



Disintegration: a homecoming

by

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Declaration of originality

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for a degree or diploma by the University or any other institution, except by way of background information and duly acknowledged in the thesis, and to the best of my knowledge and belief no material previously published or written by another person except where due acknowledgement is made in the text of the thesis, nor does the thesis contain any material that infringes copyright.

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12 April 2017

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Abstract

This thesis is an articulation of how I make sense of being a young Tasmanian Aboriginal woman through story, place and movement. The first part of the thesis consists of creative works that chart multiple approaches to the question *How does movement create the conditions in which story and place bring each other into being?*. The second part of the thesis is an exegesis of the creative works, which consists of two parts: the context of the creative works and the analysis of the creative works. The context traces the route my family and I walk from punnilerpanner country / Tarleton, the country that grew me up, to tebrakunna / Cape Portland, my ancestral country, as well as the multiple departures and returns that constitute the (ongoing) route. I outline the cultural practice of walking on country and examine how it relates to story and place. I also engage in dialogue with western philosophical and literary perspectives on the interrelatedness of place, narrative and movement. The analysis examines the responses that arise out of the creative process. This thesis, therefore, functions as both a story and a map: it is a map become story, and a story become map.

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To the people, places and stories I keep returning to, and to the people, places and stories who keep returning to me. My gratitude, always.

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CREATIVE WORKS

north of launceston: a placemap

part one

when i moved to hobart to go to university, everyone asked me where i was from.

tassie.

where in tassie?

the north.

launceston?

no, north of launceston.

north of launceston?

yeah, the north coast. you know latrobe?

no.

devonport?

where the boat comes in?

yep.

yep.

have you been?

no.

the sky

i'm on the road homewards
and you appear
weightless as the morning
a sea above me

there's a spot on the midland highway where the sky lifts. this is the beginning
of north of launceston. ridges retreat to the skyline. there is a breathing out. an
expansiveness. the sky releases us.

hobart's got the sort of sky that takes my breath away, in all sorts of ways. in
its nearness. its suddenness. it presses down on me with the inexorability of
soft, dense rain. for days. for weeks.

the sky up here is a different sort of sky. it fills my lungs with its frays of light.

tarleton

so, where am i from ? i'm from tarleton.

i'm sure everyone who has left home has experienced this: the slow narrowing of field.

australia.

tasmania.

northwest tasmania. (for years i didn't understand why devonport is in northwest tasmania. it is squarely in the central north coast of the state: the cradle coast. but now i see: it's northwest relative to launceston).

devonport.

latrobe.

tarleton.

tarleton road.

every now and then i meet someone who asks which end of tarleton road: sheffield or mersey main ? this question gives me a special sort of delight. in fact, the whole conversation delights me. and the further i am from tarleton when i meet someone who knows it, the greater the delight.

because what we are doing in this conversation is establishing our relative distance to each other.

i often marvel at our ability to inhabit all of these places simultaneously.

tea tree lane

the tide comes in
a shift
out it goes again

where the boat really comes in. and goes out.

running along tea tree lane towards the river from pardoe beach, i see the spirit of tasmania sail past. i see my pop, timing his evening walk so he can see it leave for the mainland.

it's been a long time since i came here. long enough to half forget these things. long enough to half remember them, again.

the mainland. on the north coast of tassie, you are always alongside the bass strait, on the edge of it, looking out across the water. the strait is what orients you, here. here, closer to melbourne than to hobart. deep, fast flowing strait, separating this island from the next. connecting it, too.

bass strait, you are the paths i walk, the memories i return to, the stories i write. you are my family, saltwater. i'm most at home in your liminality. i return to you again and again, to trace and retrace your tides. to listen to you sing. to see you.

pardoe beach

there are always birds to chase, here. here, running alongside you, i remember that moving is a sort of joy. a sort of play.

