or pen is inventive, the melding of the aesthetic with words and names that become linguistic landscapes. It is in these landscapes and through pilgrimage to and through language that methods such as drawing as participation, cooperation, and substance can be accomplished.

Bev died on 24 June 2009. The last time I saw him was in March 2009 at the Norfolk Island Hospital. He had become a permanent resident. I greeted him. He could hardly lift his hand to shake mine. He did, however, produce a warm and knowing smile when he saw my face. While Bev's body was obviously deteriorating, his mind was as sharp as ever. I asked him how he was. He was not able to answer. His voice was weak, his breathing static and jolty. I handed him a map and a piece of paper with handwritten information he had compiled some years before. He could hardly hold the paper in his hand. My mind drifted to the drawing he had done for me, his artefactual embodiment of *Shallow Water*.

## References

Forman, Shepard. 1967. Cognition and the catch: The location of fishing spots in a Brazilian coastal village. *Ethnology* 66(4): 417–426.

Kurlansky, Mark. 1999. *Cod: A Biography of the Fish that Changed the World*. London: Vintage.

Rendell, Jane. 2006. *Site-Writing: The Architecture of Art Criticism*. London: IB Tauris, 2006.

Stead, Naomi & Stickells, Lee. 2010. Editorial: Special issue On Writing Architecture. *Architectural Theory Review* 15(3): 233-241.

## Image List

Figure 1: Hand-drawn depiction of Shallow Water (source: Bev McCoy, Norfolk Island, 2008).