# The Sentient Body: An Exploration of the Body's Intimate Connection to the Environment.

by

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Submitted in the fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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Anne Morrison

# Abstract

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**The Sentient Body: An Exploration of the Body's Intimate Connection to the Environment.**

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This project investigates methodologies within the practice of oil painting in order to conceptualise perceptions about the intimate connection between the body and the environment.

Today the notion of the integrity of the body as complete and separate is actively fostered by the virtual, which delivers knowledge without the smell and touch of reality. Increasingly insulated from the actual experiences of nature, our biological selves are nonetheless in a state of constant material exchange with the environment. Beyond this functionality, there are those who cultivate a deeper sensory connection with the land. They regard themselves as being at one with the environment and sense within their bodies the rhythms and pulse of the cosmos. It is these internal indicators, felt rather than seen, which form the subject of this project and the investigation has sought the means through painting to successfully conceptualise these feelings of connection.

The issue of visually representing sensory responses which do not manifest themselves in pragmatic vision requires the invention of new and effective signifiers. Various methods based upon the fluid applications of oil on canvas have been investigated. Of course visual language cannot be expected to function completely outside the field of metaphor. Here the segments of the process, the actions of painter and paint, form the metaphors for flow and rhythm, and for the bindings which wrap the body into its surroundings.

Throughout the project, the subjects of each painting have been the feelings referenced within my own bodily experience. Every work represents a new exploration of the metaphoric process yet, in terms of the investigation, each is an echo of the last and a foretaste of the next.

The specific thematic connection of the body and the environment lifts the project clear of the wider evocative intent present in aspects of the Abstract Expressionist movement, although both similarities and dissimilarities with painterly processes employed by artists such as Helen Frankenthaler and Morris Louis are recognised. The precursors within the thematic of this project are particular works by the artists Helen Chadwick, Ana Mendieta, Mona Hatoum, Terry Winters, Georgia O'Keeffe, Moira Dryer and Ian McKeever.

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# PART ONE

## THE CENTRAL ARGUMENT

The project's central argument is as follows:

1. Perceptions of an intimate and binding connection between the body and the environment provide the content.

2. Rather than having visually recognisable forms, perceptions such as these reside in the mind; as metaphysical concepts they are without apparent materiality.

3. The general problem, posed in painting, is to find a means to give effective visual form to perceptions which are by nature immaterial.

4. Following investigation in the environment and through studio practice, the idea of devising painting methodologies as metaphors for primary elements of content, has been developed and refined.

5. The outcome is a group of paintings submitted for examination and, as recquired by the course outline in the University's Research Higher Degrees Handbook, 1998, the exhibition contains the original discourse of the project.

## INTRODUCTION

### The Body as Subject

During my first degree at Glasgow School of Art my paintings were figurative and often contained narrative content. I was influenced by the new generation of Glasgow Figurative Painters who came to prominence in the mid-eighties. Upon graduating, I moved directly to the Royal College of Art in London, to undertake a Masters Degree in painting. At the same time, other events intervened which radically altered my attitude to certain life issues and this in turn precipitated changes in my work. Where previously my

paintings had contained recognisable features of myself or those close to me, now the bodies became fragmented and even damaged. Moving away from specific identities I sought to portray bodies in pain, bodies under medical scrutiny, the body's vulnerability. My depictions of bodily terrains became internal rather than external, drawn from feelings rather than from visual experience. The paintings were less figurative, less specific and more emotive.

Anne Morrison,

Fig.1 left: ***Beyond the surface***, *1989*

Fig.2 right: ***Likeness of Being***, *1990*

### A New Awareness

In 1994 I received a one year residency in Australia funded by the Scottish Arts Council in conjunction with the Schools of Art in Canberra and Hobart. Geographically the contrast was dramatic. The unfamiliar surroundings sharpened my instinctive responses and heightened my awareness of being a part of the environment. The new experiences quite dramatically influenced my practice. I visited remote places; I felt the power of the land; I was surrounded by a new sense of space. Previously I had used second-hand source material such as photographs and maps. Now I used the experience of the primary source material as I sought to express these new sensations.

### The Challenge

Over a 9 month period I put together an exhibition of paintings I referred to as *body mappings* in which I endeavoured to assimilate these experiences. This group of work opened up issues which, to some degree, remained unresolved. These paintings, and others produced during the present study in its early stage had a body/ ground separation reaffirming a division between body and environment.* This was contradictory to my desire to develop imagery which indicated a oneness. My goal

was to find a new method to articulate a fluid connection, if not a total fusion, between the body and the land.

Anne Morrison

Fig.3 left: ***Scratching the Surface***, 1995

Fig.4 right: ***Beyond and Within***, 1995

*Early on, I was still thinking about these things, these new experiences, but had not yet begun to find a way to bring together these feelings through the work. Indeed it was only by reflecting on my experiences over a much longer period (three years) that I was able to do this.

## THE NATURE OF THIS RESEARCH PROJECT

### The Difficulty with the Particular

I have tried, always, to find in personal experience the nub which will set up a wider emotive response and thus move the experience out of the private domain. In many works of art the subject matter carries greater significance than its purely literal meaning. The work is much more than the sum of its figuration and its technique. Potentially it can evoke associations which transcend the representation of direct visual references. This quality of transcendence is paramount in raising art above (functionality) its material content and form, and allows it to contribute to the understanding of things which do not always manifest themselves in any tangible physical form.

(In this regard it is interesting to note that J. M. W. Turner, in many of his later seascapes and landscapes, became preoccupied with light and atmosphere, and these fluid elements became his dominant concern. The more solid features in scenes began to dissolve. Turner had edged away from a specific experience of a

particular place towards an understanding of universal elements of nature.)

Artworks with a strong functional brief tend to be limited in their capacity for transcendence. Often they are grounded by the necessary particulars of their depictions. Their meanings are directed by abundant signposting in the form of details. To make specific is to define. Likewise specificity prescribes meaning and to that extent it implies closure. Gerhard Richter considers that art becomes applied art just as soon as it sets out to deliver a specific message.[1]

### Picturing the Immaterial

Many important concepts in life and in art are by nature immaterial. While they may be widely understood they exist in the mind and are without physical substance. Indeed they can defy the limitations of precise definition and the greater the attempt to specify, the fuzzier their outline becomes. Probably this characteristic relates to their very universality. For example, the concept of *spirituality* is likely to be differently formed in the minds of each of us. As a concept, it possesses both a small core of commonality or shared understanding and an immense strata of divergent personal connotations.

### The General Problem

For the visual artist wishing to explore the expressive possibilities of incorporeal or metaphysical subject matter (the Sentient Body would be included here) the immateriality of the concepts poses a significant problem.

In visual terms it is relatively easy to communicate the idea of the connection of the body with the environment. For example a human form can be used as a symbol for the body and a tree, hill and stream used to symbolise the environment. Connection can be indicated by transposing one above the other or by the use of arrows or other means. Essentially this does no more than depict the name of the idea and adds nothing to the concept itself other than perhaps to trivialise it.

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1 Richter, Gerhard *The Daily Practice of Painting, Writings and Interviews*, 1962 - 1993, Thames and Hudson, 1995, p.170

However, the problem is proposed in painting and therefore must be answered in painting. Here I return to the sentiments of Gerhard Richter for, in painting, this is not a problem of visual communication. It is not about delivering a message which will spell out the content. The proposition is to find means of evoking the essence (rather than any particulars) of the concept and this strongly suggests that insights and perceptions derived from deep personal experiences are only a starting point for a process of conceptualisation and transformation.

Further, the question of how to solve these problems is one of practice; in my case the practice of oil painting. It is an integral part of practice rather than a topic for theory. Therefore the investigation is centred in the studio, and the final results of the project are in the form of an exhibition selected from the resulting artworks.

### A Studio Investigation

Just as *the studio* represents the site for an artist's practice, so a studio investigation implies speculation and experimentation through practice. Universally it is the method employed by visual artists to resolve concepts and to transform their concerns into artworks.

In cases where the artist is not tied to existing models or precepts and seeks to pursue an innovative art practice, she will require more of herself than a capacity to reason and the skills to follow. Thinking with things (where action often moves ahead of realisation) heavily involves spontaneous and subliminal activity. It is holistic in terms of its use of speculation, intuition and the senses as well as knowledge, analysis, synthesis and critical evaluation.

Clarification of issues is likely to be retrospective; that is, to come as the result of art practice. It can be subversive of existing norms, but is carried out within the critical framework of contemporary art practice.

Clement Greenberg in an introductory text entitled 'Modernist Painting' makes the following observations about practice and theory:

> I repeat that Modernist art does not offer theoretical demonstrations. It could be said, rather, that it converts all theoretical possibilities into empirical ones, and in doing so tests, inadvertently, all theories about art for their relevance to the actual practice and experience of art. [2]

I have been interested in finding texts related to my concerns and have developed a wider perspective on these issues. Naturally I have felt impelled to test matters through first hand experience of the environment and through art practice. (A summary of these texts is in Part 2. and a survey of the work of artists with associated concerns, whether in the terms of their content or their methodology is covered in Part 3.)

## THE PLACE OF NATURE AND THE BODY IN ART

### Modernist Ideology

A clear distinction between nature and culture has been the prevailing Modernist view and only in very recent times has this been seriously challenged. In his essay entitled 'History, Quality, Globalism'[3] Thomas McEvilley reveals that the separation of one from the other is deeply imbedded in our belief system.[4]

The separation of nature and culture can be seen in the content of Western Art from the Renaissance up to the end of the nineteenth century. Some artworks re-enforce this separation looking at wild nature as something totally outside culture while

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2 Frascina, Francis and Harrison, Charles [eds] *Modern Art and Modernism,A Critical Anthology* New York, Harper and Row, 1983, p.9

3 Included in 'Capacity: History, the world, and the Self' in *Contemporary Art and Criticism, Essays by Thomas McEvilley* [Commentary by G. Roger Denison], G & B Arts International, 1996

4 McEvilley states that 'this distinction arose in the sophistic age, that is the early fifth century BC in Athens. The idea was that nature has its own laws, which we can do nothing about, such as, say, the temperature at which water will boil. But culture, on the other hand, was believed to operate by laws that we make for it and which we are free to change in any way we want in order to engineer society into a shape that we desire. So nature was supposedly not in our power whereas culture supposedly was or is. Modernism was very deeply committed to this distinction.' McEvilly (1996), pp.119-120

others depict a meeting of nature and culture in pastoral and allegorical subjects.

### And Between: the Body

The depiction of the body in art of this period presented a problem: we are of nature and this is most obvious in the naked body. Artists desired to paint the body - particularly the female body - and this desire and its realisation had to be seen as something separate from the artist's own cultivated sensibility - Woman became Nature; Man could remain the representative of Culture.

As Manet discovered with his *Olympia*, the nude was not about real flesh and blood people.

> McEvilley is quick to point out that the ideology of modernism has come into question. It follows that the distinction between nature and culture is also in a state of flux. As part of this shifting we now see the nature-culture distinction very differently. The sophistic distinction seems to have ironically reversed. It is clear today that we can in fact control nature to a significant extent - to such an extent as to be able to destroy it, for example. or reduplicate or alter it. Now it is culture which seems out of control. We used to think of culture as the thing that would protect us from nature - from earthquakes and the famine and the cold. Now we look helplessly to nature for some cure for culture. And nature might not be there to offer a cure, having reciprocally been absorbed into culture at the same time that culture was being revealed as sunken into the chaos and randomness of nature. [5]

Today then, the issues of nature and culture are critical and unsettled. They therefore provide fertile ground for speculative thought and artistic insightfulness. Within the shifting perceptions and general re-evaluation of nature and culture, the body as subject is being re-assessed on two fronts.

1. Biotechnology is providing us with new choices about ourselves, our appearance, our offspring. Writing in the publication accompanying the exhibition *Post Human*, the curator, Jeffrey Deitch, concluded:

> Our consciousness of the self will have to undergo a profound change as we continue to embrace the transforming advances in biological and communications technologies. A new construction of self will inevitably take hold as ever more powerful body-altering techniques become commonplace. As radical plastic surgery,

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5 McEvilly [1996], pp.119-120

> computer-chip brain implants, and gene-splicing become routine, the former structure of self will no longer correspond to the new structure of the body. A new post-human organisation will develop that reflects peoples' adaptation to this new technology and its socio-economic effects.[6]

Deitch goes on to state that new approaches to self-realisation are generally paralleled by new approaches to art. *Post Human* is one of a number of thematic exhibitions based upon such issues and bringing together an international array of artists with associated concerns.[7]

2. With the breaking up of the traditional demarcation lines between nature and culture, the primal connections of self and nature can be re-established. Nature can be experienced through the body which is integral to it (and this is precisely where my own project is located).

The Tony Bond curated exhibition *BODY* [8]deals with the depictions of the naked human form in modern art. It starts with the nineteenth century Realism of Gustave Courbet and proceeds to trace differing interpretations of the body through to radical approaches used by contemporary artists. In this latter category were artists such as Louise Bourgeois, Mona Hatoum, Ann Mendieta, Cathy de Monchaux, Doris Salcedo, Cindy Sherman, Marc Quinn and Vettor Pisani. The works in the exhibition by each of these artists explore a range of concerns arising out of the current nature-culture debate. Different bodily experiences and sensations were explored visually rather than how the body looked.

### The Art of other Cultures

Many indigenous peoples have strong cultural and spiritual links with the land and this connection is expressed through their art. The significance of these art forms is readily acknowledged.

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6 Deitch, Jeffrey *Post human,* Lausanne, 1993. The exhibition was also exhibited in Turin, Athens and Hamburg between June 1992 and May 1993, p29

7 *Post Human* included artists such as Ashley Bickerton, Annette Lemieux, Kiki Smith, Charles Ray, Candy Noland, Yasumasa Morimura, Jeff Wall, Jeff Koons, Martin Kippenberger, Karen Kilimnik, Susan Etkin, and Damien Hirst, p50

8 Bond, Tony *BODY* Sydney, Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1997

Nowhere is this spirituality more powerfully expressed than in the art of the Australian Aboriginal people. For them culture and nature were never a separate matter; their links to the land were and are indivisible.

> In Aboriginal eyes the Europeans may have had a superior technology, but they used this technology in a senseless obliteration of a landscape they did not understand. To Aborigines, therefore, Europeans are a shallow people who are in constant fear not only of the people whose land they have appropriated but of the land itself.[9]

It would be difficult not to be profoundly moved by the art of the Australian Aborigines or that of many other indigenous groups. However the art of other cultures falls outside the scope of this investigation, which is firmly positioned in the contemporary art of the West. There is also the issue of inappropriate appropriation. To attempt to pick up on the art of another culture is bound to be superficial and lead inevitably to misrepresentation.