we go when the tide is low and the flat beach reaches out in front of us. when the wind blows, it blows east. it's always harder, coming back. when the wind doesn't blow, everything is amplified in the stillness. at the point, clouds reflect in the sand and pour light down onto it. east, the hills of bakers beach rise out of the sea. west, the houses of devonport spill down into it. the lighthouse waits. airplanes hum behind the dunes. it's the first beach i see, flying into devonport. it's the last beach i see, leaving. well, it used to be. i don't fly in or out of devonport anymore. and i don't swim here because it's next to a sewerage plant.

but you do. one day you get it into your head to make tracks out to the horizon and there's no saying otherwise. i get in clothes and all, that day. i stumble and swim to the furthest rock beyond the point. i wave my arms. i call your name until my voice goes hoarse with defeat. i shake, first with anger and then with panic. then, i am still. i wait for you to disappear. then, i remember. i knew how to wolf whistle, once. my wolf whistle comes back. it reaches where my voice doesn't. you turn around. you swim back. i swim back, too. the tide is coming in. we reach the sand at the same time. you come over to me. this is your last day off the lead, i say.

i realise, afterwards. you were after the sea eagle.

river road

there's a ghost that goes up and down along there, along the old highway by the river. he rides a bicycle.

no, he doesn't. it was uncle riding the bicycle when he saw the ghost. it was a woman.

no, wasn't it when everyone was in the car together that time, coming back from that thing. the car stopped, remember. it wouldn't start back up. that's when everyone saw her.

i'm sure there was someone on a bicycle.

and then the car started back up, right ?

yeah they didn't hang about after that.

anyway, there's definitely a ghost up that way. don't go up there by yourself at night.

and don't eat the oysters out of the river.

there's hundreds of them.

yeah, but they're full of muck.

bells parade

the river, the river. the river banks and just past there belonged to my family for a while. they don't belong to us anymore. but we still belong to them. we belong by the river.

this is where the river begins to be a river proper, instead of an estuary. it's a tidal river but there's a sign along river road that indicates where the river becomes the sea. it points two ways: one way is inland waters and the other way is marine waters.

we all swam in this river, growing up. this is the river that grew us up. this river is my family.

there's a house by the river. it almost fell in, the way my family's always falling into the river. the river falls too. and rises. it breathes. it didn't fall, though, the house, when we all stood on the veranda and decided to move it downriver. to a different bank. over to the other side of the river. it's in bells parade now, where the stones hold up the banks and the banks hold up the house.

but that river, it still rises.

last street

in latrobe, when i was growing up, there were two streets called last street.

now, last street on the west side of town is called last street west.

and, if you drive down last street (east) you'll see there's a street called new street down there too, now.

the crowded lounge

there are all sorts of tables here, at the crowded lounge. the table i am sitting at, writing, is a door. a church door. it turns out i'm sitting on a pew, which makes a sort of sense. opposite are two stout armchairs. roses bloom all over them.

i like the idea that there are all sorts of tables and chairs in here. that, each time i come here, i can experience the place differently. qualitatively, sitting in a pew and sitting in an armchair are not the same. sitting up high in the window, i think different thoughts to the thoughts i think sitting in a low slung vinyl chair with the drawer handle of an old school desk pressing against my knee. my spine takes different shapes.

so often we move around without paying attention to how things are arranged. we think that because they are things, they have no impact on us. but they shape the very way in which we move. our very bodies. our thoughts.

there's a puzzle here, too. it's not finished, yet.

to reliquaire, with love

when mum calls me in the morning to let me know that the main street in latrobe is shut off and i might have to go round on my way home from hobart, i don't think much of it. a fire's started in reliquaire, she says. it's burning up in the roof.

by the time i reach latrobe late afternoon, you are a pile of smoking red bricks.

i almost stop the car right in the middle of the road when i see you. people are lining up along the footpath opposite, silent.

you where i squirrel friends into secret mirror rooms to peer into infinity. you where i buy my perfume, the only place i can find it in tassie. you who transports me. you've got objects overflowing, but that's not all. you've got dreams in those objects, too. being here, i go someplace else. i put sunglasses on my face, in all sorts of shapes. i weigh teacups in my hands. i wear silk pyjamas.

