

Digital Landscapes as Metaphorical Spaces

by

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Abstract

This project investigated the ways in which new technologies impact on our relationship to the landscape, and the metaphorical possibilities of boundary zones in the landscape; those found between the city and the wilderness. These zones encompass a convergence of different realms of experience; landscapes we inhabit, landscape we have passed through to get here, and the changes we have imposed in the process.

In the postmodern world, modern technologies of travel and communication have shrunk the globe and population movement has increased dramatically. In defining self-identity, notions of place are no longer necessarily a dominant factor. This is the broad context of this research project, addressed in terms of my personal experience of migration and through theoretical and historical comparisons.

Issues related to migration are epitomised by the experience of John Glover, and how his experience is reflected by his paintings. As an artist originating from England and dealing with pastoral themes I compare my response to his. I contextualise my images with those of contemporary Australian artists whose work addresses shifting boundaries and multiple perspectives in landscape, or whose work involves new technologies. Artists who use a horizontal or panoramic format to convey specific readings of landscape have been of particular importance and inspiration in the development of my images.

The major body of images consists of fourteen large-scale computer ink-jet prints, on translucent and transparent polyester paper and white glossy paper. They are based on local landscapes: 'natural' bush, urban reserves, farmland and parks. The artworks are derived from video. Colour, scale and form have been digitally altered. The artworks can be layered and illuminated in the gallery to manipulate the viewer's perspective and promote a sense of movement through rhythm and sequence.

The artworks are intended to challenge traditionally fixed views of landscape, through the use of digital manipulation, to create generic and symbolic landscape images. The artworks emphasise transitory perspectives that characterise contemporary experience.

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Introduction

This exegesis should be read in conjunction with the artworks presented for exhibition; the exegesis and the artworks together constitute the thesis.

This project has focussed on investigating the ways in which new technologies impact on our relationship to the landscape; and the metaphorical possibilities (in image making) of fringe or boundary zones in the landscape, which are sandwiched between the known (the city), and the unknown (the wilderness). These zones encompass the landscapes we inhabit, landscape we have passed through to get here, and the changes we have imposed in the process.

Part One of the exegesis defines the broad context and central concerns of the research project in terms of the postmodern world, where modern technologies of travel and communication have shrunk the globe and consequently population movement has increased dramatically. In defining self-identity, notions of place are no longer necessarily the dominant determining factor. The individual experiences a sense of placelessness, and a fear of losing their sense of identity, which manifests on a societal level as a resurgence of fanatical nationalism. This broad context is addressed in terms of my personal experience of travel and migration, in terms of theoretical discourse about the shrinking of geographic distance by technological change, and by comparing contemporary experience and the experience of migrants to Australia two

hundred years ago. The landscape is the context of these experiences and has undergone great change as a result of mass migration.

Part Two relates the migration experience of John Glover, and the ways in which that experience is reflected in his paintings. As a 'local' artist originating from England and making images dealing with pastoral themes and locations his nineteenth-century response to this landscape can be compared with my twentieth-century response. Nineteenth-century certainties about place have been superseded by the views of contemporary artists whose work seeks to address shifting boundaries and multiple perspectives in landscape, and whose work reflects the impact of technology through their use of hybrid media. Part Two also surveys those Australian artists working with landscape and new technologies and/or hybrid landscape whose practice forms a contemporary context for this project, or whose work has provided insight or inspiration in the development of this project.

Part Three of the exegesis details the development of the artworks presented for exhibition, a process which has included trials of a range of methods of capturing, manipulating and presenting landscape images. In a conceptual sense this exploration has consisted of manipulating chance, movement, perspective, rhythm, colour, scale, sequence and form, to influence perception and reflect ideas about landscape. These artworks challenge the traditional fixed position of the viewer in relation to the landscape, through the use of movement, chance and digital manipulation in collecting and developing generic and symbolic landscape images.

Part One

Landscape, migration and technological change

The disruption of familiar culture by the movement of information and population is a primary focus of contemporary postmodern thought, manifested in two widely differing and contradictory positions. Nations including Australia celebrate an increasing awareness of multiculturalism and diversity, whilst cultural theorists flag the possibility of a seamless homogenised culture epitomised in the concept of the global village.

Mike Featherstone summarised the range of critical positions that have emerged in describing the process of globalisation.¹ The American ideals of progress and individualism have long been perceived by other cultures as a threat to national identity. Technological progress and change are no longer viewed as a linear and inevitable path toward some utopian ideal; too much is known about the negative and positive impacts of technology to idealise progress without reservation.

Postmodernism evinced a growing awareness of the flaws in this theory of constant 'progress': that resources are finite, that the constant quest for newness and progress was a quest for an illusory grail, and that neglected and suppressed 'other' narratives and histories exist, other than the western 'master' narrative of capitalism. Certainties about defining one's identity in terms of place have been undermined by the march of

¹ Mike Featherstone, 'Global and Local Cultures', in *Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures, Global Change*, editors Bird, J., Curtis, B., Putnam, T., Robertson, G. and Tickner, L., Routledge Press, London, 1993, p. 181

'progress' in the postmodern age, as individuals instead struggle to 'develop a sense of identity by locating themselves, spatially and historically, in reference to the array of information and information technologies.'²

The breakdown of 'master' narratives described by postmodernist theory is closely linked to and influenced by developments in information technology, and reflects the blurring of boundaries in broad cultural contexts. The blurring of boundaries between art media reflects a blurring of boundaries between a broad range of disciplines such as biology, geography, philosophy and art.

The information age has led to an affirmation of non-linear or non-narrative ways of seeing and representation. Information and ideas are not necessarily best expressed and ordered in linear sequences, but are more coherently presented in thematic arrays.³ In a diverse multicultural, multimedia society, amidst a constantly shifting array of referents, we are constantly reassessing our place in the world — and everything is relative.