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9 Ryan, Lyndall *The Aboriginal Tasmanians* St Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 1981, p.261

## Selected Paintings From 1998-1999

Anne Morrison *Untitled*, oil on canvas
254cm x 203cm 1998

Anne Morrison *Untitled*, oil on canvas
254cm x 203cm 1998

Anne Morrison *Untitled*, oil on canvas
160cm x 203cm 1998

Anne Morrison *Untitled*, oil on canvas
254cm x 203cm 1998-99

Anne Morrison *Envelop*, oil on canvas
254cm x 203cm 1998-99

Anne Morrison *Sinuous Liquid Skin*,
oil on canvas 254cm x 203cm 1998

Anne Morrison *Untitled*, oil on canvas
254cm x 203cm 1998-99

Anne Morrison *Untitled*, oil on canvas
254cm x 203cm 1998-99

Anne Morrison *Untitled,* oil on canvas
254cm x 203cm 1998-99

Anne Morrison *Untitled,* oil on canvas
254cm x 203cm 1998-99
Documentation of work at early stage

Anne Morrison *Untitled,* oil on canvas
254cm x 203cm 1998-99

Anne Morrison *Pulse III,* oil on canvas
160cm x 203cm 1998

Anne Morrison *Untitled,* oil on canvas
254cm x 203cm 1998-99
Documentation of work at early stage

Anne Morrison *Untitled,* oil on canvas
254cm x 203cm 1998

# Part Two

## Related Art Practices

### Introduction

This brief survey is primarily intended to locate my project alongside the recent endeavours of those artists working with similar concerns and against a background of previous progress.

In common with most artists of my generation I have an ongoing engagement with recent developments and shifts in the broad field of visual art. At the same time my project has demanded a sharper focus on particular artists' works which display features associated with my immediate interest in the body and its environment. After reviewing a range of such artworks during the course of my investigation there seem to be five main categories:

1. Painters achieving expression through process. Those processes employed by the Abstract Expressionists and the contemporary painters known as the 'New Modernists', whose paintings are regarded as 'self-referential objects'; Helen Frankenthaler, Morris Louis and Ian Davenport typify these two groups of art practice.

2. Painters who are exploring metaphorical potentialities of process; Pat Steir, Moira Dryer, Judith Watson and Ian McKeever, have been chosen as exemplars.

3. Painters working with similar concerns and utilising different methodologies as seen in the work of Terry Winters and Georgia O'Keeffe.

4. Artists working with closely related concerns in other media: Ana Mendieta, Helen Chadwick and Mona Hatoum.p Often one's first contact with the work of other artists comes via the print media. However there is a big gap between a reproduction and the actual experience of the artwork. As well as scale and the presence generated by the piece, reproductions tend to smooth away vital surface details and to vary textural, tonal, chromatic and material information. Reproductions may be

sufficient to get the drift or intent, but they are not a substitute for the experience of the work *in situ*.

During the course of my study I have been fortunate to be able to travel to centres in Australia and overseas for the purpose of viewing particular works at first hand. In the material I have selected to discuss here, there are only one or two instances where I have had to rely solely upon reproductions to assess an artist's output.

### General Observations

The Abstract Expressionist movement in the middle of this century is an obvious point of reference to works in the first category given above. Out of the movement came a wide variety of techniques in the application of paint, varying the consistency of paint, and the type and preparation of the ground.

In considering a cross section of works in the second, third and fourth categories - in particular those dealing with the expression of the body and its intimate association with its surrounding environment - a number of common concerns is revealed. Common amongst these are images of fluid substances as well as demonstrations of fluidity in the actual application of paint. Water is a commonly employed metaphor creating associations with birth, growth, renewal, immersion, baptism, rhythm and, indeed, the life force itself. It is evoked by the flow of pigment across a surface or splashed and dripped onto the canvas, or referenced in the form of streams, rivers, waves, sea and surf, waterfall, and reflective pools.

A number of artists directly employ images of the body merged with land forms. At times the external body is referenced in the shape of land forms or fused with natural forms or depicted as a transparent overlay or partially hidden in shadowy depths of a landscape. These depictions may also appear as physical ruptures of the whole of the body, torn, rent, or wounded, or in decay, as stages in its return to dust. Such literal use of symbols carries closure unless it is treated in a manner which produces sufficient ambiguity to question identity or rescue the subject from obvious banality.

Cell-like structures are also used. At the micro level these cellular patterns share structural similarities with most life forms and point towards an original ancestor.

Some depict imagined structures referencing internal *landscapes* of the body. This interiority can also be found represented in the form of one of the increasing number of imaging and scanning devices employed by medical science; the x-ray, the cat-scan, the infra-red photograph, ultra sound and the inserted video tube.

In order to take this investigation of comparable concerns in contemporary art into an examination of particular artworks, samples from each of the four main categories have been selected for analysis.

## 1. Painters Achieving Expression through Process

### Helen Frankenthaler and Morris Louis

The Abstract Expressionists were centred on New York in the forties and fifties, the movement encompassed different works, some of which were not abstract in the non-figurative sense while others could not be characterised as expressionist. Abstract Expressionism was without a consensual dogma and is viewed broadly as heuristic[10] with the artists proceeding along paths of personal discovery. It was a sublime art: the artists wrote about concerns which lifted the works out of the everyday and what had become the prevalent use of archaic myth - romanticised perceptions of the primitive, of isolation and alienation.

The concerns of this project are different from those of the artists of the Abstract Expressionist movement. However there are related issues: the idioms developed in Abstract Expressionism - to give form to the unseen - particularly in the innovative use of paint and ground - and the predominance of large paintings, as well as techniques arising from Pollock's work processes, (for example: working with the canvas on the floor rather than the

10 Harrison, Charles., *Concepts of Modern Art: From Fauvism to Postmodernism*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1981, p.169

wall). These processes were later adapted by Helen Frankenthaler and Morris Louis.

Helen Frankenthaler

Fig.5 ***Portrait of a Lady in White***, 1979

In 1965 the important survey show, *New York School - The First Generation Painting of the 1940s and 1950s* held at the Los Angeles County Museum, did not include either Frankenthaler or Louis, although both artists were amply represented in Waldo Rasmussen's *Two Decades of American Painting* which toured Australia just three years later.

In her book *American Painting, The Twentieth Century*, Barbara Rose writes about Frankenthaler in the following terms:

> Perhaps the first painter to grasp the full import of Pollock's message, however, was Helen Frankenthaler. Visiting Pollock in 1951 at his home in Springs, Long Island, she saw his work in progress. Apparently she understood immediately how important it was that Pollock worked, not on the wall, but on the ground, spreading his unprimed, unstretched canvas on the floor, standing over it, walking around it and elaborating it equally from all four sides. Late in 1952, she began staining diluted oil paint into raw duck, adapting Pollock's mechanical techniques for applying paint without the use of the brush.[11]

Rose gives Frankenthaler credit for adapting Pollock's method for the benefit not only of her own work, but for colour abstraction in general. Frankenthaler gave up the convensional use of the brush and used raw canvas which absorbed the pigment directly. Rose considered that an innovation in technique inevitably leads to a 'fresh formal statement'.[12] She explains that the adoption of this method allowed Frankenthaler to crop her images at the completion stage of the painting and

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11 Rose, Barbara., *American Painting: The Twentieth Century* London, Macmillan, London, 1980 p.100

12 Rose [1980], p.100

thus to determine retrospectively this major compositional consideration.

Morris Louis

Fig.6 ***Dalet Chaf*** 1959

Rose states that Morris Louis regarded Helen Frankenthaler's contribution as creating a bridge between what Pollock reached for and what was possible. Further Rose herself credits Frankenthaler as 'the first to appreciate the manner in which Pollock's work reconciled the linear with the painterly'. Rose goes on to make a direct comparison between the paintings of Frankenthaler and Louis.

> Whereas Louis superimposes successive transparent planes, creating misty, foggy, rainbow or other weather-related atmospheric effects, Frankenthaler paints a landscape image, and tends to modulate a form from within, contrasting not only hue, but saturation and intensity. Frankenthaler's emphasis on 'liquidity' of pigment is part of Louis's drive as well, although his perhaps more masculine interest in rigorous structure and symmetry is another obvious divergence.[13]

The techniques I have adopted for this project have similarities as well as differences with those of both these artists. My canvas is pre-stretched and sealed. This permits me to rub back and, therefore, build up layers and wear them away. While my pigment is initially applied in a diluted solution, the washes are allowed to drift with some direction over the canvas leaving behind residues of pigment. As Morris Louis does in some of his paintings, I spread transparent layers one upon another but, later, my rivers of paint can be viscous and opaque. Mostly I work with the stretched canvas flat on the ground or angled to achieve the desired directional run of the wash and I work the canvas from any of its four sides. I make a limited use of the brush.

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13 Rose [1980], p.103

## Ian Davenport

Ian Davenport is regarded as one of the 'new generation of modernist painters' [14] engaging primarily with process. For example he and artists Jason Martin, Torrie Begg and others, work through structured and mechanically repetitive processes.

Davenport spills and pours household paint, controlling and directing the flow across large painted boards and repeating the process in serial fashion. Davenport has distilled something of the process of Pollock, and Louis's yet has more in common with Louis control. He refined the spill and drip technique in a pre-planned manner. In one work a single thin line of paint is poured and dispersed in an arch, curving around the perimeter of the board. In another a network of suggestive criss-crossing lines are poured in separate layers.

Ian Davenport

Fig.7 ***Untitled***, 1989

In the work illustrated here, a cascade of black and white paint is poured vertically down the grey ground from a series of nine evenly separated points. The trace of the application and sequence of layering is visible. Davenport waits until each layer is dry before spilling the next. [15] The paint is often opaque, the spills calculated, clean and precise; one layer rarely disperses or bleeds into the other. The paint may escape from his intended directional run yet, by working in series, he later edits the output selecting the more successful ones. 'The choice of colours functions as a key which facilitates the reading of the layering

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14 Muller, Brian, 'On Painting 11', *ArtMonthly* issue 179, Sept., 1994, p.18

15 Archer, Michael, review of 'Ian Davenport' *Artforum* 35 Sept-Dec., 1996 p.19

and order of the poured runs.' [16] His choice and method of painting with household paint reinforces the flatness of the surface, while also denying possible sensual or tactile associations.

These new generation modernists share a commitment to creating non-representational, self-referential objects . Brian Muller suggests that 'the viewer's reading of the physical process of painting and the materiality of the paint dominates and disrupts his/her automatic external references.' [17] Paint however can be such an emotive medium, that even if one's primary concern is with the process and the work is 'self-referential', there is the potential for other possible metaphorical associations (references). McEvilley suggests that 'ultimately the idea that references and associations are to be excluded from ... art practice are naive.' [18]

2.

### Painting and Process as Metaphor: Pat Steir, Moira Dryer, Judith Watson, and Ian McKeever

There are similarities in the processes Ian Davenport and Pat Steir employ, yet in contrast to Davenport's interest in self-referential painting, Steir discusses the development of her fluid painting technique as an extension of Pollock's technique. In particular she was interested in developing his dripping method and taking it further. Within this context she has described the waterfall paintings as

> a comment on the New York School, a dialogue and a wink. They say, "You didn't go far enough. You stopped when you saw abstraction."...I've taken the drip and tried to do something with it that the modernists denied. [They denied] The Image. [19]

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16 Archer [1996] p.19

17 Muller , Brian, 'On Painting 11', *ArtMonthly* p.18

18 McEvilley, Thomas *Art & Discontent, Theory at the Millennium,* Document text, McPherson & Company, 1991, p.43. McEvilley discusses this in the context of an essay on the formalist critics; Greenberg, Fried etc.

19 McEvilley, Thomas *Pat Steir* New York, Harry N. Abrams,1995, p.69 (McEvilley quoting Pat Steir in conversation with Brooks Adams, p69)

Pat Steir moved on from earlier expressive, gestural paintings to explore 'a semi-conceptual method designed to remove the mark from her personal control and allow it to inscribe itself on the surface.' [20] However the intentional mark is still visible where the brush touches or brushes the canvas from the point where she wants the paint to flow. The point of contact is limited, yet in some cases repeated, reinforcing its presence. Beyond this obvious point of contact (where the paint inscribes its own trace freely traversing down the painting) there lies the potential for the paint to get closer to what is being represented. And this is where, as McEvilley suggests, 'the sign and the thing are compacted, one and the same,' [21]

Pat Steir
Fig.8 ***Waterfall for a Mature Bride***, *1989*

Fluid processes explored in paint have the rich metaphorical potential to evoke fluid processes elsewhere. In Steir's case it is those things observed in nature, such as waves, waterfalls and rain. The paintings themselves are an exploration of processes occurring in nature. Similar to the process employed by Davenport in *Untitled* 1989, Steir touches the vertical canvas with a brush laden with paint. Beyond this obvious point of contact lies the potential for the paint to get closer to what is being represented; that point where the paint inscribes its own line, freely traversing down the canvas. Davenport uses thicker household paints while Steir works with more fluid and thinned oil paints. Steir repeats the process and the floods of white paint against the dark ground, together with the process of the running, trickling paint, evoke something of the vertical flow of water as observed in waterfalls.

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20 McEvilley [1995], p.65
21 McEvilley [1995], p.65

## Moira Dryer

Moira Dryer's paintings have some similarities with others within the tradition of Modern Abstraction. Dryer acknowledges these associations suggesting that 'it is the re-assimilation and reorganizing of how we percieve the imagery that is the new frontier.' [22] Dryer pours, spills, disperses the paint. The fluid paint leaves a trace across the surface perhaps angled vertically enabling the paint to run and disperse, similar to Steir and Davenport,. Steir's work alludes to the elemental forces in nature. Dryer's work however, perhaps through her emotive colour and her more ambiguous pictorial space, implicates something of *body* with the land. The stains and floods of paint suggest a damaged, ambiguous terrain.

Moira Dryer

Fig.9 ***Damage and Desire***,1991

This work is painted on wood which has had holes drilled into it. Dryer has spilled, poured, dripped purple and black washes of paint, from a vertical position. There is a suggestion that the paint is leaking, or spilling out from these holes; like puncture marks, or wounds, cut and bleeding. The patterning of the wood grain, like a damaged skin, is visible beneath a field of raining droplets of paint. Each droplet of paint has dispersed, bled over, even seeped into the grain of the wood. The surface is literally damaged, evocative of both the body and the landscape. Rosetta Brooks suggests the work 'embodies the space of the threshold - a space *between* spaces, between the body and the world, between night and day.'[23] The works are caught - suspended at a point - where they may begin to reveal something.

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22 Brooks, Rosetta, 'Dream Catchers', *ArtForum,* Summer 1992, p.86 quoting Moira Dryer, in 'An Emotive Identity,' *Tema Celeste* nos. 32-33, Autumn 1991

23 Brooks [1992] p.86

In this regard it is interesting to note that Georgia O'Keeffe often looked to the 'space between spaces... between buildings, or bones, spending time picturing the not there... " the sky through the hole [and] the slits in nothingness " (to use her own phrases)...'. [24]

In dissolving the solidity of the world this ambiguity of space can be evocatively explored, addressing the space 'between spaces'. Often for Monet and Turner this space was where the water and sky merged. McEvilley describes Monet's and Turner's work as on the verge of abstraction, 'the watery element, with its multiple ambiguities about presence, reflection, motion, and stillness, is especially an interface between abstraction and representation.' [25] It is interesting that the work of both Monet and Turner had an influence on Frankenthaler.