reliquaire, you are here still.

the orchid reserve

the only place i've seen orchids is in singapore. there's a whole national orchid garden of them over there in the botanic gardens. it's magic.

here, off railton road, we've put some space aside for them, too. forty acres. which is sort of magic, too.

it's home to over fifty species of native orchids, but i haven't seen one yet. i'm going to keep going, though.

why? because of the map at the beginning of the orchid trail. it's a very straightforward map because it ignores most of the possible pathways. which means there are pathways there that don't show up on maps.

also, there are orchids.

shale road

the river becomes rapids up here and once you're in them there's nothing to do but let them carry you along and hope you don't bump up against the rocks. don't let the littlies in here because you'll have to go in after them. dogs, too.

the rapids let you go too, eventually, in the deep still pool by the fallen tree.

there's a frog that sings in the platypus pool and we're all trying to stand up and balance in the guts of him. no one even notices that we're singing, too. least of all us.

it's always the songs that you don't know you're singing that reverberate in you the loudest. the longest.

tarleton to tebrakunna: a placemap

part one

the wind turbines

you work for the wind farm, so we get to go right on in there. it's a surreal sort of place. it's got some magic to it. they say the birds fly too close and get caught up in the turbines. i can see why. there's a throbbing a humming a buzzing. just below the surface. the whole being here vibrates. i'm sure my very body's being altered.

i keep seeing the windfarm in disrepair. i don't know what it is about it. they're all shining. i go right on up to one and touch it. it's solid. but i'm on a different sort of time. they won't last, and i can see it. you give us some high vis vests.

follow the road straight down and it will take you home, you say.

if the ancestors couldn't see us coming before, they can now, i say.

we go down along the long, straight road home.

the ringarooma river

we get to the river mouth when the sand begins to shimmer. there are a whole lot of pelicans waiting at the high tide line. we're way ahead of time.

there's nothing for it but to camp out by the dunes out of the wind and wait for the tide to go out.

the wind's not blowing the way it usually blows.

we wait. the march flies arrive. they are relentless. so are we. we match each bite with a corpse.

we watch the lagoon by the dunes recede. it edges its way down. i try to doze off, but can't. i try to stay awake, but can't. after two hours, i decide to go take a look at the river mouth. you stay by the dunes. when i get there, i see the tide's gone out quite a way so i decide to wade a little way into the river and see what's happening.

there's a black cloud above the dunes on the other side of the river and it's fast becoming something else. i can't quite say what. i think bushfire, but it's not rising, it's descending. the water's at my knees. i begin to slow down. kelp curls around my ankles. i don't take my eyes off the sky. the dunes opposite start to blur. i stop altogether. i'm something like a quarter of the way into the river, but it's hard to say. the water doesn't seem to be getting any deeper, and the river seems to be getting wider. the sky moves quickly. a thick sea mist drops onto me and i can't see the dunes opposite any more. i turn around. i can still see the shore i came from, just. i can't see the dunes where you are. i can't see you. i back out of the river. i don't take my eyes off the sky. i don't turn around until i'm on the sand, and when i do, i bolt back to you.

later, you tell me you didn't take your eyes off me when i walked out to the river mouth. on the way out, i'm a white silhouette against the white sand. the mist comes in, and i disappear. on the way back, i'm a black silhouette against the mist. you think i'm a pelican. it isn't until i get closer that you realise it's me.

still later, you tell the story at the pub: she went in white, and she came out black! we all laugh. but we don't go back to that river.

the living site

you give me a rock to hold onto and it sits in my hands with a heaviness that is all its own.

i've never felt this sort of weight, before. the weight of thousands of hands. of just one pair of hands.

it's got movement in it, this rock. it's anything but still. it shifts in my hands like the dunes. it feels its way among the rifts and valleys. it makes out the landscape of my hands.