Australia's short colonial history represents this continual process of exchange. Cultural baggage from the 'Old World' arrived in the form of Western aesthetic sensibilities used to filter images of the 'New World'. At the same time images from the 'New World' have been carefully constructed, collected and returned to the 'Old World', in a developing culture of information flow. This flow of exotic and endemic elements

² Jim Collins, *Architectures of Excess*, Routledge Press, London, 1995, p. 28

³ Timothy Druckrey, "Revisioning Technology" in *Iterations: The New Image*, edited by Timothy Druckrey, MIT Press, USA, 1993, p. 27

continues to occur at an accelerating pace due to the increased density of global networks of objects, ideas, information and matter.

Information technology in the twentieth-century is impacting on the nature of the human relationship with the environment, and 'the entity called "nature" is meaningful only in the context of the cultural patterns that are constantly being negotiated in a society.'⁴ The increase of speed of travel and the apparent shortening of distances means that we lose sight of a meaningful destination and become like nomads with nowhere to go.⁵ Immigrants experience this dilemma in the form of a sense of loss, being torn between the desire to look back toward their former homeland, and the need to locate a new imaginary homeland. The imagination is a powerful force in colonisation.⁶

The effect of mass migrations has been the creation of radically new types of human beings: people who root themselves in ideas rather than places ... people in whose deepest selves strange unions occur, unprecedented unions between what they were and where they find themselves. The migrant suspects reality ... To see things plainly you have to cross a frontier.⁷

Migration is contributing to the removal of cultural boundaries. People place themselves through their journey, their only references their points of departure and arrival. In a sense they identify themselves through their dislocation rather than their location.⁸

⁴ Ross Gibson, "Elsewhere", Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, 1988.

⁵ Perejaume, *Art in America*, July 1989, p.134

⁶ Richard Nile, "The Double Life of Krystyna" in Chris Barry's exhibition catalogue *Wind in Utopia*, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, 1996, p. 11

⁷ Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands*, Granta Books, London, 1991, p.124–25

⁸ Pavel Buchler, "Migration", in the exhibition catalogue *FotoFeis International Festival of Photography in Scotland*, editors A.Foster, K.Gill, E.McArthur, Edinburgh, 1995, p. 75

Population movements and migrations have been characterised by the desire for cultural familiarity; people make pilgrimages, or even return permanently to their homelands, if political conditions permit. But it is never quite the same; the passage of time, and its changes, has effectively blocked the path of retreat. Travellers carry tokens of their own cultures. People are more likely to live and work in more than one country in their lives and consequently develop the ability to adapt and accept cultural difference. Paradoxically, the 'authentic' or uncorrupted cultural experience is increasingly difficult to obtain, and is therefore regarded as valuable.

In Australia, the 'possible definitions of nationality ... are as myriad as the cultures of the world' — thus Gibson quotes Henry Miller — 'Our destination is never a place but rather a new way of looking at things.'⁹ Australia's bicentennial year, 1988, marked a period of renewed interest in reviewing and questioning the development of Australian cultural identity. Ironically, this identity is based largely on myths of place. In his introduction to the bicentennial anthology *Islands in the Stream*, Paul Foss described this connection between place and identity, arguing that 'A portion of terrestrial space has been transformed into a place of historical life for people, into a corner of the historical world ... one's internal life, or 'habitus', becomes an essential part of one's image of habitat — the ways of defining and moving across a given space.'¹⁰

It is pertinent that the use of landscape metaphors is a commonplace feature of contemporary cultural theory and discourse. 'Terrain', 'contours', 'mapping', 'geography', 'navigation', 'location', 'space',

⁹ Gibson, op. cit.

¹⁰ Paul Foss, *Island in the Stream: Myths of Place in Australian Culture*, Pluto Press, Sydney, 1988, p. 1–3

'landmark', 'realm' and 'centre'; these words are used both to describe actual experience, and as a rich metaphorical language to deconstruct those experiences. The landscape metaphor appears frequently in writing that addresses individual and national quests for identity, quests usually expressed in the form of a desire for coherent self-location, and involving a constant reappraisal of the symbolic paradigms of physical and historical landscapes.

Salman Rushdie observed that the origin of the word 'metaphor' is the Greek words meaning 'bearing across', referring to the 'migration of ideas into images', and that therefore migrants are by definition 'metaphorical beings'¹¹. Rushdie goes on to suggest that migration, or frontier crossing, is a metaphor for all humanity; it is an opportunity to re-imagine the world. For the individual, migration is an experience akin to re-birthing; creating a new identity in a strange environment with an alien language and strange customs.

The modern experience of air travel has circumscribed our concept of space and characterised the experience of migration in the late twentieth-century. Air travel has contributed to the development of an understanding of nature as a context or framework for human activity rather than as an opposite or 'other'; many international flights now feature continuous computer screen updates en route, indicating to passengers the precise location of the aircraft .

I migrated from the United Kingdom to Papua New Guinea in 1972, and then from Papua New Guinea to Australia in 1983. The flights from London to Port Moresby, and later from Port Moresby to Hobart took a

¹¹Rushdie, *op. cit.*, p.278

matter of hours. Migrants to Australia in the 1950s spent many weeks at sea. Early settlers (for instance landscape painter John Glover and his family) and convicts transported here in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries spent many months at sea, more vulnerable to the vagaries and power of nature than more recent travellers, and therefore more inclined to view the experience as a battle against adversity. My migration experience has taken me from a crumbling 'first world', to the equatorial landscape of the 'third world' and finally to another temperate landscape, this time in the 'new world'.

I arrived here having been led to believe that Tasmania had a very English landscape, and in a sense I had viewed my impending migration here as being the nearest thing to a return to a homeland, especially since I had very few memories of England. I'd had enough of heat, humidity and expatriate life; I was looking forward to civilisation and culture. In December 1983, as I flew in to Hobart airport, I viewed with horror the yellow, drought-stricken scrub. The shock of that very un-English landscape preceded a slow process of coming to grips with another alien environment, a process of grieving for a lost landscape and letting go of a fantasy. That process has contributed to my interest in John Glover; he migrated to Tasmania a century and a half ago and experienced a process of coming to grips with this environment.