Dryer's work recalls for me the experience of visiting Colmar to see the Isenheim Altarpiece by Grunewald. The body in pain was made visible through Grunewald's rendering of the diseased, wounded flesh. The actual

Moira Dryer

Fig.10 top: ***Deep Sleep***, 1991

Fig.11 bottom right: ***More Random Fire***, 1991

Fig.12 bottom left: ***Revenge***, 1991

physical substance of paint and its metaphorical association with flesh, with skin, emphasised this further. The depiction of this

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24 Chave, Anna, 'O'Keefe and the Masculine Gaze', *Art in America*, Jan.1990, p124

25 McEvilley [1995], p61

damaged, sore and leaking skin, caused me to confront my own physicality, materiality and vulnerability. My response to Dryer's work is similar. Yet the less figurative nature of Dryer's work and the lightness of the paint-staining allows a more open reading.

### Ian McKeever

Ian McKeever has spoken about the significance of the land/body metaphor in his paintings. He has explored processes in paint to evoke processes in nature and to suggest something of his own experience in the landscape. McKeever is widely travelled, and discusses his experience of solitude in wilderness areas. He works from these experiences when back in the studio. His early work developed from placing his paintings out in the natural environment to be affected by the elements. He has worked between photography and painting; painting over photographs of the landscape; leaving gaps between the layers of gestural brushstrokes to expose fragments of the photograph underneath.

The gestural brush mark was later replaced by more fluid applications of paint. In a large series of diptyches, McKeever placed the paintings on the floor to work. A dialogue was then developed between the two square formatted paintings. One panel was painted primarily black, and the substance of the paint was heavier, reworking an earlier painting.

Ian McKeever

Fig.13 ***Trilobite***, 1985-88

The painting on the left emphasises the surface, the inorganic, the mineral, and is suggestive of the the fossil trace. Its partner, placed directly against it, was painted with lighter tones the emphasis being white, with only subtle traces of black and grey creating a more open, spatial, fluid work, relating to the organic,

the biological.[26] McKeever re-emphasises this contrast in his titles. Thick, sludgy layers of viscous paint, poured over a previous work, dry to resemble the fractures found within rock. Evidence of a landscape, once in the process of forming, in motion; yet directly evocative of substances, suspended, caught and solidified. Vivienne Bennett suggests the work is like 'a fossil record of gesture inscribed and revealed.'[27]The monochromatic nature of the paintings places less emphasis on a bodily presence, and more on the processes occurring within the landscape.[28]

### Judith Watson

Judith Watson creates ambiguous spaces within the fluid grounds of her unstretched paintings which suggest a floating lightness. Within these she depicts a variety of clearly controlled articulated lines of chalk or paint evoking other forms. These are sometimes strange and unfamiliar objects. Yet others are more recognisable, taking the form of bone, or an outlines of a figure. They seem to float above the fluid underpainting.

The works often evoke landscapes of water or earth or of less recognisable material substances. This is where she seeks to tell her story, perhaps relating to her aboriginal heritage or perhaps referring to her visits to other countries and things to which she has responded. In this painting 'between islands' she suggest an interior form, an island, which could also be viewed as a gap, a hole, an opening between one plane and another, a space between spaces. Over this form an outline of a possible female form is drawn in chalk, The work further suggests that to be 'between experiences is to be engulfed by an elemental

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26 Biggs, Lewis, 'The Shape of Time' in *McKeever - Ian McKeever Paintings* 1978-1990, Exhibition, Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, 1990, p.46

27 Bennett, Vivienne*The Staffa Project, A Collaboration,* Ian McKeever and Thomas Joshua Cooper, The Harris Museum and Art Gallery, 1987, p.7

28 Mark Finch highlights the 'continual mesh of narratives around his work', as McKeever speaks of his painting as being specifically 'of itself' yet also to a search for 'equivalents to an idea of nature which he associates with painting'.
Finch, Mark, Painting as Vigilance, *Contemporary Visual Arts, Magazine,* issue 15, p.20

force, in a space where mapping of terrain is almost impossible.'[29]

Judy Watson

Fig.14 ***between islands***, 1994

Watson discusses that being 'between experiences' is for her to be 'between traditional and urban Aboriginal culture, black and white, India and Australia, Northern European and Asia-Pacific, and so on.' [30] The work also hovers between figuration and abstraction. She describes her use of dots inscribed on the painting's surface as 'about always being in a constant state of flux.' [31]

## 3. The Bodily Landscape: Terry Winters and Georgia O'Keeffe

Interested in the processes of growth in nature, Terry Winters brings together isolated seed and cell-like forms in heavily worked and encrusted painterly surfaces. These are heavily rendered and static, made visible through the 'effects of emerging technologies and scientific developments' affecting 'the changing nature of visibility'[32]

In this work Winters articulates cell-like forms, individually and in clusters. Thick paint is 'drawn' onto layered ground of predominantly white/grey and ochre. Some of the cell forms

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29 Lynn, Victoria, 'Judy Watson: Map/Dream/Journey',*Antipodean Currents; Ten Contemporary Artists from Australia*, New York, Guggenheim Museum, 1995, p.106

30 Lynn [1995], p.106

31 Lynn [1995], quoting Watson, p106

32 Philips Lisa, *Terry Winters,* New York, Whitney Museum of American Art,1992, p.19 Philips is here indirectly quoting Crary [1992] pp.1-24

exist within the ground of the painting submerged under a field of greys. Others exist more in relief, above as if on another plane, closer to the surface. The paint is sculpted into forms, 'to articulate cell partitions and boundary walls' [33]. The weight of the brush heavily laden with paint is visible. We can observe where the paint has been dragged, oozing out on either side of the brush. A particular form has been evoked while simultaneously leaving a trace of the actual brush width, exposing part of the ground of the painting underneath.

Terry Winters

Fig.15 ***Double Gravity***, 1984

I find myself caught up within the heavy, weighted physical presence of the brush marks drawing these organic seed or cell-like forms. Some have been re-worked through painting in between the black, white and grey lines drawn in paint, or by layering more paint around them, to redefine the forms. Rather than cells caught as if floating or suspended, within liquid, we have something more akin to a fossil trace, a cast, as if sculpted, or caught suspended within the solidity of stone. Winters describes his intention;

> I want my paintings to function both as an illustration of something outside itself and as a self-contained material fact whose physicality amplifies and undermines this illustrative aspect. [34]

The works relate more to the biological and botanical illustrations which Winters has often referenced; as though fragments, separated and isolated for study.

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33 Philips [1992], p.19

34 Philips [1992], p.21, quoting Winters in *The 40th Biennal Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting*, Exhibition Catalogue Washington, D.C, The Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1987, p.68

Lisa Phillips suggests 'there is a sense of great rotation and animation imparted by the active brush work and surface energy of the field,' [35]yet this energy refers more to the brush mark, than to the energy of the imagined nature of the forms themselves. The material presence of the forms exists, heavily sculpted upon and separate from the painted ground. They remain isolated objects, pertaining less to the ground which only just begins to reveal subtle veilings, passages, layers of paint within which forms begin to emerge and dissolve. This suggests the methods employed in much scientific investigation, isolating a fragment from the whole.

### Georgia O'Keeffe

Both Winters and O'Keeffe have blurred the boundaries but in different ways, in their reading of the body and the land in their paintings. Winters focuses on the micro-cell and seed-like forms; O'Keeffe's work oscillates between the macro and micro, blurring the boundaries between the body and the landscape. Both observe different connecting forms in nature, within the landscape and the body.

Georgia O'Keeffe

Fig.16 ***Black Place***, 1944

With the use of visual metaphor Georgia O'Keeffe has explored an intimate landscape, by implicating the presence of the body, drawing upon her own bodily experience. Cropped paintings of flowers framed within the canvas, focus on interior details. The folding and unfolding of the petals suggest the subtle metaphorical evocation of the body's delicate folds. Forms are created similar to the curves and folds of rock; the land and mountains shaped, carved by the elements.

35 Philips [1992] p.21

In exploring different ways of seeing and experiencing the landscape, she investigates the connections between different forms in nature, alluding to the underlying processes. In works devoid of the horizon line, an interesting spatial ambiguity is created with an uncertainty of scale. Spiralling, sweeping patterns can draw the eye simultaneously inwards toward a more intimate interior world, and outwards toward a distanced external aerial view of the landscape.

Georgia O'Keeffe

Fig.17 ***It was Yellow and Pink 11***, 1960

There are ambiguities of scale and form in a number of O'Keeffe's works. She employs a very controlled and smooth application of the medium, investigating the visible connecting shape and form of things. In doing so she avoids any metaphorical implication of the process to emphasise the tactile nature of her subject matter. In a sense she denied those things, flattening out the forms.

## 4. Artists working with closely related concerns in other media.

The permeable nature of the body's boundary is explored in a variety of particular works, directly and metaphorically. Some of the work places an emphasis on contemporary issues relating to the blurring of boundaries between nature and culture and the body and technology. Internal and external landscapes are evoked, collapsing one into the other.

Ana Mendieta
fig.18 four earth/body works
from the "***Silueta***" series,
1973-80

## Ana Mendieta

By leaving a subtle trace of her body in the landscape, in the *Silueta* series, 1973-80, like a shadow or imprint, Ana Mendieta marks a temporary intervention into the landscape, and comments on the relationship between the body and the land. In the top left work, she has traced the outline of her body lying down upon the land. Removing the sand or earth, further emphasises her form dug into the gound. By casting the shape of her body embedded into the sand, or constructing the outline of her body she marks her presence, which will linger after she departs. However rather than imposing something unconnected to that particular location, she often uses what is present. Moulding the earth, the soil, leaves, twigs, until the natural elements, the wind and rain, remove the trace of her presence, returning the area to its previous state. The work was documented, preserved via the photograph. The vulnerable and finite nature of both the body and the land is implied yet the bodily presence disappears and the land remains. Mendieta leaves only a gentle impression on the landscape. (*Our* dramatic human interventions often change and alter the landscape more permanently.)

Mendieta evokes other possible relationships between the body and land which may relate to our previous histories and myths: forms of ritual which have resonance with a time when humans regarded themselves as part of nature. The intimate and

temporary inscription of her body's contact suggests a more empathetic relationship and understanding of land. The work is in contrast to much of today's earth art which is much larger in scale.

### Helen Chadwick

In the work illustrated Chadwick explores less direct, physical materiality as she brings the landscape and the cellular together working with digital/photographic imagery.

Helen Chadwick

Fig.19 ***Viral Landscapes, no 1***, 1988-89

This work is part of a series of digitally manipulated photographs of the body's cells layered over photographs of the landscape. On the left of each of the horizontal landscape images, all of which are rugged, eroded coastlines, are panels a third of the size. These are made up of flat planes of bright colour; red, pink, yellow, peach and blue from which the cells, (one imagines bacteria, viruses etc) seem to spill. The luminosity of the artificial light and dyes makes the cellular image more discernible across the terrain of the landscape. The eye scans from left to right following the cells, or viruses, as spread out from the coloured panels across the landscape. The body is present yet only through an exposed minute fragment. This fragment is separated from the body, floating freely across the landscape. [36]

Chadwick discusses her own body in the context of this work referring to the dissolution of the body's boundary. She writes:

> At its most intimate, the abolition of frontiers renders my body up as cells and tissue, 'vulnerable to manifold incursions'. Released from the bonds of forms and gender, flesh is volatile and free to wander in an aetiology of complete abandon. This

36 similar to the view under the lens of the microscope.

> errantry cannot be arrant, a pathological condition in a moralising space, for here in a scenario of mutual being the ideals of purity, and thus contagion, no longer apply. Previously, as punishment for vagrancy, the inevitable final closure would be death, but disintegration has already occurred. The living integrates with other in an infinite continuity of matter, and welcomes difference not as damage but potential. The story of susceptibility is reinscribed, affirmed in new dynamic rhythms as a counter offensive to the terminal association of sexuality and disease. Spliced together by data processing these are not ruined catastrophic surfaces but territories of a prolific encounter, the exchange of living and informational systems at the shoreline of culture.[37]

The cells are depicted as if to suggest that they too are caught up in the turbulence of the scene, as though participating in the changing nature of the external environment. Through the process of digitally layering the cellular image over the landscape image, the collage employed in this work re-enforces the separate nature of the components. The cells seem to exist above, upon, the surface of the landscape photograph.

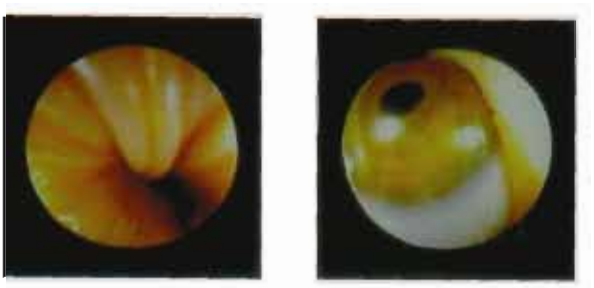
### Mona Hatoum

In a work entitled *Corps Etranger* (*foreign body*) Mona Hatoum scans the interior and exterior of her own body by utilising the invasive imaging processes of endoscopy and coloscopy used in medicine.The film is viewed inside a circular room within the gallery. The space is small, dark and claustrophobic. Five or six people at a time can enter through two openings. You stand in close proximity with the person next to you, as the film is projected onto the floor in a circular format.

The camera scans the minute surface detail of the exterior of the body as you listen to the rhythm of someone breathing. Because of the tiny detail the camera exposes, one is never quite sure of the exact location of the camera upon the body. This seemed unimportant, yet as the work continued its significance became more apparent. The artist was controlling not only the space, but the movement of the camera, and the viewer's gaze upon the body. The camera enters an orifice of the body and proceeds on its journey into its deepest recesses. The experience is fascinating yet

37 Chadwick, Helen, *Enfleshings*, [with essay by Marina Warner], London, Secker & Warburg, 1989, p.97

yet the confined space and the presence of other people is unsettling and confronting. The artist was exposing the body inside and out, the body of another, yet it held a reminder of one's own materiality and vulnerability.



Mona Hatoum

Fig.*20* detail from ***Corps etranger*** (Foreign Body),1994

The journey through the interior of the body is accompanied by the sound of a heartbeat. We look down into the recesses of the body with a sense of vertigo, as though about to fall forwards; drawn towards the film through the speed and fluid movement of the camera, as it scans deeper and deeper into the body. Becoming aware of this I was compelled to try and stand back. It was difficult to keep my balance on the perimeter of the film and I felt I was being pulled into an never ending visceral tunnel. Within this context 'the viewer is both predatory explorer and innocent witness, voyeur and victim,'[38] and is invited to contemplate her own physicality through reflection upon her reaction in that confined space.

There is a sense of vulnerability and fragility in all of these works, in that the body is imaged as a landscape/terrain, as something separated from itself. We are confronted by the fragmented body; cells imaged, dispersed across the landscape; the trace of a body's outline upon the earth, a fragmented clinical view of the body's interior and exterior terrain.