i haven't held anything this sort of solid in my hands for as long as i can remember.

it's for grinding ochre, you say. hold onto it for a bit longer.

i'm holding onto it, still.

the islands

it turns out we have different ideas about how we're going to wind this thing up. to me, it's little musselroe beach. to you, it's the mouth of the little musselroe river. to you, it's our friend's place.

who are any of us to decide these things?

we go along little musselroe beach and climb around the point to the mouth of the little musselroe river. then we go back to our friend's place.

there's a cairn at the mouth of the river. we decide this is it. we go to take a picture but the camera battery runs out.

the islands draw your eyes to them. the pathway continues to them. it's visible as day. we come back in the morning and take a picture of us looking out at them.

later, when we visit the tebrakunna visitor centre to have a look, we understand the true significance of the cairn at little musselroe bay, and the significance of us looking out towards swan island.

that's where george augustus robinson stops off as he transports our families from mainland tasmania to wybalenna.

swan island is where our families stand and look back at our country.

the country we're standing on, looking back at swan island.

boobyalla

what's it like for you, being aboriginal? i ask

everyone's got ideas about what it means to be aboriginal and if you don't fit in with those ideas they try to make you feel like you're not real, you say.

yeah.

that sort of thing's been going on all my life.

yeah, me too.

but anyone who tries to tell you who you are or who you're not doesn't know shit. what they think doesn't change a thing. so i just shrug it off.

i nod. it's not easy, though.

you pause.

look at this, you say, breaking off a boobyalla branch. it's stuck here between nature and civilisation, constantly getting beaten back by both. it loses some roots. it keeps hold of others. it's always struggling to survive, and it does. that's what we do, too. what we've always done. what we'll always do.

you give me the branch.

it's not until later that i understand just how formidable boobyallas are. i'm still wearing the scratches become scars on my legs.

the wind

you are in the wind, they say. or the wind is in you.

for a brief moment on the beach, i feel you in the wind. in me. i'm in the wind,
too. you become the wind become me.

there's no then that's not now. no there that's not here. no you that's not me.

that's what the wind says, anyway.

the sky

the world feels wide, here at the big sand big sea big sky. i'm beginning to lose my thoughts in the sky. they begin, in my consciousness, but instead of arranging themselves into a coherent image, they dissolve. perspective disintegrates, too. i turn around and immediately forget if i've come this way or if this is the way i'm going. backwards becomes forwards. more sand, more sea, more sky. a thought begins to form. i've got the whole map before me. it's gone. i go off in one direction, then another. i'm moving. i'm still. a thought begins to form.

everything is moving very slowly. my thoughts dissolve into the sky. my voice dissolves into the wind. my feet dissolve into the sand.

and there's the sky.

the sea

i dream that places are oriented a certain way. they face a certain direction.
each time i return to a familiar place, it's different. events move from one place
to another, from one day to another. the mountain slides down.

stories return to themselves, again and again. generation after generation.

over the river

we make just one river crossing by foot, from weymouth to bellingham. it's you and i, who go over the river. the tide's about as low as it gets when we reach the estuary. it looks like the sort of river you can cross. in some spots, anyway. we bump into a couple of locals as we come down along the bank to scope it out.

do you think we can get over to the other side?

they nod.

where's the best spot to cross?

they point downstream.

we nod. thanks.

we slosh over the mud flats and down the shallowest point. it's low, but it's still moving. we look at each other.

want a banana?

ok.

we sit and watch the river for a bit. the tide's about to turn. now's as good as any time. i hoist my backpack onto my head and take your hand. we wade in. we take it slow. in the middle it gets to waist height and i can feel the pull of the water when i lift my foot off the ground. i'm not thinking about anything, really, except getting it back down somehow. i'm squeezing your hand, now. slowly, the bank of sand creeps closer. the water goes down a notch. things start to ease off. we keep on taking it slow. the water's at our knees, and then our ankles. we're there.