My attitude toward the Tasmanian landscape has been influenced by landscape art, especially Glover's paintings; viewing the landscape through his aesthetic filter has contributed to my ability to see aesthetic possibilities in dry sclerophyll vegetation. This appreciation was cemented by my year of horticultural studies in 1992, particularly the study of different native plant communities in Tasmania. After thirteen

years, my perspective of the native landscape has utterly changed, but my attachment to a constructed 'European' style of landscape lingers.

Aspects of reconciling attachments to different landscapes has been evident in my previous artworks. Some have looked back with nostalgia for the Papua New Guinean landscape, some have looked back with nostalgia for the English landscape. Many migrants attempt to compensate for lost homelands in some way. My images in this thesis represent an acceptance of the postmodern experience of 'placelessness' and of self identity as migratory and always in a state of flux.

Part Two

Glover's Tasmania and some 20th-century Australian landscapes

John Glover's oeuvre parallels some of the parameters of the landscapes of this research project, in terms of the physical locations of his landscapes (Tasmania), his concentration on 'inhabited' landscapes, and in terms of his personal experience of migration. John Glover is one of Tasmania's most celebrated artists. He migrated here from England in the early nineteenth-century, and much of his painting focuses on the pastoral scene — the natural landscape showing the impact of human activity on the land. Glover's reaction, and that of other artists, to this new environment, and their attempts to come to terms with it artistically, provides some context for the efforts of Tasmanian landscape artists since that time.

John Glover moved to Tasmania to take advantage, on behalf of his grown up children, of generous land grants. He named his property by the Nile River in northern Tasmania after Patterdale, the English village where he had lived for many years. He brought with him from England many plants and birds, which he used in the establishment of gardens at 'Patterdale'. Glover's sketchbooks contain pages where multiple images are tightly packed on one page to conserve paper, and this collaged effect inadvertently captures a sense of his documentation of progress through the landscape as he found it. These diaristic sketchbooks contain preparatory sketches with several versions of the same view, and clusters

of views based on particular locations. Glover was 'absorbed in the physical structure of the rural landscape'¹².

In nineteenth-century Tasmania the pastoral landscape paintings of John Glover reflected the complexity of white settlers' relationships with their new environment. Eucalypts became an important symbolic motif in pastoral painting in Australia. Pastoral holdings enclosed existing grassy plains dotted with eucalypts; a landscape that had not naturally evolved, but had developed through centuries of Aboriginal land-management practices of burning off to promote growth and flush out game. Ironically, many artists were unaware of this intervention and celebrated the 'pristine' landscape in paintings reminiscent of an idyllic English landscape, in itself a flawed fabrication of eighteenth-century landscape design.

Aspects of the Australian landscape appeared to have the park-like qualities made attractive by the eighteenth-century English landscaping innovations of 'Capability' Brown, who framed expanses of lawn with heavily wooded areas, in contrast to the highly formal gardens of earlier fashion. Brown's 'natural' landscapes involved transplanting large mature trees to create instant woods, and excavating massive amounts of soil to create instant lakes. Glover and other pastoral painters

focused on English aspects of the landscape in order to satisfy both their own aesthetic sensibilities and those of their patrons. Either they depicted localities where settlers had sought to convert their holdings into a familiar English environment or they showed places where the 'natural' appearance of the countryside was thought to be reminiscent of England. In both cases, they also demonstrated

¹² Peter Chapman, 'John Glover's migration to Tasmania', *The Art Bulletin of Tasmania*, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart, 1985, p. 23

Australia's great potential as a field for immigration and investment.¹³

Translating the landscape included importing and planting exotic species; Glover's painting 'A View of the Artist's House and Garden, Mills Plains' (1835) reflects this keen interest in horticultural experimentation in the new colonies through attempts to establish and propagate cottage flowers, vegetables, fruit trees and herbs in Tasmania. The preparatory sketches for the painting show that Glover embellished greatly on the original garden, achieving in the painting a sense of the unlimited bounty of nature to be found here.¹⁴

Despite the influence of a European aesthetic sensibility, and despite the influx of exotic species, Glover managed to capture some of the unique qualities of the native vegetation. His sinuously curving eucalypts became his trademark motif, alternately criticised for being botanically incorrect, and praised as carefully controlled expressions of the essential qualities of eucalypts.

Peter Chapman argued that it was a fallacy that Glover was unable to master the forms of the native flora; this fallacy was due in part to the differences in form and shape between species of eucalypt in Tasmania and New South Wales. Chapman concedes that the sinuosity is exaggerated; but through deliberate artistic intent, particularly in the paintings that feature Aborigines, where the graceful and lofty proportions of the tree 'seem to stand in silent mysterious empathy with the doomed race of natives'.¹⁵

¹³ Tim Bonyhady, *Images in Opposition: Australian Landscape Painting 1801-1890*, Oxford University Press Australia, 1991, p. 43

¹⁴ Bonyhady, *ibid.*, p.49

¹⁵ Chapman, *op. cit.*, p.30

Ian McLean has taken this theory of a symbolic division of style further, in his paper 'Under Saturn: Melancholy and the Colonial Imagination'¹⁶. The paper theorises that Glover's 'Aboriginal' landscapes, featuring the sinuous eucalypts, have allegorical meaning that reflects a melancholic ambivalence toward the landscape, whilst Glover's 'settler' landscapes feature 'oak-like' eucalypts that represent the redemptive landscape of paradise regained. Glover's response to the dislocation of migration was to produce two distinct groups of paintings that reflect irreconcilable visions of the landscape as strange 'other' and new 'home'.