My own work while acknowledging a connection with a number of works by these artists, is also addressing the permeable nature of the body's boundary, yet, as an arena in which a connection between the body and the land is explored.

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38 Morris, Frances, 'Mona Hatoum', in Stuart Morgan and Frances Morris, *Rites of Passage, Art For The End of the Twentieth Century*, London, Tate Gallery, 1996, p.103

# Part Three

## Related Texts

### Introduction

My work has developed from experiences in the landscape in various areas but particularly in the Australian inland (desert and bush) and the Tasmanian "Wilderness." In this section I will look at the texts which have helped me to come to a better understanding of how to think more deeply and more clearly about my intentions and my working practice. The work has evolved from very different experiences in cities and in geographically and physically remote areas.

I have been interested in the ways in which we move within, and respond to, different places; how some areas may seem to restrict or hamper movement, while others suggest or allow a greater freedom. The spaces and how we move within them bring different responses and a heightened awareness of different land-forms and experiences of less visible phenomena.

The discussion of texts begins with brief references to authors and works which have thrown light upon my responses to the land and my approach to painting.

In *Flesh and Stone* Richard Sennett explores the history of the city told through people's bodily experiences, in part investigating the idea of the passive body within the developing urban environment[39]. Paul Virilio in *Open Sky,* reflects on the impact upon the body of new forms of communication and transportation. 'Electronic perspective',[40] he suggests, has resulted in a less physical form of orientation, which has created an environment suited to a 'forgetting [of] *the essence of the path, the journey*'.[41] Roland Barthes contrasts his journey within familiar western cities with that of Tokyo, where the signs and symbols we often rely on, such as street names and

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39 Sennett Richard, *Flesh and Stone, The Body and The City in Western Civilisation*, London and Boston, Faber and Faber, 1994. p.18

40 Virilio, Paul, *Open Sky*, [translated by Julie Rose], London & New York, Verso, 1997, p.36

41 Virilio [1997], p.23 (author's emphasis)

numbers, do not exist.[42] Moving within this unfamiliar city without the assistance of 'readable' signs is a more 'highly visual and sensuous' experience similar to the way we would negotiate the 'bush or jungle.'[43]

The history of humanity's changing relationship to the landscape in western culture is a central theme in *Landscape and Memory*. I have found this monograph significant because Schama takes us through many of our nature myths and stories. He argues that, in our desire to re-shape nature, something of the connection *to* nature has been lost, hidden beneath many different narratives. He searches 'below our conventional sight level, to recover the veins of myth and memory that lie beneath the surface'. [44]

The metaphor of the storm pervades the many areas explored by Paul Carter in *The Lie of the Land.* In a sense, Carter like Schama takes on the role of the archaeologist, uncovering different ways of relating to the land through a fascinating reflection on, and critique of, colonial history. He suggests that our awareness of the poetics of the storm and of the audible and other rhythms of the landscape can open up alternatives to the western tradition of invasion and occupation,[45] where that perspective is distant and objective.

My own developing awareness and interpretation of the landscape has evolved through a more intimate bodily experience, events and processes occurring within the landscape in flux which cannot be easily defined and mapped.

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42 Barthes, Roland., *Empire of Signs*, [translated by Richard Howard], New York, Hill and Wang, 1982, p.36

43 Duncan,S.James and Duncan,G.Nancy., 'Ideology and Bliss: Roland Barthes and the Secret Histories of Landscape' in *Writing Worlds:Discourse, Text and Metaphor in the Representation of Landscape* [edited by Trevor J.Barnes and James S.Duncan], London p.33

44 Schama, Simon, *Landscape and Memory*, Fontana Press, New York, Harper Collins, 1996, p.14

45 Carter, Paul, *The Lie of The Land*, London, Boston, Faber and Faber, 1996

Barabara Bender[46] and W.J.T Mitchell,[47] in the collections of essays they have edited, consider the meaning of landscape from both historical and contemporary views. Each has brought together writers from a variety of disciplines with different perspectives on the idea of 'landscape' as less an 'artefact', an 'object' or a 'text' to be read at a fixed moment in time and, rather. as continually changing; in the 'process of construction and reconstruction'; as a 'dynamic medium in which we live and move and have our being'.

Gregory Bateson in *Mind and Nature* reflects upon man's changing responses to the natural world, to the increased distancing and to our feeling of alienation and separation.[48] Peter Fuller in his essay 'Geography of Mother Nature'[49], suggests that, from his Western European perspective, paintings of the Australian Desert provide a potent metaphor for our contemporary relationships with the changing landscape, For him 'all of us live, on the periphery of a potential desert... ill at ease with the nature that nurtures us, constantly worried that through our own actions we will cause it to fail.'[50]

It has been salutary to reflect on these different perspectives, on why universally there is this developing sense of separation from nature; and to reflect on the need to explore possible future relationships, between man and nature, which are less exploitative and more empathetic.

Essentially this will be done most fruitfully through the visual arts and through the insights of creative and poetic writing.

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46 Bender, B. (eds) *Landscape, Politics and Perspectives*, Oxford, Berg, 1993, p2-3.

47 Mitchell, W.J.T. (ed) *Landscape and Power*, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1994. p.1

48 Bateson, Gregory, *Mind and Nature: a necessary unit*, London, (S.I.): Fontana/Collins, 1980, p27

49 Fuller Peter, 'The geography of Mother Nature' in *The Iconography of Landscape: essays on the symbolic representation, design and use of past environments*, [ed by Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels], Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988

50 Fuller, Peter [1988],p28

Pablo Neruda [51] and Italo Calvino [52], for instance, are two of the authors who, through their texts, have widely influenced western thinking.

Neruda in his political and historical writings, and also in his poems on nature, has sought to disrupt 'the wall of silence round crystal, wood and stone'; in a sense 'to restore a sense of wonder, of the sacredness of the natural world.' In "Estravagario," he declared that he did not want to name things but 'to mix them up' [53]

Calvino would have us seek 'a different space'. Lightness, he suggests, could be one of the great literary values of significance for the future and he points out that

> 'Some literary inventions are impressed on our memories by their verbal implications rather than by their actual words.' [54]

All about us there are processes and activities continually occurring in the environment of which we are a part; the flow of the river, the air, the wind, the cycle of life, of growth and decay. Life is never static, it is in a continual process of transition and transformation. [55]

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51 Neruda, Pablo, *Selected Poems: A Bilingual Edition* [Edited by Nathaniel Tarn, Translated by Anthony Kerrigan, W.S. Merwin, Alistair Reid, and Nathaniel Tarn, with an introduction by Jean Franco], Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1975

52 Calvino, Italo, *Six Memos for the Next Millenium* [translated by Patrick Creagh, Jonathan Cape, London

53 Neruda, [1975], pp.13, 21
Neruda wanted to 'mix them up'.
Until all the light in the world
has the oneness of the ocean,
a generous, vast wholeness
a crackling, living fragrance,
From the poem, Too many names, (p.179)

54 Calvino [1992],
Whenever humanity seems condemned to heaviness, I think I should fly like Perseus into a different space. I don't mean escaping into dreams or into the irrational. I mean that I have to change my approach, look at the world from a different perspective, with a different logic and with fresh methods of cognition and verification. The images of lightness that I seek should not fade away like dreams dissolved by the realities of present and future. (p.17)

55 Refer to journal extracts for the connection of these events with my own experiences, in relation to my work.

## The River And The City

I see the river as a metaphor for my journey out of the city and I imagine the flow of the water dissolving the solidity and density of the city as I begin to experience a different sense of space.

We become drawn to waterways within the city, perhaps by their continual flow and renewal. They are 'water arteries that flow not only through space but also through time'.[56] They can link the land-locked cities with the expansiveness of oceans. Their 'positions remain essentially the same'... yet 'endlessly changing, endlessly flowing'. [57] An interchange of forces occurs as the water flows out of the mouth of the river into the sea. I often feel compelled to follow the river out to sea, perhaps as Moore suggests to 'confront its eternity within the context of the limited' [58]

Ben Okri, in *Astonishing the gods,* describes a city in which the buildings seemed ' to hang in mid-space... They appeared to rest on nothing, suspended.... made of an ephemeral substance... He was puzzled by the monumentality of things and their apparent lightness'. [59]
The narrator in this story begins to feel lighter, and weight and insignificant parts of his being dissolve, [60] as the solidity of the city dissolves. The familiar fades, to reveal a different sense of space, in which things become more acutely perceptible. Okri's story is similar to Calvino's reading of lightness, the once familiar weighted city becomes more fluid; buildings become 'liquid'; fountains turn into 'fragrances'; cathedrals into 'harmonies'.

I am reminded of Monet's paintings, in particular his transformation of the solidity of the cathedral buildings at Rouen: a struggle, that Bachelard describes, as being between 'stone and air'. 'Part of the periphery evaporates in gentle

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56 Moore. W. Charles and Lidz, Jane, 'Rivers of Connection, Canals of Communication', *Water and Architecture*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1994, p.77
57 Moore [1994] p.77
58 Moore [1994] p.160
59 Okri, Ben., *Astonishing the Gods*, Phoenix, 1995, p.8-9
60 Okri [1995], p.10

disobedience to the geometry of lines' and the building seems to dissolve into 'a truly airy thing - airy in its substance, airy to the very core of the masonry.' The materiality of the paint its very substance, its presence and tactility draw the viewer intimately back to the detailed stonework affected by the elemental forces of nature. 'Out of a still world of stone he created a drama of blue light.'[61]

Claude Monet

Fig.21 ***Rouen Cathedral: the west portal and the Tourd'Albane, morning affect***, 1894

The Rouen Cathedral was painted not to address its solidity, at a fixed moment in time: Monet was engaged more with the process of change, and for him, a primary concern was the changing light.

The river in contrast to the buildings within the city, is constantly moving, never static, it touches and affects the land; it is a source of life, a resource becoming 'the interface between land, water, air and sun.' [62] (Yet it can also be a source of devastation, and can itself be devastated.)

Rivers within cities, have something in common with the little pockets of green spaces, such as parks, squares, and commons. They help the urban dweller to maintain a connection with the forces of nature, with those things often lost, or remote, or less perceptible in the city.

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61 Bachelard, Gaston.,'The Painter Solicited by the Elements' in *The Right to Dream,* [translated by J.A.Underwood], Dallas, Texas, The Dallas Institute, 1970, p.26

62 Mann, Roy, *Rivers In The City*, New York, Praeger Publishers, 1973, p.14

## The Separation Of The Senses

In the city we find our way by the recognition of familiar signs and symbols.[63] In this sense we are primarily relying on visual triggers. Perception develops from a reliance on the interaction of all the senses, yet vision, within this context, tends to dominate other senses.

In *Flesh and Stone* Richard Sennett explores a 'history of the city told through people's bodily experience'. [64] He discusses the implications of what he describes as the sensory deprivation often found in modern spaces; 'the tactile sterility afflicting the urban environment'. The human body, he suggests has become pacified and desensitised.

> This great geographic shift of people into fragmented spaces....amorphous spaces, suburban housing tracts. shopping malls, office campuses, and industrial parks... has had a larger effect in weakening the sense of tactile reality and pacifying the body .[65]

The journey to and from the city, the journey from one country to another - often by car or plane - consists primarily of the physical experience of the points of departure and arrival. In between these points we often remain stationary, in a physical sense 'passive'. It is the world around us that passes us by, whether at a great distance or rapid speed. Our experience of the world within this context becomes less sensual and more visual. 'The modern mobile individual has suffered a kind of tactile crisis: motion has helped to desensitise the body.' [66] In creating 'greater freedom' of movement within the city and across the world, the journey becomes less physical, less stimulating.

We could contrast this with the river, previously the main network of communication and information. Today information and communication flow in the form of invisible electric impulses.

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63 Barthes [1982], p.36
64 Sennett [1994], p.17
65 Sennett [1994], p.17
66 Sennett [1994], p.256

Computer technologies offer us a way to be 'telepresent to the whole world,'[67] while we remain immobile. This technology has created a new form of perception; our engagement with the world places more emphasis on the visual, while making other senses partially redundant. Physical distances become irrelevant, as technology brings us closer to other places through the world of images and information. Individuals now 'meet' and communicate in cyberspace. Simultaneously this distances us from the complex and layered experiences of textures, irregular surfaces, smells and sounds. Virilio suggests, 'there exists [now] an unnoticed phenomenon of pollution of the world's dimensions'. He argues that 'the optical density of the landscape is rapidly evaporating', and that the 'geophysical environment is undergoing an alarming diminishing of its 'depth of field.' [68] This he says is having a negative effect on our relationship with the environment.

This sensory deprivation was brought home to me in my recollection of London which was dominated by subterranean experiences. Journeys were mapped out, by deciphering and following a network of interwoven coloured lines marking the underground railway, designed to assist and ease the circulation of people around the city. As I became familiar with the system, I found I did not have to really think or to connect with anything other than abstract signs. Movements were automatic, the everyday experience of the city was mapped out by these isolated points of reference. As Sennett suggests this reinforces in us a sense of 'disconnection.' Moving through our constructed environment often entails less physical effort, diminishing our engagement.[69] He further makes a comparison between this kind of everyday, repetitive, numbing travel, and the effects of mass media.

> The traveller, like the television viewer, experiences the world in narcotic terms; the body moves passively, desensitised in space, to destinations set in a fragmented and discontinuous urban geography. [70]

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67 Virilio [1997], p.25
68 Virilio [1997], p.22
69 Sennett [1994], p.18
70 Sennett [1994], p.18

It was not until I came to Australia that I realised just how much this feeling of being weighted down by the heavy and oppressive skies and engulfed by the concrete towers of London had affected me. The blue sky there was never really visible, often concealed beneath a haze which hung heavily over the city, creating a sense of claustrophobia. This feeling of claustrophobia *above* ground was compounded by the daily experience of the journey within the tunnels underground.