i can't remember if i gave a little jump of joy. i hope so.

fish traps

everything's already here, i know that much. it's just a matter of being able to see it. there's so much, though, i don't know how to see.

i'm so grateful to the people who show me how to see.

some things, though, i can see for myself. today, i see you, fish traps.

waterhouse beach

i've got a recording of the wind and the waves along this beach. it goes for a minute or so, and the wind doesn't let up the whole time.

it's a very long beach, this one. long enough for you to get impatient waiting for us at the agreed spot and decide to drive on down. it's a beach that's still becoming a beach, too, which makes for hard walking. our feet sink deep into shells becoming sand. the wheels of the ute sink deep, too, when you stop. deep enough for the axle to disappear.

we all get on our bellies and try to dig it out, anyway. it's no use. you get hold of a big stick somehow and i can't tell if it's for digging or for whacking someone over the head. after a while, we stop digging and start glaring at you. the tide's coming in. we haven't got long. i retreat to look for shells. you make some calls and a local farmer agrees to come and dig you out. you've got a hundred dollars on you to hand over. we start back walking. a few minutes later, we see a huge tractor rolling towards us. it stops when it reaches us. we gesture back down the beach. the driver nods.

we follow the ute tracks along the beach. they're already dissolving in the wind. we're just a few hundred metres from the agreed spot when you burn past. you cackle with triumph. we roll our eyes.

later, when i'm in the bath, i hear you on the phone saying you spent the day making an arse of yourself.

i crack up.

waterhouse island

this is the first time i'm making notes during the day. i'm on the way out to waterhouse point, across from waterhouse island. this is the first time a place is speaking to me, that way. or the first time i hear it. i'm at home, here. i'm at ease, here. i've always loved this sort of country, low scrub and hills by the sea. i can see here. i belong here. i trust this place. it knows me, i know it. i can move freely here. and it is here i understand what is it to move freely. how i am moving. backwards and forwards in time and space, from place to place, story to story, person to person, among all of the connections i have made and will make. i am, always, everywhere. i think of how places hold people. the birds, too. they were there are here. this how to move freely. there is no beginning to walking, no end to it. there's never been a beginning or an end. just a making sense of things, an interweaving of meaning, over generations, in all beings.

hobart: a placemap

part one

the mountain

i'm always approaching you. sometimes i feel it's all i do, here. over and over.

autumn seeps into my bones. i feel the old melancholy. the resistance of my limbs, the be out longer stay up later don't give in to the shorter days and the grey sun stubbornness of them. the lie on the couch and listen to old songs. the longing for something unclear.

i fix a puncture in my bike and ride up ridgeway road. my legs gasp so hard i have to stop several times. when i reach the dam the road flattens out and the trees take on a surreal quality that makes me feel i'm pedalling outside of time and space.

i don't know how long i'm on that road. in a way, i'm still on it.

the rushing wind keeping so still whirring down huon road and back to my doorstep before i'm properly where i am. i feel i'm still up there, i get back down so fast.

i fall in love with you all over again. over and over.

st georges terrace

the three of us move down together from the coast. i remember arriving, driving up davey street past the stone wall, there, by the park by the bus mall, it'll come to me, what it's called. anyhow, you're driving and i'm navigating. i don't know hobart at all. this is the very beginning. before my heart's in it. in its very streets. i don't know where we're going but somehow i get us there. when we pull up you're already there, both of you, unloading. the excitement of moving large objects around. of moving our bodies from one place to the next. of arriving, of finding out the ways we'll move in and amongst, over and over.

we begin in earnest. we drive all over town to all of the second hand shops. we buy practically nothing. we've got everything, really. but we go anyway. we all go shopping together, and split the bill three ways.

for a brief moment, there's no one between the two of us. inevitably, we drift towards each other. the way we always do.

but we're different, it turns out. things begin to fray. and then there's someone between the two of us, again.

i move out, into a different house.