¹⁶unpublished paper presented at a post-graduate research seminar, Tasmanian School of Art, Hobart, 1996



Figure 1. John Glover, 'Patterdale Landscape with Cattle', c.1835, oil on canvas, 75.5 x 112.4 cm, collection of the Australian National Library, Canberra. (Source: *The Art Bulletin of Tasmania*, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart, 1985)

Glover's curving 'rococo' eucalypts, the grazing cattle, the tidy meadows, the golden light that suffuses his idyllic rural landscapes in 'Patterdale Farm' and 'Patterdale Farm with Cattle', belie the harsh reality of the landscape and the dryness of the inhospitable scrub. 'We are given art, it is said, so that we shouldn't perish from the truth.'¹⁷ This disparity between reality and imagery reflects metaphorical aspects of the paintings; the images do not recreate a European landscape, but they certainly make reference to it.

Peter Conrad wrote that, despite the implicit falsity of these images, he 'derived a certain comfort from watching Tasmania misrepresented like this. It proved that reality need not be taken as given: it was manipulable, according to your own compulsive way of seeing. And it promised a heady relativity, replacing the single inescapable world with a kaleidoscopic array of images, all of them different.'¹⁸ In his childhood in twentieth-century Tasmania, Conrad sought to extend the range of possible 'ways of seeing' his environment by seeking out a variety of vantage points, such as the changing view from a moving train, or the dizzy childhood experience of climbing a pedestrian footbridge across the Brooker highway in Hobart. It was a conscious effort to manipulate the experience of 'being in the landscape'.

For contemporary Australian landscape artists the experience of 'being in the landscape' is also a crucial focus. 'Once a powerful agent for declaring place and conveying purpose for one's habitation, landscape is no longer necessarily fixed by "place", by geography. In practices which gather

¹⁷ Peter Conrad, *Down Home: Revisiting Tasmania*, Chatto and Windus, London, 1988, p. 180

¹⁸ Conrad, *ibid.*, p.172

existing images as a “readymade nature”, culturally specific styles reappear, detached, homeless, in cultural conflict.’¹⁹

Changes in our understanding of, and relation to, our immediate and global environments are reflected in the way contemporary artists visualise landscape. ‘An artist creating a landscape now has a concept of time/space unlike those of previous generations. The concept of landscape has changed to add a diverse set of understandings that may include aerial viewpoints, map references, and cosmic deep space.’²⁰ The nature of new time-based media lends itself to the production of art that looks at new and changing relationships between time, motion and space; and the resulting kaleidoscopic array of conceptual possibilities of ‘place’ has, as an inevitable corollary, a sense of ‘placelessness’.

Photomedia artist Rosemary Laing produced in 1995 digital images influenced by Michel de Certeau’s observations on movement and the collapse of distance associated with the technology of modern travel. Laing links this loss of referents to the phenomenon of television culture. Her research examines theories of perception, and her recent digitally manipulated landscape images map a shift in the way the occupation of space is affected by the accelerated development of technology.

¹⁹ Ian Burn, ‘Symbolism and Landscape’, in *Five Satellite Exhibitions*, edited by Susanne Davies, Biennale of Sydney, Regional Galleries Association of NSW, 1986, p. 28

²⁰ Margot Lovejoy, ‘Postmodern Currents’, in *Art and Artists in the Age of Electronic Media*, Prentice Hall, USA, 1992, p. 4



Figure 2. Rosemary Laing, 'ariel wall', electronically altered image, computer painted vinyl, 200 x 300 cm, 1995. (Source: *Greenwork* exhibition catalogue, Annandale Galleries, Sydney, 1995)

Laing's panoramic colour-saturated images, (some based on photographs by Peter Elliston, see Figure 2) and time-lapse images of aircraft take-off, aim to capture the brief moment between stasis and flux, and between acceleration and inertia. Laing's aircraft images allude to the network of flight paths that covers the globe and represents the collapse of distance²¹.

For painter Tony Clark the oriental scroll has been a recurring format for his pastiche landscapes. His 'Chinoiserie Landscapes' of 1986 were panoramic cultivated picturesque landscape paintings based on patterned and sculpted forms that excluded narrative and anecdotal elements. In 1988 the 'Myriorama' works, made while Clark was living in London, were a series of nineteenth-century-style watercolour landscape postcards, reminiscent of the work of Glover and Claude. They were presented at *Documenta* 1992 pinned to the wall in a line connected by a shared horizon line. The myriorama is 'perfectly attuned to the landscape needs of the postmodern admirer of nature. For it generates its scenery by repetition of a few formulae whose relationship to nature is salutary in its remoteness. The myriorama speaks to all our needs in landscape: it produces sensations of depth and atmosphere ...'.²² The imagery of the myriorama alluded to impressionism and the French landscape tradition which is familiar, yet remote to Australian viewers.

²¹ Annemarie Jonson, *Greenwork* exhibition catalogue essay, Annandale Galleries, Sydney, 1995

²² Roger Benjamin, 'Mysteries of the Villa Sino-Romana', in *Art and Text*, No. 44, 1993, p.40



Figure 3. Tony Clark, detail, 'Myriorama', acrylic on canvas boards, 1992. (Source: *Art and Text*, No. 44, 1993)



Figure 4. Tony Clark, detail, 'Kufic Landscape', acrylic on canvas boards, 1991, 61 x 370 cm, private collection, Melbourne (Source: *Art and Text*, No. 44, 1993)

Clark's 'Kufic Landscapes' of 1991 consisted of a series of paintings again linked by the horizon line and reminiscent of Chinese landscape scrolls. The panels are painted orange, and the 'trees' which form the landscape are actually Kufic Arabic letters which form the words 'Al Hamdu lillah' or 'Praise God'. Tony Clark's images clearly appropriate European and Eastern styles and symbols in recognition of cultural associations, but the linear format of many of his works invites a narrative reading, and the narrative reading lends itself to an experiential rather than symbolic representation of landscape.

Tasmanian printmaker Bea Maddock, in her 'Antarctic Suite' (1987), also uses both horizontal formats and horizon lines to recreate a sense of space and of the movement of the viewer through the landscape. This perspective partly stemmed from the fact that Maddock broke her leg in Antarctica and, unable to move around, she became a passive observer, compelled to use a mirror attached to the porthole of the ship's sick bay to watch the landscape move past.²³ 'Antarctic Suite' consisted of a ten-metre lineal panoramic landscape print in seven panels, hung with a series of colour photographs of the Baudessin Glacier. The colour-shifts in the photographs acted like the movement of frames in a strip of cinematic film, to represent shifts in time and space.