The urban has become the recipient of the 'negative attitudes to wilderness'; large cities have been termed: 'the modern wilderness'; the 'concrete jungle'; the 'modern equivalent of the medieval forest populated by demons.'[71]

Usually the western city, with its particular, often familiar, set of signs and symbols, street names, and maps can be easily deciphered to help us move about the city. As mentioned previously, in *Empire of Signs* Roland Barthes contrasts this familiar process with another experience, within the unfamiliar Japanese city, and he describes his orientation within the eastern city as more of a 'gestural practice'.[72] James and Nancy Duncan suggest that Barthes

> sees orientation in Tokyo as more akin to highly visual and sensuous way [of] finding in the jungle or the bush, whereas in the West it is a more abstract, cerebral experience sustained by the 'printed culture', rather than the 'gestural practice' .[73]

Barthes suggests

> You must orient yourself in it not by book, by address, but by walking, by sight, by habit, by experience; here every discovery is intense and fragile, it can be repeated or recovered only by memory of the trace it has left in you'[74]

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71 Short, J.Rennie, 'Wilderness' in *Imagined Country:Environment, Culture and Society*, London, Routledge, 1992, pp. 26-27
This is picked up by Linda Michaels in the 1998 Perspecta *Between Art and Nature* when she argues that our 'urban environment may now be considered as being in some way our "natural habitat",' in her essay 'Natural Selection', p35

72 Barthes [1982], p.36

73 Duncan,S.James and Duncan,G.Nancy., 'Ideology and Bliss:Roland Barthes and the Secret Histories of landscape' in *Writing Worlds:Discourse, text and metaphor in the representation of landscape* [edited by Trevor J.Barnes and James S.Duncan], London, Routledge, 1992, p.33

74 Barthes [1982], p.36

Barthes' discussion is relevant to my arguments in terms of the body's memory in reading landscapes. In the city we are in a sense protected from the forces of nature. Journeys within the city can become mundane, insignificant, an 'abstract' automatic gesture. The desire to feel something more 'visual and sensuous' leads to the journey out of the familiar; as if seeing a river for the first time and being overcome by the desire to follow it . [75]

### Land Body Metaphor

Throughout the ages humans have developed 'correspondences between the physical body of man and the physical features of the universe'.[76] Rivers have been metaphorically linked to the body, creating an 'image of the flow of life', [77] of the lungs breathing life into the city. The river was once a city's lifeblood, a fluid network. In ancient societies rivers were a source of mystery; [78] and, linked to the mystery, they were also feared; viewed as 'carriers of havoc and death,'[79] Man's desire to tame and control nature, together with a growing ability to reach the source and to tame the river, imbued him with a sense of power.

Different myths and stories of the river as a creative force were expanded through the centuries by other events and narratives. Rivers became tamed; 'imagined as lines of power and time carrying empires from source to expansive breadth.' [80]

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75 As David Malouf in *Remembering Babylon* writes:
The very habit and faculty that makes apprehensible to us what is known and expected dulls our sensitivity to other forms, even when the most obvious. We must rub our eyes and look again, clear our minds of what we are looking at to see what is there.
Malouf, David *Remembering Babylon*, London, Vintage, 1994, p130.

76 Stewart, Susan, *On Longing: Narratives of the Minature, the Gigantic the Souvenir, the Collection*, Duke University Press, Durham 1993, p.129

77 Schama [1996] p.261

78 Schama [1996] p.262

79 Schama [1996] p.260

80 Schama [1996] p.261

Ch'iu Ying

Fig.22 ***Emperor Kuang-wu of the Eastern Han Dynasty Fording a River***,1506 - 1522

River imagery not only evokes forces and lines of power but an almost infinite range of other associations; some of which are suggested in early Chinese landscape paintings. There we observe forms such as mountains, rocks, rivers and streams, all suggesting a lightness; caught in the process of emerging from the ground or perhaps dissolving into it. The river often links the space between the top and bottom in these paintings. 'The Chinese word for this connecting void is ch'i, (filled with energy) the same word used by acupuncturists as they look for the energised connections in the human body..,' [81] There is a sense of flux in the paintings; perhaps the feeling of this ch'i; the energised connection between things, is conveyed more clearly/*poetically* than the solidity of the observed forms, such as the mountains and rocks.

In traditional Chinese landscape painting the interplay between the suggested close and distant points, is more fluid, less fixed than in much western art. Objects appear to be in the process of disappearing into the ground. The crevices in the mountains are similar to the cracks in the rocks and the forms of the rivers.

81 Moore [1994], p 77

The development of cities has sometimes involved the redirection of rivers and streams underground, together with the felling of ancient trees. But today we are beginning to recognise the significance of a sense of place in planning a city and the importance of retaining some connection with local history; [79] of allowing the rivers and streams to flow, trees to grow. These ideas of flow and change are integral to my own work and the metaphor of the river is central to my approach.

Because of my interest in evoking a more fluid connection between the body and the environment, I have spent time in places where one can experience and observe those links more acutely. Paradoxically when we are surrounded by things (structures) which seem fixed, solid or static, (as within the city,) the body often senses a greater feeling of 'disconnection' from its environment.

As with the Chinese landscapes the space within my paintings is ambiguous, familiar yet also unfamiliar, uncertain, destabilised. As I journey, seeking to explore the spaces between the near and the far, there is a fluctuation between multiple possibilities of the intimate and distant experience, of the micro and macro,

### Landscape As Object Or Text

'The term landscape was coined in an emergent capitalist world to evoke a particular set of elite experiences - a particular 'way of seeing'.[80] This often involved a form of distancing by the observer from what was being observed, a distancing which was psychological as well as (sometimes) physical, as evident in geography's history. In the writing of the land the visual was of primary importance; it evolved during imperialist times, from a western European perspective and often 'implie[d] a specific way of looking.'[81] The geographers 'made no connection between the world as it was seen and the position of the viewer,

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79 Goode, David, Introduction: 'A Green Renaisance', in*Green Cities. Ecologically Sound Approaches to Urban Space.* Edited by David Gordon. Montreal, New York, Black Rose Books, 1990, p.4

80 Bender, B. (ed) *Landscape, Politics and Perspectives*, Oxford, Providence, Berg, 1993, Introduction

81 Rose, Gillian, *Feminism and Geography, The Limits of Geographical Knowledge*, Polity Press, 1993 p.87

and the truth of what they saw was established by that claim to objectivity.'[85] The landscape was viewed as an 'object' or a 'view' constructed from a distant or a fixed point.

In the case of the European colonisation of Australia, the explorers and geographers who mapped out new territories were employing a 'particular way of seeing', of viewing and interpreting the land. The Europeans overlaid their familiar, western grid upon what they regarded as an uncivilised and untamed nature. As Carter states, 'the result of ground clearing was to institute one system of memorialisation at the expense of another'. [86]

Maps record the changes, the boundaries that we inscribe upon the surface of the earth. They are a record of 'historically specific codes ... largely undifferentiated from the wider geographical discourse in which they are often embedded'.[87] But landscape also changes and alters, like our perception of it. Bender comments that 'the way in which people - anywhere, everywhere - understand and engage with their worlds will depend upon the specific time and place and historical conditions '; that 'each individual holds many landscapes in tension'; and that 'landscapes are thus polysemic, and not so much artefact as in process of construction and reconstruction'.[88]

Mitchell reminds us that even before the 'secondary representations of landscape, it 'is itself a physical and multisensory medium (earth stone, vegetation, water, sky, sound, and silence, light and darkness, etc) in which cultural meanings and values are encoded.'[89]

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85 Rose [1993] p.7
Geography shares much with the history of Western thought, many feminists have argued that 'Masculinist rationality is a form of knowledge which assumes a knower who believes he can separate himself from his body, emotions, values, past and so on, so that he and his thought are autonomous, context-free and objective' p.7

86 Carter, Paul. *The Lie of The Land*, Faber and Faber, 1996, p.6

87 J.B Harley, 'Maps, Knowledge and Power', in *The Iconography of landscape* edited by D. Cosgrove and S. Daniels, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988, p.277

88 Bender, B. (eds) p.2-3.

89 Mitchell, W.J.T. (ed) p14

Jonathan Crary suggests that in the 19th century there occurred an 'industrial re-mapping of the body' which involved 'a separation of the senses'. He reflects on this shift from a haptic to a more optical perception of space; the sense of touch becomes less significant than that of sight. This relates to the situation where the observer takes on the role of consumer.

> Not only did the empirical isolation of vision allow its quantification and homogenisation but it also enabled new objects of vision (whether commodities, photographs, or the act of perception itself) to assume a mystified and abstract identity, sundered from any relation to the observer's position within a cognitively unified field. [90]

As we approach the 21st century this separation of the senses is further exacerbated through what could be termed the technological remapping of the body which has affected our perception of our environment as well as our bodies. This can create a further distancing from ourselves and the environment through the increasing use of prosthetic devices which can replace or extend the body's visual capacities. For example Crary further suggests that the historically significant function of our eyes is being replaced by other practices where the visual image bears no relationship to the observer in a ' 'real' optically perceived world'.[91] As Crary points out

> if these images can be said to refer to anything, it is to millions of bits of mathematical data. Increasingly, visuality will be situated on a cybernetic and electromagnetic terrain where abstract visual and linguistic elements coincide and are consumed, circulated exchanged globally.[92]

An interesting example of imagery derived from such processes can be seen in satellite and medical images utilising Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) technologies. These processes have extended the eye's optical capacity to 'render surface/body boundaries obsolete.' Hidden, and partially unexplored landscapes of the body and the earth then become objectified;

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90 Crary, Jonathan, *Techniques of the Observer, On Vision and Modernity in The nineteenth Century,* An October Book, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England, MIT Press, 1995 p.19

91 Crary [1995] p.2

92 Crary [1995] p.2

attention shifts towards their productivity, towards their 'efficient yielding of secrets, contents, products, knowledge.' [93]

Fig.23 ***Digitally enhanced satellite Image***

Satellite imagery has developed from a history of map-making and from an authoritative power base. It is not only the earth's surface which is imaged and mapped, but phenomena such as light, air, wind, temperature, have now been reduced to 'measurable data'.[94] What has developed is a 'a new type of landscape literacy, in which the "modern" perspective of the human eye is rendered obsolete. '[95]

Daina Augaitis in the catalogue essay 'Seeing Nature' in *Eye of Nature* suggests that we have become distanced from nature, not only through living in our urban environment which reduces the spaces in which one can interact with nature, but also through the way in which we now describe natural phenomena as 'filtered through scientific concepts and modified by contextualised analysis.' The effects of industrialisation have created a 'tainted

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93 Jody Berland, 'Mapping Space: Imaging Technologies and the Planetary Body', [edited by Stanley Aronowitz], *in Technoscience and Cyberculture*, 1996,p.126

94 Berland [199 ] p.126

95 Berland [199 ] p. 126-127
This new type of 'landscape literacy' refered to by Berland can be seen in this example of a digitally enhanced infrared satellite image of the Amazon Basin. The main artery of the river is shown as blue, indicating pollution, black lines show the rivers tributaries which indicates fresh water and the forest is re-imaged as pink depicting an area of living organisms. The choice of colour is often arbitrary, employed to clearly define boundaries and to extend perceptible information. When satallite technology rendered visible the first images of earth from space, there was created an increased awareness of the earth 'as a finite resource' , while simultaneously and paradoxically the same technology 'celebrates the panoptic lens whose monumental scale and technical complexity relies on equally monumnetal technological, commercial and above all military interdependency. p129

environment' and this is what we are now distancing ourselves from, in our search for 'untampered nature'.

> As nature plays a decreasing role in the lives of large urban populations, the vision of it begins to fracture and dissipate. Nature becomes an image imbued with longing and nostalgia but, simultaneously, it is pronounced as alien, described in relation to anthropomorphic concepts of machinery and information systems, relegated to the territory of the non-artificial. A longing for nature was once a longing for one's origins, but now these origins are increasingly distanced[96]

Charlotte Day in the catalogue essay for the exhibition *Diorama* makes the point that the increasing number of artists who are currently returning to explore issues related to nature is possibly connected with how distant we feel from it. [97]

The experience of the body and land as intimately connected, came from the interaction of all our senses, not the privileging of one over the other. When privileging the visual often we create a form of distanced knowledge.

Distancing from tactile engagement with things is further emphasised when we consider the networks of information which are primarily of a visual nature. Artworks in collections around the world, for example, can be accessed via one's computer at home. In this context we are left with the image of the work, not the context, or the substance, or the texture. The effect of the scale, upon the body, and so much else becomes lost.

In my work I have drawn upon the tactile as much as the visual; not to define and isolate a particular object, but more to evoke the sensation of how that object/environment, or substance was felt by the body; to implicate the presence of the body within the environment and the significance of the information one receives through the skin; through touch.

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96 Augaitis Daina, 'Seeing Nature: And the Works of Bill Viola and Laura Walker, Eye Of Nature', *Eye Of Nature*, p.2. Walter Philips Gallery.

97 Day, Charlotte, catalogue essay, *Diorama* at 200 Gertrude Street in Melbourne in 1997)

## Landscape As A Medium

In his essay *Eye-and Mind* Merleau-Ponty describes the interaction between the 'mobile' body and the world, in which the sentient body and that which it senses are undivided.[98]

Merleau-Ponty sums up many of the underlying arguments in this section by drawing our attention towards a consideration of visual perception, as part of a more complete bodily experience. When one moves through the landscape and becomes 'caught up in things', it is not merely a particular view one remembers, but a more complex unfolding of experiences and sensations over a period of time. A greater sense and understanding (awareness) of our environment can be more completely experienced when vision is not isolated from the body's other senses.

Walking over a day, or a week, or a number of weeks in a particular area, one begins to notice the landscape is a 'multisensory medium', a process, which is continually changing. The river essentially remains in the same place and yet it is also continually moving, In one sense the landscape never moves; it, too, essentially remains the same, yet things within it are continually moving, active, in a process of transition and transformation, like life itself.

Calvino, when feeling the world condemned to heaviness, allowed his imagination to '[take] flight' to seek a different perspective. Not to become detached or distanced from reality, but from this different perspective he could begin to see things differently, perhaps more clearly.

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98 Merleau-Ponty, 'Eye and Mind', in *Art and its Significance,* An Anthology of Aesthetic Theory', edited by Stephen David Ross. 3rd edition.New York, State University of New York, 1994, p.284 'Visible and mobile, my body is a thing among other things; it is caught up in the fabric of the world, and its cohesion is that of a thing. But because it moves itself and sees, it holds things in a circle around itself. Things are an annex or prolongation of itself; they are encrusted into its flesh, they are part of its full definition; the world is made up of the same stuff as the body....vision happens among, or is caught up in things - in that place where something undertakes to see, becomes visible for itself by virtue of the sight of things; in that place where there persists, like the mother water in crystal, the undividedness(l'indivision) of the sensing and the sensed'

Many of the texts relating to my work seem to be concentrating on our need to re-think our ideas about vision and the other senses. For example, Carter is interested in re-instating vision back with the mobile observer. James Gibson, similarly perceived vision as being part of a more complex visual system. Vision from a fixed point, creating a ' snapshot vision', or 'aperture vision'[99] he described as similar to the photographic image, 'the artificially produced glimpse' creating 'a poor sort of awareness' [100] This was what had often been studied. But visual perception, he felt, had to be taken back to the body to create a more complete relationship to its environment.

Carter is also interested in the idea of landscape as itself a medium, and considers that space is as much an auditory as a visual experience.[101] This conceptualisation of space is similar to Bergson's, who thought that our understanding of the world as based primarily on vision, was in a sense about controlling the world spatially, by thinking of the world, in terms of 'a multiplicity of separate objects'. Bergson believed that a move from visual analogies to auditory analogies would enable us to conceive of the world more in terms of a process of becoming. [102] He and Alfred Whitehead were known as philosophers of process. They were seeking to overcome the divisions created between mind and body, subject and object within Cartesian thinking. They preferred to think of humans as being 'within the world as participants in the world's becoming'. This way of thinking is much closer to Indian and Chinese thinking than western philosophy. Whitehead argued that

> the immediate fact for awareness is the whole occurrence of nature. It is nature as an event present for sense-awareness, and essentially passing.' [103]

The body moving through the landscape, is within the landscape, not only observing a particular view, but active within it.