Whilst Clark and Maddock traced paths through historical landscapes and dramatic scenes of wilderness, for other contemporary Australian artists peripheral sites have provided the impetus for exploring Australian identity and environment; after all 'we live for the most part on the edges of the continent'²⁴. The exhibition *Location* comprised photo media depictions of landscape, many of which demonstrated a

²³ Bea Maddock, 'Saying and Seeing', *Siglo*, Issue 6, University of Tasmania, 1996, p. 16

²⁴ John Barbour, 'Inland: Corresponding Places', *ACCA*, 1991, p. 7

cartographic approach to environments, speaking in terms of 'mappings, territories, journeys, destinations, borders and geography.'²⁵

²⁵ Natalie King, "Dislocation", Photofile, Number 38, March 1993, p. 42



Figure 5. Robyn Stacey, detail, 'All The Sounds of Fear', cibachrome print, 120 x 147.5 cm, 1989–90. (Source: *Location* exhibition catalogue, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, 1992)

Generic landscapes such as Robyn Stacey's city images contradicted the more traditional documentary role of photography in which actual places are photographed and thus identified. The images depict the 'fictionalised nowhere space ... made possible by the flattening out of unspecific events and images into a single object-frame.'²⁶ Graeme Hare, by using colour bands to suggest movement, undermines the reading of the landscape as a fixed location and therefore as a specific, nongeneric landscape. Hare reduces elements of the landscape to essential fragments, which speak as much of what is not seen as of what is. This nonreferential perspective associated with hybrid media indicates that for many artists any sense of identity associated with landscape is in a state of flux²⁷. Hare employs the horizontal format as a device to signify the charting of space, while Clark and Maddock have used both the horizontal format and the horizon line.

²⁶ Juliana Engberg, *Location* exhibition catalogue, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, 1992, p.7

²⁷ Paul Foss, *op. cit.*, p. 1

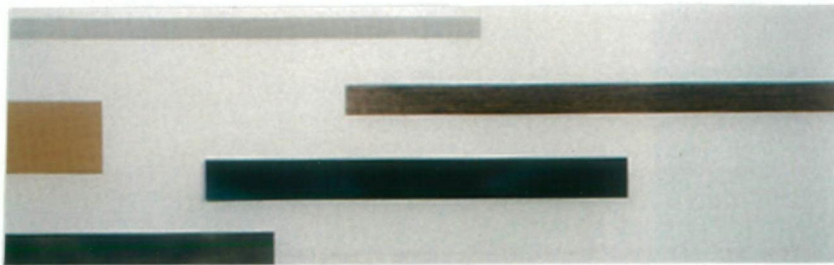


Figure 6. Graeme Hare, detail, 'Horizontal', C type photographs bonded onto perspex, nineteen pieces, each approximately 20 x 200 cm x 0.3 cm, 1992. (Source: *Location* exhibition catalogue, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, 1992)

The horizontal line carries a range of metaphorical possibilities. At its most literal, the horizontal line represents the horizon in the landscape, the interface between two fundamental and opposite elements or regions in the landscape, sky and land or sea and sky. Hence the line of the horizon can be used as a metaphor for other dualities; past and present, natural and synthetic, European and Antipodean, wilderness and city.

In my images the horizontal format functions in two ways; firstly it is a conceptual reference to this range of dualities, and my use of landscapes that represent the interface or the areas of hybridisation between these dualities. Secondly the horizontal format encourages the viewer to move along the image, to experience a feeling of moving through the landscape, and consequently of not belonging there; a sense of placelessness or dislocation.

Part Three

The development of the artworks presented for exhibition

For most of the contemporary Australian populace living in urban areas, pastoral regions represent an attractive ideal, and this attitude has not changed greatly since the nineteenth century, when massive-scale industrialisation caused huge population shifts from the country to the city, and people developed a nostalgic view of a disappearing lifestyle. Against this history, this research project revisions pastoral landscapes as hybrid landscapes, in the context of technological change.

'Every representation of landscape is also a record of human values and actions imposed on the land over time'²⁸, and every representation of landscape has the potential to influence human values and actions. Pastoral landscapes have been key sites in my artwork since 1990, and form a major focus of this research project, because they are hybrid landscapes that occupy the territory bordered by the city and the wilderness. A contemporary demarcation of the boundaries of pastoral landscapes could encompass huge tracts of land, from urban reserves to farmland. Pastoral landscapes reflect polarities; the meeting of native and foreign, of present and past, and they reflect the pain of dislocation and the longing for familiarity. They are characterised by human intervention and habitation which has corrupted 'natural' pristine values. They represent a convergence of different realms of experience.

²⁸ Deborah Bright, 'Of Mother Nature and Marlboro Men: An Inquiry into the Cultural Meanings of Landscape Photography', in *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography*, edited by Richard Bolton, MIT Press, USA, 1990, p. 126

The blend of exotic and endemic species in Tasmania's pastoral landscapes is a microcosmic example of hybridisation on a broad scale, through an increasing commerce of objects, ideas, information and matter around the globe. Information technology, by facilitating this commerce, is having an impact on the nature of the human relationship with the environment. Images constructed using new technologies are an appropriate response to this changing relationship; hence the development of this work has caused me to move away from photography and into video and digital media.

The first major batch of images I produced during this research project culminated in the collaborative installation 'Out There' (Figure 7). Created by Peter Young and myself for Hobart City Council and the National Association for the Visual Arts *No Vacancy* project in 1995, 'Out There' consisted of digital images, in slide format, back-projected onto the lime-washed glass window of a vacant retail space in the city centre. A slide-dissolve unit was used to create a seamless image sequence. The sequence reflected an individual's journey through rural, suburban and urban spaces, cutting a transect line between the geographically peripheral sources of the imagery and their inner city installation space. This installation represented the first stage of investigating ways of creating narrative by controlling the sequential delivery of images. In addition, 'Out There' was important in enabling me to pinpoint more precisely which hybrid landscapes were to be the focus of this research project.



Figure 7. Detail from 'Out There', Rebecca Greenwood and Peter Young, digitally altered video stills projected onto lime-washed glass, dimensions variable, 1995

While developing 'Out There' I used a video camera rather than a photographic camera to collect 'real' source images, and continued to use video in subsequent work. It emerged as the most appropriate image-capture device in making image sequences that evoke movement through the landscape.

Although the public response to 'Out There' was very positive, the sequential character of the work was obscured by the continuous looping of the slide sequence; the work had no discernible start or finish, and some viewers did not watch the screen for long enough to view the entire piece. The physical movement of the images through the slide sequence did not seem to be the most effective way to evoke a sense of movement through the landscape.

To achieve this sense of movement, I subsequently chose to concentrate on large-format computer ink-jet prints of digitally altered video stills. These prints are wide enough to encourage the viewer to move to view the image, mirroring my own passage through the environment in the process of making the work. 'Tree String/Pole String' (Figure 8), based in part on the Midland Highway in Tasmania, was the first work developed in this way, using the horizontal format to control the narrative reading of the image.²⁹

²⁹exhibited in "Imagine Nature", Plimsoll Gallery, University of Tasmania, January 1996.

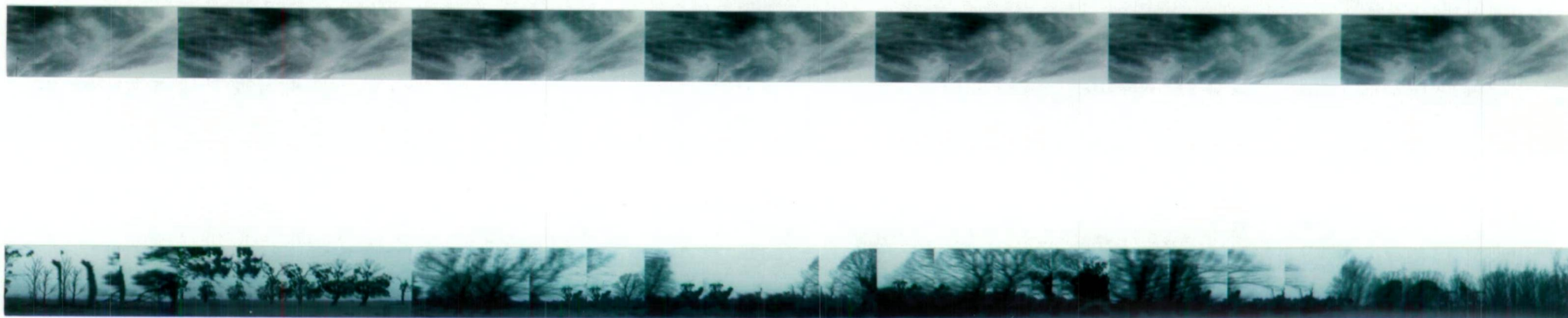


Figure 8

Rebecca Greenwood, 'Pole String/Tree String', 1995, ink on translucent polyester, two prints, each 25 x 550 cm

The Midland Highway was originally a bridle track developed by convict labour to connect the north of the island colony with the south.³⁰ Land along the highway was cleared for farming, and the climate was temperate and lent itself to the planting of typical English species such as hawthorn hedges and oak trees. Forests in England were cleared in the middle ages to create pasture to support a booming wool industry, but the passage of many centuries has meant that this cleared landscape has come to be validated as natural. The image 'Golf' (Figure 9) is based on a typical site of this type of validation; golf courses being a good example of highly manipulated 'natural' landscapes evolved from the aesthetic sensibilities of eighteenth-century landscape design. Ironically, this view of a 'benign' nature became a yardstick for colonial attempts to recreate Tasmanian nature in an English image. The early farming estates were characterised by imposing Georgian houses, fringed and protected by exotic trees.

³⁰ Howard Tanner, "Converting the Wilderness: The Art of Gardening in Colonial Australia", Australian Gallery Director's Council, 1979, p. 36



Figure 9. 'Golf', Rebecca Greenwood, ink on translucent polyester paper, 25 x 190 cm, 1996

My image 'Tree string' is a sequential depiction of a portion of the Midland Highway, and it is also a twentieth-century vision of a landscape much altered as a result of farming practices, especially clearing and grazing. The soil has been severely eroded, most of the trees, both native and exotic, have died, and the remainder are struggling to survive on diminished water resources.

'Tree String/Pole String' consists of two prints. A horizontal coloured print depicting a sequence of trees is paired with a horizontal monochrome image in which a section of sky pierced by a flagpole is repeated many times. This repetition reflects the passage of time, in the same way that a passenger would be reminded of motion, and the passing of time, by the flicker of telegraph or fence posts past the window of a moving vehicle.

'Tree String/Pole String' was the starting point for a set of translucent prints that is one of the two major sets of prints presented for exhibition and examination as part of this research project. 'Tree String/Pole String' and the other unframed images in the set of translucent prints have been largely derived from video footage shot from a moving vehicle. The viewfinder of the camera and the car window have acted as a still frame through which a changing sequence of images has passed. Segments of that image stream have been captured and manipulated to retain that sense of flickering frames. In the images 'Domain' (Figure 10), and 'Trunk' (Figure 11) I have trialled the use of repeated vignetting to evoke this sense of a view flickering past a frame.