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99 Gibson, J. James, The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception, Boston, London, Houghton, Mifflin, 1979, p.1

100 Gibson [1979 ], p.304

101 Carter [1996], p.303

102 Gare. E. Arran, *Postmodernism and the Environmental Crisis* , London and New York, Routledge, 1995 p.114

103 Whitehead, N, Alfred, *Concept of Nature*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1964 (first published 1920), p.14

Multiple perspectives made up of both the intimate and distant are experienced simultaneously. For example, previously recognisable landmarks, may temporarily disapear under cloud. One then moves within the space relying more on one's other senses and less upon vision. Movement is slowed down, subtle changes relating to the terrain underfoot become more apparent.

We have evolved from a nomadic species wandering the land to developing a preference for a more stationary mode of existence, particularly in western cultures. Virilio suggests that with the advent of new forms of communication and transportation, there is a 'forgetting of *the essence of the path, the journey*' [104]. In the East many maintain, what was once a universal belief: 'that wandering re-establishes the original harmony which once existed between man and the universe'. [105] Our perception of space today relates less to the physical journey and to the slow unfolding of a landscape over a period of time. This loss of the 'trajective' is as Virilio, Carter and Gibson suggest a significant issue in developing a greater understanding of our changing perceptions throughout history.

My own experience of the landscape is layered. I return to a place and retain memories of a previous visit. The journey to, and the experience in, that revisited location is never the same. I am interested in this layering of experiences of place, relating to my memories and to the movement through the landscape; similar to the river moving through space and time. The paintings are an exploration of ways in which to recall something of the events and processes happening around me, in the remote and less cultivated areas. Locations which, I have found, have made me more aware of my body and surroundings.

This interaction of my body within and moving through the landscape relates less to the observation of the environment from a fixed point, and more to the close proximity of my body as it impacts with its surroundings. I move through and across

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104 Virilio [1995], p. 23 (emphasis in text)

105 Chatwin, Bruce, *Songlines*, Picador in association with Jonathan Cape, 1987, p.200

different terrains, experiencing numerous and varied surfaces. textures or substances against the skin and underfoot, enveloping my whole body. In exploring processes and connections between the body and the space around the body, I have sought to evoke an intimate connection between the body and the environment. My focus has been upon events and processes occurring within the landscape which are fluid and dynamic. Regardless of scale, they have been re-interpreted within my practice, to create an ambiguous terrain in flux; evocative of both the body and the landscape.

I have considered how different kinds of environments can affect the body, and that such affects are further enhanced through reflections on historical and contemporary perspectives highlighted within the texts mentioned. Our relationship to and perception of the landscape is continually changing, as is our understanding of and relationship with ourselves. By selecting particular areas within these works I have sought to relay something of the thread which I consider links them to each other and to my investigation.

# Part 4 How The Project Was Pursued

## TAKING THE EXPERIENCE OF THE ENVIRONMENT INTO THE STUDIO

### Starting Up

There is an old Middle Eastern story which tells us that the soul moves at the gentle pace of a camel. Moving from one place to another at a faster rate means that it will take some time for the soul to catch up. Perhaps this helps to explain my disorientation following air travel from the UK to Tasmania to enter the PhD program.

Initially, I knew I wanted to develop an original body of work based upon bodily responses to the environment, but at the start, I underrated the number of possibilities which would emanate from this. Because of my earlier visit, I was aware that the Tasmanian environment held many powerful messages and I began with a number of field trips to increase my own stock of experience. At the back of my mind was the belief that the catalyst for the paintings would come from highly visible features to be found in remote areas. This was reflected in the tactics I employed in the early stages of the project. It also drove me to collect as much documentation as possible from chosen locations, including photographs, sketches, maps, geographical data and local historical data of the land since European occupation.

Reflecting on walks in Tasmania's South West, for example, the journey between one point and another, is not necessarily a journey along a straight path; the land has folds and inclines, and is made up of numerous textures and substances, which are observed and also felt by the body. The body experiences its environment through an accumulative and layered process. Any journey will include a number of different perspectival relationships. For example while we are able to see a detail within the landscape far off in the distance, this detail observed at particular points continually changes and alters as we move through the landscape, becoming closer to that place. We are constantly observing subtle connections between the intimate and distant points.

## Field Work

Two of the locations visited were the Mount Lyell mine at Queenstown near the West Coast and Strathgordon in the central South West. While they are different, one from the other, both of these sites contain dramatic evidence of human intervention in rugged blue-green wilderness landscapes.

## Mount Lyell Open Cut

After travelling across the high country and through extensive rain forests, the bare boned landscape of Queenstown is a shock to the system. This man-made wilderness is simultaneously an attraction and repulsion. The first stark vista of the external masses of Mount Lyell and Mount Owen, with their vivid sulphurous colours and exposed anatomies rivets the senses, only to be trumped by the open cut mine itself. Peering over the lip of the naked mountain, I was confronted by an abyss, an emptiness where the peak and supporting bulk once stood. The central core had been surgically removed and steeply, deeply, descending terraced walls circumscribed its emptiness.

Anne Morrison

Fig.24 ***Mt. Lyell; open cut mine Queenstown***, 1997

What was witnessed at Mount Lyell seemed to provide a harvest of metaphors: from external nakedness to internal absence; from the formings of nature to monumental corporate sculptures; from the lifeless fibrous texture of the surface under foot to the remote sensing of the aerial photograph with its flattened exactitude. Perhaps it was the sheer scale of the drama or my still travelling soul, but I felt myself to be a distant observer, an outsider, as emotionally inert as the aerial photograph. However the words *open cut* resonated with me in its double meaning: the mine *and* surgical interventions upon the human body.

That experience reminds me of an observation made by Simon Schama , that;

> ... although we are accustomed to separate nature and human perception into two realms, they are, in fact, indivisible. Before it can ever be a repose for the senses, landscape is the work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock.[106]

The location triggered memories not only of the body, but of previous approaches of digging the palette knife into a heavily worked surface to render the body's materiality in paint. By altering the surface, again and again, layering and scraping the paint back, I would expose different layers. The activities around me within the landscape were echoed within the painting processes. At this time I was also seeking to evoke something of the changing nature of visibilty[107] by looking beneath the visible surface of the body.

At Mount Lyell, I later returned, and descended beneath the surface, into the deep dark network of cut and pined, wet tunnels, to gain yet another perspective.

### Strathgordon

Situated between Lake Pedder and Lake Gordon, Strathgordon was a Hydro town, built as a temporary site for construction workers on the dams which hold back the westward flow of the Gordon and Serpentine rivers to form two vast man-made lakes. I made several visits to the area. The setting is dramatic with the sheets of water as big as landlocked seas, mirroring the surrounding mountain ranges and cloud laden skies.

The town has been demolished and the Authority was in the process of landscaping the site to 'return it to nature'. Out in the South West I had the distinct impression that nature was impatient to reclaim her own.

At the time of these visits to Strathgordon, the old building foundations, roadways and services were partially visible through the encroaching vegetation. Just as the signs of erosion

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106 Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory*,p6-7

107 Crary, Jonathan, [1995], p., 1-24

in the denuded landmass of Mount Lyell had interested me, so the decay and the transitional condition interested me at Strathgordon.

With the idea of site specific works I returned from these trips with bundles of reference material including sketches and photographs as well as collectable items from the area, such as tourist brochures and other historical information.

I continued with field work throughout the study; visiting and, at times, staying for days in some of the many isolated and wild areas of Tasmania. It not only replenished my sensory stock, but provided the ideal milieu in which to reflect upon the project.

## STUDIO INVESTIGATION

The studio investigation forms a sequence of three developmental phases, each of which roughly coincides with a calender year.

## PHASE ONE

### Format

When experimenting with various applications of paint and ground, I worked simultaneously on small studies and large paintings. Throughout the project I favoured working at a size comparable to my own stature or bigger. This allowed me to feel that I was working in the painting and that at middle distance it could occupy my field of vision. The choice of the vertical format mirrors the standing (and viewing) figure. It also suggests the vertical form of the traditional Chinese scroll paintings where the landscape appears to dissolve into the ground of the scroll.

This idea of envelopment gained importance as the project progressed and the emphasis shifted away from specific objects, towards an evolving sensation of place registered by the body.

### The First Group of Paintings

Each painting is 243.84 cm in height with the widths varying from 70 to 115cm

Anne Morrison

Fig.25 left to right: ***Flood***, ***Open Cut***, ***Murmur***, ***Skin***, 1995-97

An alternating strategy was tried with this group of work. In some the landscape was the dominant concern, while, in others, the concern focussed upon bodily sensation. The intention was to indicate the connection between the two with a reading across the group of paintings.

The source material for these works was gathered from field trips and consisted of my own photographic documentation and sketches, other photographs, maps and historical material. The resulting artworks scanned the surface of things in both a literal and a metaphoric sense. They attempted to deal with the concept of connection at the level of the visible surface.

### Example One: *Open Cut*

The mine site opened up a range of associations: cutting into the land followed by erosion and further degradation; the build up of water in the mine cavities; the oxidation of minerals, with its subsequent colour release; cutting the skin; an open wound; a leaking wound.

Working from a photograph, the image was radically altered and enlarged using the 'tiling method' with a photocopier. This procedure eliminated much of the detail but left the tell tale marks of human intervention and erosion upon the site.

Anne Morrison

Fig.26 ***Open Cut***, 1996

Paint was applied in a controlled manner using both palette knife and brushes. Before the paint was dry a large brush was drawn across the surface to produce a slight blur. The softening of the underlying brush marks and a monochrome palette were used to reference the photographic source. ( At that time the distancing produced by optical technologies was high on my agenda.)

Anne Morrison

Fig.27 Detail ***Open Cut***, 1996

Eventually I decided to contrast the controlled paint work by a pour of paint vertically down the centre of the canvas.

### Example Two: Skin

Interest in the dichotomy of macro- and micro- vision led me to an inspection of tiny areas of the body's surface, different patterns of skin stretched over an undulating terrain. This work has painted networks of arterial lines which have counterparts

elsewhere in nature; for example these bodily landscapes could represent root systems or river systems or the marks left in beach sand by the retreating tide.

Anne Morrison

Fig.28 ***Skin***, 1996

Taken from a segment of the palm of my hand, the network of lines was carefully applied by brush, then taken back to leave only the bare trace of the line. This was overlayed with glazes to locate the marks beneath the surface. It was one of a series of works dealing with the ambiguity of distance and a similarity of forms in bodies and landscape.

Anne Morrison

Fig.29 Detail ***Skin***, 1996

### Example Three; *Strathgordon*

At the start an historical photograph of the township, taken from a nearby hilltop was used to clearly show the past layout of

roadways and buildings. These features were painted as though etched into the landscape. The surrounding hills and water were positioned, and edged out around the margins of the painting.

Fig.30 **Strathgordon**

This first stage was layered over leaving only the slightest trace of the underlying structure. This replicated the fate of Strathgordon at the time of my visits.

I sought to create a tension between the ground of the painting, with its tiny details of what had been the township, and a broader field indicating the natural state.

Anne Morrison

Fig.31 ***Strathgordon***, 1996-7

The issue of a continuing state of flux was important to my perception of the work. The later layers were in part scraped back the better to reveal an earlier stage. The paint was quite

tough and tearing at the skin created abrasive patches on the surface of the painting. To an extent this quality reflected the feeling I had when viewing the sparse remains of the township in its rugged natural setting.

### Methodology

Initially the predominant method of applying paint was with palette knife and brush. With the painting in phase one, including *Open Cut* and *Strathgordon*, the paint was directly manipulated. However as I came to regard the process of painting as a means of telling about the body /land experience, I sought a more fluid method of application.

This led to experimentation with pouring, spilling, floating, and dripping onto the surface, liquefied consistencies of paint. Tilting the canvas gave an effective measure of control over a stream of pigment in solution, (yet this tilting of the canvas was only used in *Open-Cut* and was not re-introduced until the end of phase 2, and then more fully in phase 3). Eventually the position of the canvas while painting became horizontal rather than vertical. The density of the paint mix was a vital factor in determining its behaviour and I learnt to predict the performance of various degrees of viscosity. I also learnt to disperse layers with the application of dissolvents or by rubbing and scraping back. (This was not in the mode of the Action Painters.) My working of the paintings was slow and deliberate. Within any one painting, applications would be wet on wet or wet on dry. Glazing remained a useful technique. The drying times drew out the process. I worked on a number of paintings at any one time and each underwent changes over many months.

### An Evaluation of Phase One

Because the landscape was dominant in these works, they did not display satisfactorily a bodily presence. The problem lay in the preoccupation with specific sites as well as in the painting technique employed.

The simultaneous reliance on the actual experience of place and the photographic source material was problematic. Rather than renew the experience, the latter provided a mass of 'remote' detail

of the location which confused less tangible personal perceptions. The photograph set up a barrier which hid body/memory recollections.

It also became apparent that the notion of change varied, depending on my focus, whether on dramatic human interventions or the gradual processes of nature. Yet both were aspects of the concept of flux. The condition of change is always present but it may be virtually imperceptible. Therefore it could not be pictured in specific terms. This notion became the subject of experimentation later in the program. My concern was not to represent any fixed point in time or any specific location. Rather my interest was in the cycle of birth, growth, death and decay, which is all pervasive in nature. From rocks to insects, each has its own time clock and its own rhythm. Confined to an urban environment, time frame is, almost to the exclusion of all else, a human concern. Whereas in the bush, in the solitude, the realisation came to me: my time clock, my rhythm was but one beat in a pulsing landscape.

It became clearer that the aim of the research lay not in confining the body to one painting and the environment to another, but in experiencing one through the other. To pursue this further it would be necessary to find a way to articulate these concerns in other than specific signifiers drawn from pragmatic vision.

The association of field work and studio investigation was valuable. Perceptions of the environment solidified when contemplating their imaging possibilities within the activity of painting. Fleeting ideas could be sorted out and used or discarded. The juxtaposition of field work and studio investigation provided a valuable mechanism for gathering and clarifying my responses.

### Findings

This first phase provided some useful leads for further development: they included

1. the binary oppositions of distance and intimacy as reflected in the visual response, as opposed to the corporeal response to place;

2. conceptions of time, rhythm and change as expressed in the layering of events one over the other;

3. similarly ideas about the land and body in a continual state of flux as expressed in the residues left by the washes of paint; and

4. the erosion of surface as expressed in scraping back or chemically dissolving the surface paint.

## PHASE TWO

### A Different Approach

Reviewing progress to this point led me to make a number of changes. The numerous field trips where I often camped out for some days, altered my perception of the body/environment connection. The relationship was organic, rhythmic in its fluctuations, yet indivisible and it was not a site specific phenomenon. Paintings based upon specific places were abandoned. The new works were to be based upon the corporeal experience of unifying the body and the environment.

### Technical

Brushwork was all but discarded in favour of direct fluid applications such as pouring and dripping the paint on, sometimes copiously, sometimes sparingly. Controlling the movement across the surface through the fluidity of the mix, and adding turpentine to disperse one consistency of paint through the other. Layers were added; at times working wet on wet or wet on dry or semi-dry. I worked on the floor, not against the wall.

Anne Morrison

Fig.32 left: ***Murmur II***, 1997

Fig.33 right: ***Pulse II***,1997

As awareness was growing about how the paint would react on different grounds and in various consistencies, I found a satisfying range of alternatives. Advancing tides of paint activated a large proportion of the surface in a single sweep. This was explored at the latter end of phase 2 and developed much further in phase 3. The consistency varied from that of thick cream to that of red wine. Pigment in thin suspension left a speckled residue across the under layer. The various passages taken by a build-up of layers left windows in between.

I chose to reduce the scale of the new body of work from 8 to 6 feet in height. Primarily it was for practical reasons. The *fluid* approach meant longer completion periods with the painting taking up floor space. The smaller format enabled me to fit two or three on the studio floor at any one time. (Eventually I was able to use two studios in tandem.) I viewed these smaller works as sketches or trials for other paintings. This encouraged experimentation as I struggled to create really active, pulsating surfaces.

During this phase the colour hues were subdued. The exploration of the layering process, with its building up and working back, produced differing paint formations. These were chiefly tonal in character.

### The Body in Outline

The rhythms and patterns now emerging had metaphorical references to both the body and the environment. However I felt

an additional need to articulate the body's presence in what I came to regard as *body/land mappings*. I resolved this by settling on a range of methods evoking the outline of the body, either drawn on the surface, or emerging between activity upon the surface. The continuity of the picture space remained both inside and outside the line suggesting connection between the interior and exterior of the body.

Anne Morrison

Fig.34 ***Fracture***, 1996-97

### Example Four

The work commenced with an idea rather than a visual reference. After applying washes, and while the paint was still wet, I mixed more paint to a fluid consistency and while moving across the surface it was allowed to tumble from the brush and fall a short distance to spread in roughly circular formations on the wet pre-painted canvas.

A further near-transparent wash or glaze was applied and allowed to dry before drops of turpentine were scattered across the painting. Because they removed the immediate surface paint a filigree trace was created; the result recalled weathering, lichens and cellular patterning. I used warm reds and crimson to advance the idea of living cellular formations. This painting was one of the series where the outline of the torso emerged from the gaps left between clusters of dispersed droplets of paint to indicate interior and exterior.

### Example Five

An umber ground consisting of dispersed droplets of paint created an all over patterning which was later partially concealed

by droplets of blue paint. Washes of blue paint were further dispersed. This was later rubbed back in areas to reveal the underlying layer. The intention was to create an oscillation, a tension between a number of subtle layers - the umber ground and the blue surface - this was emphasised more by lighter droplets of paint in areas across the surface and then glazed to create a more subtle shift between layers.

Anne Morrison

Fig.35 ***Untitled***, 1997

A network of lines were painted over these layers to suggest the fragmented outline of a body. The lines were intentionally ambiguous enough to evoke a number of other possibile associations, such as lines drawn upon a map. Lines on maps, signify borders and boundaries which are in a continual process of change` and transformation. I considered the line as a temporary inscription upon the surface.

### Evaluation of Phase Two

A problem with the outline technique was that it carried connotations of demarcation between the body and its surroundings. Within the terms of my aims this separation was undesirable and another difficulty was the visible reference to the body which in itself indicated differential treatment.

As a transitional measure, the smaller format had some practical advantages, but a larger area would provide the scope for free manipulation of the fluid process. Another consideration favouring a larger format was the capacity to fill the visual field of the viewer.

## PHASE THREE

### Refining Practice

I had come to the realisation that the various actions in this fluid form of painting - mimicked natural processes: the material inconsistencies, the flow and ebb, the residues which marked the trail, the solidification, dispersal and wearing away, the ruptures and deviations, stratifications and erosion - and the energies involved in applying paint, the rhythms, direction, layering and the use of gravity through the tilting of the canvas were also natural processes. The all-pervasive state of flux, so apparent in the solitude of the bush, had its counterpart in personal states of transition and transformation. As biological beings we are subject to the self-same processes. The metaphors of this fluid painting applied to both environment and body; either one could be perceived through the other.

Anne Morrison

Fig.36 **Artist's Studio**,1999

I returned to a larger scale, settling on a vertical format of 243.88 by 198.12cm. With the canvas on the ground I made use of a wooden plank and bricks to build bridges for access to the interior of the painting. This method gave a literal reading to Rothko's notion of working 'in the painting'. It allowed me to submerge myself in the process; a parallel to submerging oneself in the natural environment.

Anne Morrison

Fig.37 **Artist's Studio**, 1999

Numerous small studies are preludes to and have developed simultaneously alongside the main body of work, composed of medium-large to large canvases. Large canvases were a particular feature of Abstract Expressionist painting. The reason for my choice was accurately articulated in a statement made by Mark Rothko in 1955.

> I realise that historically the function of painting large pictures is something very grandiose and pompous. The reason I paint them however - I think it applies to other painters I know - is precisely because I want to be very intimate and human. To paint small pictures is to place yourself outside experience, to look upon an experience as a stereopticon view or with a reducing glass. However you paint large pictures because you are in it. It isn't something you command. [108]

When you are working on a large canvas you are indeed working in it. It is not distanced from you. The experience of painting is therefore an intimate one.

Charles Harrison is quick to point out that additionally 'this implies "absorption" of the spectator by the painting ...'.[109]. Both the intimacy of working in the painting and the embodying of the viewer are important to the aims of this project.

### A Process of Refinement

The immediate task was to refine the paint action to increase these metaphorical associations. It would be simplistic to infer that any particular sequence in the making of the work equated to this or that sequence in nature. Yes, certain actions could be seen

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108 Harrison [1981] p.169, [Rothko, quote from a statement in *Interiors*, May 1951]

109 Harrison [1981] p.169

to mimic natural processes, but the creating of a work is altogether more complex and involves numerous and various actions repeated and even negated. Indeed, this complex interweave of sequences is likewise experienced in nature.

(Metaphors do have their descriptive limits. For instance my acts taken in their totality are finite. By comparison, the totality of acts within nature are infinite or at least on-going.)

I worked across a number of paintings at any one time. I stayed with each of them for an extended period responding to their surfaces as they constantly changed, and considering one against the other in developing them further.

The idea of a 'fluid weave' was explored: streams of paint advancing across a surface composed of the passage of earlier streams. Their progress registered the slightest undulation from the previous crossing even as their different trajectories bound them together.

Anne Morrison

Fig.38 left: **work in progress**, 1998

Fig.39 right: **work in progress**, 1998

I developed a particular method of exposing under-layers which melded with the apparent spontaneity of fluid methods of applying paint. I would pour a tonally lighter layer of paint over the dry layers already making up the surface. Before this application was fully dry, droplets of turpentine dispersed areas of the lighter paint to reveal the darker paint beneath. This dispersal method opened up gaps between the layers. As it bit through the surface layer and the medium evaporated, the effect

revealed the traces of paint flows and the direction of the pour of the turpentine.

To a certain extent, experimentation increased predicability. How-ever there were numerous variables, for example: the consistency of the various paint mixes; variations in the ratio of turps to paint;
the stage in the drying cycle when the paint would resist dispersal or when its fluidity was such that it would disperse entirely leaving no trace of the encounter; the height at which liquids were dropped or spilt; and the angle of the tilt of the canvas, which could be varied as matters progressed.

Over time I gained a feel for the materials and methods, but I did not attempt to eliminate the unexpected which constantly enlivened the experience.

### The Main Body of Work

In the final phase the work consisted of 14 large painting, each 244 X 183 centimetres, and 7 medium paintings, 180 x 135 or 183 x 137 cms. The selection for the examination exhibition will be made from these. A number of smaller studies was also produced. To some extent these could be regarded as notes about the processes which evolved in the larger paintings.

### Example Six

The first layers of paint, those which made up the ground, suggested repetitive patterns. The next step was a pour across the *top* of the canvas; white spilling into reds, crimsons and blues of differing fluid consistencies. The top edge was then raised above my head directing a downward flow, the colours mingling on the way. As they reached the bottom of the canvas the pour and lift were repeated, working from both ends; and again it was repeated; and so on, until the paint had dispersed over the entire picture plane.

Anne Morrison

Fig.40 ***Envelop***, 1998

When the paint was dry, a new batch of paint was mixed to yet another consistency. The pour and tilt were also changed and the flow redirected to angle across the previous lines of application. Overlapping layers were built up in this way. By adding further medium, the paint dispersed more rapidly, sweeping across the underlying layers. By continuing to thin the paint, further application left only a fragmented residue behind. Some parts of the under-layer were dissolved, others were not. Tiny thread-like veins were left on the surface, and areas of repetitive layering were exposed.

Anne Morrison

Fig.41 left: Detail, ***Envelop***, 1998

Fig.42 right: Detail, ***Untitled***, 1997

### Example Seven

While painting Six consisted of a number of layers, one over the other, the paint was primarily opaque. In contrast to this approach, a related group of paintings was developed where the paint was layered less. The consistency of paint was more fluid and transparent which allowed me to work with the white ground of the painting.

Anne Morrison

Fig.43 left: ***Untitled***, 1998

Fig.44 right: ***Untitled***, 1998

Large areas of the painting on the left were covered by a number of fluid spills from one position sweeping across the tilted canvas and dispersed further by the application of turpentine, spilling in selected areas to control the flow. Before the spill dried, I removed an area of paint by dragging the paint away using a turps rag, or by dispersing it more fluidly by dropping turps onto it when it was still very wet. By re-angling the canvas, I continued dispersing the paint in a different direction, working with a similar consistency and mix of paint, to create a continuity of flow. In another section I altered the mix and depth of colour to emphasise the disruption and re-direction of the paint.

Fig.45 Detail ***Untitled*** (Fig.43), 1998

Redirecting the flow of paint in this way, and allowing it to disperse fully to run its course, then removing it and redirecting it, created a more dynamic rhythm and brought unexpected undulations such as those often experienced by the body in nature.

### Example Eight

This painting was radically changed on a number of occasions over a nine month period. My purpose was to work up from a ground of light blues and greens towards layers of darker tones of crimsons, reds and ochres. I was seeking an ephemeral and visceral feel to the surface. Concealing the blue-green ground under the darker layers allowed its rediscovery by the processes of dissolving and rubbing back.

Anne Morrison

Fig.46 **Sinuous Liquid Skin**, 1998-99

Liquid spills formed slightly arching lines of paint directed horizontally across the canvas. These lines were allowed to

merge at particular points during their progress. The flow would occasionally be disrupted by the build-up of the under-layers and would branch off to form unplanned tributaries. Mostly, I would assist this intervention by adding paint to the new stream.

Fig.47 Detail, **Sinuous Liquid Skin**, 1998-99 **Fig.46**

### Decisions about Finishing Paintings

Taken as a whole body of work, the individual paintings were not finished in term of further consideration. Instead they were continually visible in the studio as they were reconsidered and possibly reworked, in relation to each other. At times a number of paintings would be taken to the gallery (between shows) and set up for a few days. Seeing them in the gallery context assisted the on-going appraisal. Each painting was a component in a single experimental exercise and they were only finished when the experiment finished.

Anne Morrison

Fig.48 ***Untitled***, 1998-99

## SUMMARY

The intention in this section has been to describe how the project matured. The development has been structured into three main phases. The sections tell how field experience was reflected in my evolving comprehension of the project and in the studio investigation. Examples have been given of early field trips where there was a specific relationship to early paintings: a relationship I came to reject. The text associated with the various examples of paintings is limited to an outline of the mechanics involved in making the works. Content as it relates to the body of paintings is dealt with elsewhere in the section.

# PART 5

## CONCLUSION

The perception of an intimate and binding connection between the body and the environment comes from my growing sense of a unity of the self with its natural environment. This awareness is heightened by the contrasts in my life experience between cities and remote, unpopulated places.

At no time do I resile from the subjective nature of that proposition, however, it is reinforced in general terms by the writings of numerous influential authors and by the work of many prominent contemporary artists.[110] This perception is currently the content of my art practice.

During the PhD program I have sought to deepen my understanding of the relationship between the body and the natural environment by undertaking regular field trips to remote areas of Tasmania. I found that a marked change in perception occurs in such places. Different value systems apply and there is a significant shift from the cerebral to the sensual. In this sensiferous state boundaries separating body and place dissolve. It is from these field trips that conviction about a oneness of the body and the natural environment has been seeded deep within my being. I have sought to express it in paint.

The specificity of visual figuration has its drawbacks. The problem, common to the expression of metaphysical concepts in visual art, is to find an exemplary means of representation. Therefore at the core of this project is this search for a way to express my concern which has no specific materiality nor any observable manifestation. In the course of the investigation it became apparent that in the process of oil painting, some actions referenced the rudiments of the concept. A method was devised to emphasise these metaphorical aspects of the painting.

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110 Examples of work by artists and authors are provided in Part 2 of this Exegesis.

This methodology involves the fluid application of oil paint on canvas, both wet on wet and wet on dry. The working position of the stretched canvas is on the floor. Periodically the canvas is left for days to dry completely before being subjected to further change. The dispersion of pigmented fluid through various means helps to create metaphors for a unifying concept of body and environment. The processes may work with, against, or across each other and include : spreading washes where the flow is influenced by moving the canvas, sometimes becoming exhausted, sometimes evaporating to leave behind sedimentary markers. This was followed by numerous other veils of paint, some partially covering the formations beneath; others dispersing into a still wet ground, layers rubbed back or chemically dissolved, these are some of the various acts by which painter and paint which create metaphors for a unifying concept of body and natural environment.

As stated earlier the problem was posed in painting and it followed that a resolution had to be found in painting. As a dynamic field painting possesses an ongoing critique and in resolving the issue it occurred to me that for an outcome to be acceptable it must also hold its place within the *critique* of painting. This gave the project a second important challenge.

The outcome of the research project is demonstrated in the paintings chosen for the thesis exhibition. They were made during the third and final phase, when numbers of paintings were worked on together and then reworked over many months. [111] Exploration of the metaphoric process moved across all the work in progress. Thoughts and action on one painting were expanded on the next. There is no precise correlation between commencement and completion and therefore the paintings are not intended to be viewed sequentially; indeed they could be regarded as one work.

The body and the natural environment form a major theme in the arts of the West. It is one amongst a host of concepts which are germane to contemporary intellectual discourse and which, by

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111 The development of the methodology is described in Part 3.

their nature, cannot be identified with any single aspect taken from visual experience. The significance of my research project relates to the contribution it makes in painting to the expression of immaterial concepts in general and the body and the natural environment in particular.

# Personal experiences, reflections on

# Journeys in Australia 1994-1998

## Introduction

We journey from one country to another, or from one major city to another often by plane, our interest is primarily in our point of departure and arrival. We are rapidly transported from one side of the world to the other, and the spaces in between; the distant landscapes below, are rarely ever physically experienced.