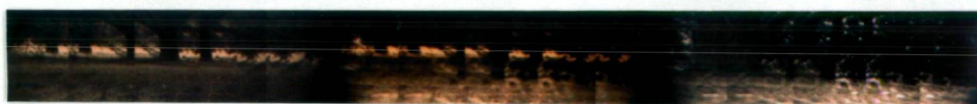


Figure 10. 'Domain', Rebecca Greenwood, digitally altered video still, computer printed on transparent polyester film, 25 x 250 cm, 1996



Figure 11. 'Trunk', Rebecca Greenwood, digitally altered video still, computer printed on transparent polyester film, 25 x 250 cm, 1996

During a train or car trip, the passenger/observer looks through the windows, viewing a moving, framed image. Relative to the vehicle, the passenger is not moving. But at the same time the image is still, and the vehicle, and therefore the passenger, is 'moving through a three dimensional scene like a projectile'³¹. The observer is separated from the image by the window pane, and by the relative difference in motion; this irreconcilable difference separates them with finality.

The increasing speed and volume of automated transport in the twentieth century overwhelms the observer's capacity to absorb these contradictions of motion and stasis. The observer reacts in several ways. If there are no breaks in the stream of images, the observer experiences visual overload and then perceptual shutdown. The observer learns to focus on the horizon line to combat travel sickness, and therefore is unable to focus on the foreground; it becomes a blur of texture and colour. The observer is likely to become tired and lose concentration. This experience of motion and images is very similar to the perceptual shut down associated with the bombardment of media imagery.

There is a powerful metaphorical potential in the relativity of stasis and motion in the view from a moving train; in the sense of Salman Rushdie's definition of metaphor as a 'bearing across' of ideas migrating into images³². The vehicle passes through the landscape and

Outside, there is another immobility, that of things, towering mountains, stretches of green field and forest, arrested villages, colonnades of buildings, black urban silhouettes against the pink evening sky, the twinkling of nocturnal lights on a sea that precedes or succeeds our histories. The train generalises Durer's *Melancholia*, a

³¹ Timothy Druckrey, op. cit., p. 61

³² Salman Rushdie, op. cit., p. 278

speculative experience of the world: being outside of these things that stay there, detached and absolute, that leave us without having anything to do with this departure themselves; ... these things do not move.³³

The window pane of the carriage mediates the boundary between the observer and the image, and allows the observer to 'move through' a static scene. The pane acts as a sound barrier; the image is silent, and the silence 'makes our memories speak or draws out of the shadows the dreams of our secrets ... unknown landscapes and the strange fables of our private stories.' Railroad travel 'combines dreams with technology.'³⁴ It allows us to forgive the landscape its ugliness; the buildings, factories and fences, to view the world with rose coloured glasses.

Like the vehicle window, the translucent surfaces of the prints allows the observer to go beyond their perception of the image as a two-dimensional object, to experience the metaphorical space of the image. The viewer looks through or into the image rather than at a flat opaque surface. The surface of the print is an interface between the viewer and the landscape onto which the viewer can project her or his dreams. These images are then hybrid zones in the sense that they synthesise actual places and metaphorical spaces, and in another sense through the fusion of nature and artifice evident in the acid greens and deep purples of these landscapes, for example 'Path' (Figure 12).

³³ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, University of California Press, USA, 1984, p.112

³⁴ Michel de Certeau, *ibid.*, p. 112



Figure 12. 'Path', Rebecca Greenwood, digitally altered video still, computer printed on translucent polyester film, 25 x 250 cm, 1996

In renouncing the monocular and bounded perspective of a still camera the work can raise issues about territory and the boundaries of one's environment and oneself. There is an element of chance in my images, achieved by continuously filming whilst driving through the landscape. This element of chance is retained by allowing the natural chronology of the footage to form the basic structure of the image. When I play the footage back I have a sense of motion sickness.

Footage sequences are transferred to computer where they are pasted together and manipulated to create the long horizontal format 'strings' or 'scrolls' that are the basic format of the work. The work 'Branch' (Figure 13), in particular, displays a stylistic resemblance to Chinese scroll paintings and to the paintings of Tony Clark; the silhouetted outlines of the leaves and branches are repeated in the image to create an ambiguous pattern merging the varied characteristics of different species. The absence of a horizon line denies the viewer a point of reference with which to place the image in a three dimensional picture plane. 'Rock' (Figure 14), created at the same time as 'Branch', functions in a similar way, but is an image based on water and rocks that could also be read as sky.



Figure 13. 'Branch', Rebecca Greenwood, digitally altered video still, computer printed on translucent polyester film, 25 x 250 cm, 1996



Figure 14

Rebecca Greenwood, 'Rock', 1996, digitally altered video still, computer printed on translucent polyester, 25 x 300 cm



Figure 15

Rebecca Greenwood, 'Cascade', 1996, digitally altered video still, computer printed on translucent polyester, 25 x 375 cm

On screen the images are cut and pasted to retain and refine the sense of motion; in the image 'Cascade' (Figure 15) the repetition of diagonal forms gives the image a musical cadence. The rising and falling horizon line and the rhythm of the image imparts a sense of motion. Rhythm is created by the repetition of the images in relation to each other; the viewer passes along a series of images, so that both the content and the arrangement of the images reinforces a feeling of movement. The translucent prints are not fixed to the wall, they hang in space; the method of installation sustains the sense of mobility and evanescence captured in the constructed space of the print. The space around the images is darker, minimising the distraction of the gallery space.

The scale and sequence of images, and their placement and lighting, allows a narrative reading of the images as a whole entity. Some of the images have been titled as 'strings', to imply that the images are segments or fragments that could hypothetically be joined, as in an endless ball of string, to allude to the possible existence of an overlapping circular narrative with no easily discernible start or finish. The circular narrative could in itself be a small fragment of global networks of images and ideas that are continuously interacting and hybridising in a complex process of cultural evolution.

These multiple views of hybrid landscapes are intended to have a metaphorical function, representing the notion of hybrid and aggregate narratives or histories. Viewed as a whole, the distinctions between these narratives are not clear and it becomes possible to interpret the whole as representing a generic landscape.

Viewed as separate components, the landscapes have individual characteristics which allow them to be associated with specific locations or landscape genres. This potential for both specific and generic interpretations can disorient the viewer.

The second set of prints in this exhibition, the 'Blur' series (Figures 16–19), represents this erosion of defined narrative and located space and, unlike the earlier works, these images function either as separate components or as one whole piece and, being transparent, can also be layered over other images.



Figure 16. 'Blur 1', Rebecca Greenwood, digitally altered video still, computer printed on transparent polyester film, 25 x 250 cm, 1996



Figure 17. 'Blur 2', Rebecca Greenwood, digitally altered video still, computer printed on transparent polyester film, 25 x 250 cm, 1996



Figure 18. 'Blur 3', Rebecca Greenwood, digitally altered video still, computer printed on transparent polyester film, 25 x 250 cm, 1996



Figure 19. 'Blur 4', Rebecca Greenwood, digitally altered video still, computer printed on transparent polyester film, 25 x 250 cm, 1996

In the 'Blur' series the motion through the landscape has increased to the point where the landscape has dissolved into streaks of colour, and the only discernible vestige of reality is the occasional shadow of a passing branch.

The final work completed for this project is 'Cloud' (Figure 20), which functions as a visual foil to the rest of the work, offering relief from the increasing nausea of motion. 'Cloud' is a contemplative space. The camera has been directed above the landscape at the sky, and unlike the sky image of 'Tree String/Pole String' (Figure 8) there is no flagpole to provide a reference point for time, motion and physical location — as every migrant knows, no matter where you are the sky above you is the same sky.



Figure 20. 'Cloud', Rebecca Greenwood, digitally altered video still, computer printed on white photo matte paper, 50 x 375 cm, 1996

Conclusion

The research has led to my move from photography into video and computer manipulation, culminating in large-scale illuminated images which hang in space. These media were explored for their potential to find a new aesthetic or plastic form for my vision of the landscape as an metaphor for my personal experience of migration.

The first set of horizontal format translucent prints was developed from video footage. The translucent surface allows the viewer to look through the two dimensional picture plane at the landscape within. Elements of the landscape were repeated in the image, colour was altered, and the horizon line was changed. The horizon line represents the division of fundamental elements of the landscape, and the horizontal format presents the possibility of movement through those elements. The horizon line has emerged in this work as a metaphor for the interface and hybridisation of dualities.

The manipulation of the images creates a sense of ambiguity about whether the landscape is natural or artificial. This sense of ambiguity was pursued further in the second set of images. The four 'Blur' images were shot using a video camera moving at much higher speed than the earlier works. The high speed enables colours and forms to be merged to capture an overwhelming sense of motion and disorientation, with only faint vestiges of the real landscape apparent to the viewer; the horizontal format has been retained, but the horizon line has disappeared.

The configuration of the images in the gallery is crucial to their reading. A long narrow space forces the viewer to move along and past the images, as a traveller in a vehicle would move past the landscape. 'Cloud' was the last image produced, and is hung separately from the two earlier sets. This image offers a sense of sameness in the landscape by using the sky as a contemplative space. 'Cloud' acts as a contrast or foil to the motion of the earlier works.

The historical and contemporary context for these images has ranged from nineteenth century landscape painting to post modernist theory about technology, migration and the construction of identity. This project has explored the relationships between the observer and the actual landscape and between the observer and the landscape image, and the metaphorical potential of those relationships.

Shifting boundaries between natural and artificial landscapes and the hybridisation of endemic and exotic elements in the landscape have emerged as useful metaphors for the shifting boundaries and hybridisation of contemporary cultures and identities. I have sought to reconcile the apparently contradictory phenomena of identity construction and global homogenisation, by making images that trace paths or journeys through hybrid zones able to act as metaphors for both phenomena.

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Illustrations

Figure 1

John Glover, 'Patterdale Landscape with Cattle', c. 1835, oil on canvas, 75.5 x 112.4 cm, Australian National Library Collection. (Source: *The Art Bulletin of Tasmania*, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart, 1985)

Figure 2

Rosemary Laing, 'ariel wall', 1995, electronically altered image, computer painted vinyl, 200 x 300 cm. (Source: *Greenwork* exhibition catalogue, Annandale Galleries, Sydney, 1995)

Figure 3

Tony Clark, 'Myriorama', 1992, acrylic on canvas boards, dimensions unknown. (Source: *Art and Text*, No. 44, 1993)

Figure 4

Tony Clark, 'Kufic Landscape', 1991, acrylic on canvas boards, 61 x 370 cm, private collection, Melbourne. (Source: *Art and Text*, No. 44, 1993)

Figure 5

Robyn Stacey, 'All the Sounds of Fear' (detail), 1989-90, cibachrome print, 120 x 147.5 cm. (Source: *Location* exhibition catalogue, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, 1992)

Figure 6

Graeme Hare, 'Horizontal' (detail), 1992, C type photographs bonded onto perspex, 19 pieces, each approximately 20 x 200 x 0.3 cm (Source: *Location* exhibition catalogue, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, 1992)

Figure 7

Rebecca Greenwood, 'Out There' (detail), 1995, digitally altered video stills projected onto lime-washed glass, dimensions variable

List of Works

A selection of the following works constitutes the exhibition presented for examination. Some of the works are to be pinned to the wall, some are to be suspended in mid-air, some may be hung in front of other images to create a layered effect. As the works are colour balanced to suit artificial light, the gallery space must be completely dark except for gallery spot lights to illuminate the works. Some works may be suspended above or below other works.

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Rebecca Greenwood, 'Pole String/Tree String', 1995, ink on translucent polyester, two prints, each 25 x 550 cm

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Rebecca Greenwood, 'Golf', 1996, digitally altered video still, computer printed on translucent polyester, 25 x 190 cm

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Figure 16

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Figure 18

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Figure 19

Rebecca Greenwood, 'Blur 4', 1996, digitally altered video still, computer printed on transparent polyester, 25 x 250 cm

Figure 20

Rebecca Greenwood, 'Cloud', 1996, digitally altered photograph, computer printed on white photo matte paper, 50 x 375 cm