It takes approximately 26 hours from London to Australia, yet as the plane passes over the many different terrains below, often the contrast from the cultivated to uncultivated landscapes is visible. When flying over the vast expanse of the Australian continent I made the decision to travel across it again, at a slower pace, by road: to gain a different perspective.

A road trip from Canberra to Adelaide, up through Central Australia to Darwin took six weeks. This resulted in a more intimate experience of the ground underfoot and of the subtle and sometimes dramatic changes occurring within the rich and varied landscape. The detail within these new surroundings unfolded slowly. Things became more accutely perceptible by exploring different locations over a longer period of time.

Anne Morrison

Fig.49 left: **Central Australia**

Fig.50 right: **Sand Patterns**

## Extracts from notebooks

### Break-Aways; Simpson Desert

Walking on a vast open desert plane, the searing heat, penetrates the surface of my skin. All the moisture from my body seems to

evaporate. The land is dry and rugged, the flatness of the terrain seems to stretch off endlessly into infinity. The wind suddenly picks up and I find myself nearing the edge of an unexpected cliff; a huge semi-circular plateau opens out, giving way, to what was once an ancient inland sea, marking the start of the Simpson desert. The flat desert plain seemed to just break away and crumble underfoot. I imagine the ebb and flow of this ancient sea sculpting the hills in the centre, which would have been no higher than the plateau I am standing on, their breaking down over the ages through other elemental forces.

Anne Morrison

Fig.51 **Break-Aways**

Journal Extract

**Coober Pedy**

Areas within the desert have been re-landscaped. Fault lines visible upon the desert's surface, reveal where minerals can be located underground. Vibrantly coloured opalescent dust-mounds disrupt the flatness of the terrain. Extracted earth from the mines is piled high; pyramids, of pinks and blues, lilacs, whites, continually change shape and scale, while also changing colour with the shifting light. Weaving between these strangely sculpted pyramids is a network of underlying, partially visible red, ochre dirt pathways connecting the mines; surfacing through the lighter coloured mined rock. In stark contrast to the dry rugged ochre ground is a warren of smooth, glistening white, narrowly mined tunnels. My hand traces the smooth cold surface of the interior rock face, disrupted by thin threads of opal colour, raised like veins under our semi-transparent skin. These coloured lines catch and refract the artificial light, as though the very heart of the land was bleeding its colour out of the wall.

Fig.52

**Coober Pedy Opal Mines**

**South West Tasmania; Cox's Bight. Day 1.**

The earth was fragile, wet and slippery underfoot as I pushed myself forwards, and up the side of the range. The muscles in my legs ached and I was becoming more aware of my heart beating faster as it pumped the blood around my body and the rapid rythmn of my breath. Half way up the hill, partially sheltered from the rain behind a few small bushes I felt the wind carrying out a river of cloud, rushing fast beneath me, close to the valley floor. It was as though this, seemingly never ending river of cloud swept by here, day after day, that it had always been there, slowly carving the shape of the hills either side of the valley.

Anne Morrison

Fig.53 left **Sth West Tasmania**

Fig.54 right **Sth West Tasmania**

Journal Extracts

Thoughts of the valley as it was formed millions of years ago surface; I imagine mountains carved by slow moving rivers of ice, the sound of boulders crushing under the weight, pressure and movement of the glacier, slowly melting as the temperature rises. Now I am witness to the clouds retracing this ancient river's path.

Cloud shadows race across barren hills, my thoughts shift from the clouds and hills as separate things and one begins to dissolve

into another; and I momentarily trace the movement. Different forms continually emerge and dissipate, highlighted fleetingly by the broken light. A reflective surface, wet, glistening becomes opaque and harsh. Sharp contrasts between the clouds; dark shadow of the clouds and the light continually change, alter, shift. A fast flowing river of cloud shadows, defying gravity, spills across the hills, down into the valley and the crevices; and back up again, liquid shadows, spilling and climbing.

Anne Morrison

Fig.55 **Gordon River**

**West Coast Tasmania**

**Mount Field**

Familiar landscape changes under heavy snowfall, taking on a new identity. The tarn shelf has a network of board walks in areas to protect the vegetation. Paths were only partially visible locatable by the odd flag marker and many of these had become bent over or concealed under the heavy snowfall. Confident of my familiarity with the area, I was unperturbed and proceeded regardless. However further into the walk, and in the higher terrain, the snowfall became heavier and the journey more arduous. By piercing the snow with a long stick each time I took a step, I was able to locate the boardwalk, which had all but disappeared under the snow. A few times I mis-judged and fell through the snow up to my knee, then later, up to my thigh when the markers completely disappeared from sight. Also the once familiar hills and tarns were hidden.

Anne Morrison

Fig.56 ***Untitled***, 1997

In one area I fell through the snow up to my waist and the fear of actually falling right through and hitting the icy water of the tarns, forced me to lie flat across the snow. Cold, wet and tired I spread my weight more evenly and crawled over this precarious and temporary surface, neither quite solid nor liquid. Occasionally stopping to rest, with my face only a few inches from the snow, I found myself observing the minute delicate patternings in the snow, perhaps where a drop of snow melting from a long grass stem, falling turned to liquid; water hitting the snow, tiny indentations marked this temporary changing surface, and patterns of air trapped, in flux, caught, rippled under the ice.

**Ocean-Rythmns**

In the ocean the impact of different rhythms of water envelops the body. Calm and gentle undulating rhythms support, surround and pass over the body as it floats neither totally above nor below the moving waters surface. A wave breaks and crashes submerging the body beneath the turbulent surface. Tumbling underwater, I am uncertain as to where the surface is.

The power of the ocean shatters the silence of the stones and pebbles that lie static on the ocean bed. The movement of the current spins fragments in all directions; upwards, forwards and backwards; until they again rest on the ocean floor.

A tidal rip drags my body away from the shore; waves crash and force it under again and again. I am swallowing water, gasping for breath; fighting against the pull of the tide; trying to swim back to shore.Panic makes my body heavier and heavier. I disappear under the surface, then fight back up again, gasping for breath, trying to relax, to float, to tread the water gently until strength returns sufficiently to regain the shore.

Anne Morrison

Fig.57 **East Coast Tasmania**

Fig.58 **East Coast Tasmania**

Where sea touches land, there is an in-between space, fluid and shifting, where one element flows into, merges with, the other. The idea of a fixed boundary dissolves amidst the ebb and flow of the tides. It cannot be marked or fixed precisely on a map.

**Sky and Sea**

Cloud patterns on the water slowly come into focus, surfacing through another skin; a transparent membrane, on which a thin veil of oil is suspended. Swirling shimmering spiralling lines, move slowly, subtly, altering shape with the gentle rythmn of the pulsing sea. Stretched and pulled, the patterning of oil holds together on the surface, slipping over the undulating water. One landscape becomes visible through the other, through an intermediate layer of oil.

**St.Valentines Peak**

The mountain became completely enveloped in cloud. I was dis-oriented and uncertain of my exact location, or of how high I had climbed, or if the summit were close.The primary motivation for this trip was to retrace the steps of a surveyor, Hellyer, who made a fascinating 360 degree circular drawing of the surrounding area from this peak in the mid-nineteenth century. We were intrigued to observe the changes that had occured to the surrounding terrain over that century. Weather unexpectedly changed and soon we could see little.

Periodically a gust of wind would disperse the clouds, as if pulling them apart momentarily to fleetingly reveal a sharp drop, down the side of the peak, which would just as quickly disappear. This was when we realised we were walking along a fairly narrow and precarious ridge. Jutting out at alternating angles across this was a line of large boulders, similar to the rugged backbone of a gigantic prehistoric animal. Waiting in anticipation for the next breath of wind, a waterfall of air revealed another gap in the layers of cloud, exposing another momentary view, a slither of the rock face, and the sharp descent down the side of the peak.

The view, the spectacular scenery often observed from a great height, gave way to an unexpected and more interesting

intimate, awareness of the terrain close to our bodies. The dramatic changes occurring in terms of the wind, partially revealed then concealed the mountain. I became interested in this shift of personal perspective, through the experience of the unexpected. Reduced visibility encouraged much slower movement over a terrain appearing and disappearing from sight

Henry Hellyer

Fig.59 **St. Valentine's Peak**

Panoramic Sketch 1827

I was there, at the same spot as Hellyer, but I was aware of the changes in our surrounding landscape, even though not then visible to the eye. My former knowledge had been developed from a variety of secondary sources and from our terrestrial perspective, from photographs, studies and documentation; now I felt a sense of connection with this place, which was not related to the all-encompassing view.

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31. **Strathgordon,** oil on canvas, 254 x 203cm, 1996-97
32. **Murmur** 11, oil on canvas , 203 x 160cm, 1997
33. **Pulse** 11, oil on canvas, 203 x 160cm, 1997, (private collection)
34. **Fracture,** oil on canvas, 203 x 160cm, 1996-97
35. **Untitled**, oil on canvas, 203 x 160cm, 1997
36. Artist in Studio. 1999.
37. Detail of installation of small works, artists studio, **untitled**, oil on board, 22 x 18cm, 1995 - 99

38. Work in progress, oil on canvas, 254 x 203cm, 1998-99
39. Work in progress, oil on canvas, 254 x 203cm, 1998-99
40. **Envelop,** oil on canvas, 254 x 203cm, 1998-99
41. Detail of 40
42. Detail of **'untitled',** 1996, at early stage 1996
43. **Untitled,** oil on canvas, 254 x 203cm, 1998
44. **Untitled,** oil on canvas, 254 x 203cm, 1998
45. Detail of 43
46. **Sinuos Liquid Skin,** oil on canvas, 254 x 203cm, 1998
47. Detail of fig 46
48. **Untitled,** oil on canvas, 254 x 203 cm, 1998
49. Anne Morrison, aerial photograph, Central Australia, 1995
50. Anne Morrison, photograph; detail of sand patterns, 1998
51. Anne Morrison, sketch, Break-Aways, Simpson Desert
52. Photograph from Prestige Souvenirs of Coober Pedy, opal mines
53. Sketch, South West Tasmania.
54. Sketch, South West Tasmania
55. Anne Morrison, photograph, Gordon River, MacQuarie Harbour, 1997
56. Anne Morrison, **untitled,** oil on canvas, 60 x 50 cm, 1997
57. Anne Morrison, photograph, East Coast Tasmania, Bay of Fires, 1998
58. Anne Morrison, photograph, East Coast Tasmania, Bay of Fires, 1998
59. Henry Helleyer, Panoramic Sketch, St Valentines Peak, Feb 14 1827. Vandiems Land Company, Tasmanian National Archives.

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## STUDIES

1983-84 Scotec Diploma Art & Design (First Year), Glasgow College of Building and Printing
1984-88 Bachelor of Arts (Hons.) - Painting, Glasgow School of Art
1988-90 Master of Arts - Painting, Royal College of Art, London
1995-98 Presently enrolled in The Tasmanian School of Art, University of Tasmania, PhD

## SOLO EXHIBITIONS

1989 *Anne Morrison:* Artists Choice, 369 Gallery, Edinburgh, Scotland
1994 *Artist of the Week*, Collective Gallery, Edinburgh, Scotland
*Anne Morrison, new work,* Residency, Northfield Academy, Aberdeen, Scotland
*Work in progress,* Foyer Gallery, Canberra School of Art, Australia.
1995 *Liquid Voices,* Plimsoll Gallery, School of Art, Hobart, University of Tasmania.
*Traces,* Works on Paper, Entrepot Gallery, Hobart, Tasmania.
1997 *Intermediate Ground*, The Bond Store, Tasmanian Art Gallery andMuseum. Hobart, Tasmania.

## SELECTED GROUP & OPEN EXHIBITIONS

1990 *What They Showed*, The Clearings, Chelsea, London.
*Royal College of Art Students,* Galerei zur Alten Deutschen, Schule, .
*Art London '90,* The 5th International Contemporary Art Fair,Olympia ,London, Switzerland
. *1st Year RCA Painters*, Art Directions, Soho, London
1991 *Utopias,* Anne Morrison and Hugh Gilmour, Dagmar Gallery, London.
*Leicester Exhibition for Schools and Colleges*, Beaumanor House, Leicester.
1992 *Somatic States - body abstract'*, Quicksilver Gallery, Middlesex University, London and Norwich Gallery, Norfolk.
*Coventry Open,* Herbert Art Gallery & Museum, Coventry.
*Festival Feature:Scottish Women Artists,* Pittencrieff House Museum, Dunfermline.
*ADD*- Artists of Devonshire Drive', Greenwich Arts Festival & Whitechapel Open, Catherine Grove School, Greenwich
1993 *Royal Over-Seas League*, 10th Annual Open Exhibition, Park Place London.
*CD Artwork Auction*, Collective Gallery, Edinburgh.
*Christmas Exhibition*, Demarco European Foundation, Edinburgh.
1994 Gallery Opening Exhibition, Corr Contemporary Art, London.
*Stones in her pockets,* Contemporary Experimental Photography, MAC Cannonhill, Birmingham & The Montage Gallery, Derby .
*Superfictions 2*, Museum of Contemporary Ideas by Peter Hill. Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia.
1995 *Art 95 - London Contemporary Art Fair*, Business Design Centre, London.
*The Continuing Tradition*, 75 Years of Painting at Glasgow School of Art, 1920 - 1995, Glasgow Scotland
1996 *Trust Bank Open,* Launceston, Tasmania
*Copper, Tin, Nickel and Sand*, Gallery West, Queenstown Tasmania.
1997 *Excursive Sight 1*, Cradle Mountain Visitors Centre Gallery, Cradle Mountain, Tasmania.
1998 *Excursive Sight 2,* Contemporary Prospect/Historic Precedent', Plimsoll Gallery, School of Art at Hobart,University of Tasmania
*Hutchinson Art Prize*, Long Gallery, Hobart,Tasmania
*Trust Bank, Art Prize*, Launceston, Tasmania

## AWARDS

| | |
|---|---|
| 1988 | The Jock MacFie Award |
| | The Elizabeth Greenshields Award |
| 1989 | The John Minton Travel Award |
| 1990 | The Ensign Award |
| | The British Institution Fund |
| 1995-98 | The Association of Commonwealth Universities Scholarship in Australia |
| 1996 | Trust Bank Open, Highly Commended. |

## RESIDENCIES

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|---|---|
| 1989 | Cite Internationale des Arts, Paris. |
| 1993-94 | Scottish Arts Council and Grampian Regional Council - Northfield Academy, Aberdeen, Scotland (six months). |
| 1994-95 | Scottish Arts Council, Australian Residency - Canberra School of Art and Hobart School of Art, University of Tasmania, (one year). |

## COLLECTIONS

Aberdeen Hospital
Ensign Trust, Finsbury Circus, London
Royal College of Art, London
Scottish Arts Council, Edinburgh
The University of Tasmania.
Private Collections, Switzerland, England, Scotland and Tasmania.