i'll hardly see you for the next six years. it seems absurd, now.

denison street

there's a green bathtub here, and we share bath after bath together. we talk about all sorts of things. we understand each others' sorts of sorrows. i throw my legs over the side of the bath when i get too hot. i don't get to see you without your glasses, so much.

you start staying over at someone's place up the road. i start staying over at a someone's place down by the water.

one night, i get to sitting out on the couch and somehow lock myself out. i don't figure it out until i'm on my own. i ring our doorbell a few times. no one comes to open it up. you're already up the road, asleep probably. what the hell. i make tracks up the road to you and knock on the front door. there's no one about. i go back down onto the street, where i can see the attic window. there's no light. i think about throwing something on up there, but i don't know what i want you to do about it anyway, so i go back on down the street. i ring our doorbell a few more times. no one comes to open it. then i see my window, right by the front door. it's open, so i slide it on up and scramble in. my room's so cold i can see my breath.

the next day, one of our housemates gives me hell for ringing the doorbell so late. i still don't understand why she doesn't come down and let me in. no one at your place hears me knocking. you'd come down for sure.

i've still got the bath towel you left behind. the one with the blue and white stripes.

waterworks road

it's a steep valley, this one. short afternoons. it's hard to get the clothes dry.
hard to keep my bones warm.

this place is crammed with all sorts of things. this is the beginning of so much.
i feel all sorts of things, here. this is where i take my bed apart and strew my
things all over the floor. where i begin to write, again. where, for a short time,
the only clear pathway is from the doorway to the bed.

we meet, here, before i'm even living here. you remember, and you tell me the
story over and over, but i only ever half remember. i'm somewhere else, that
night. i'm always, somehow, somewhere else. there's no reason for it. it's just
the way things go.

nothing matters, here. there's no milk, so i give you cream in your coffee.
later, i'll tell this story over and over again. how you didn't make a bit of fuss
about the cream.

how could you know? that i'm past hope or fear. that, normally, i'll make a fuss
of the slightest thing. how could i know? that fuss is something you'll do
anything to avoid.

you're not the person i fell in love with, anymore, you'll say to me, later.

i'm afraid i don't love you enough, i'll say, later still.

and even later, it'll turn out it's not such a big deal, after all.

marine terrace

i come down for days at a time. i'm always about to leave, but i never quite do. i convince myself i'm about to leave, but i'm not, not really. it doesn't take you long at all to say why don't you leave a few things in the cupboard? it's too soon. it's not too soon at all. it's the most practical thing.

it's renovated now, our place. someone with money gets hold of it and does it up real nice. every time i go past there, and i go past there all the time, every chance i get, i stop just by the gate and look at where we grow zucchinis in the corner, and at the patch of sun next to the tree where you and i sit one time on the hill. i stop a few steps further along, too, and look in the window. there's a blonde labrador on the back porch, curled up in his bed. he lifts his head to look at me, as i look in the window. there's a sink in the window now, and i can see all the way through to the window on the other side of the house, the window that looks out to the sea. they've knocked the back wall of your bedroom out, then. i still see the wall, and the bedroom behind it. i see the bed where you wrap your arms around the night of the party my heart gets broke. when we wake up in the morning we go to the market and you keep a hold of my hand for the longest time. when you let go i get lost and wander around until a friend finds me by myself in the market and brings me back to you. i see the poster, the one i forget. i get another copy for you years later. i get a passport wallet back to you, too. i've lost so many of your things and it takes me years to get them back to you. but i always do. i see your guitar in the corner. i see where you lounge under the window. i see us climbing out your bedroom window and onto the balcony outside. the balcony's not the slightest bit safe. it leans. i go around the front of the house and see they've propped it up. there's a door and everything now, you can go straight out onto it. i keep going down the hill and onto the jetty. i see us on the jetty, hundreds of us. hundreds of you. drinking tea. smoking a cigarette. with friends, with me, by yourself. i see them putting up the tsunami meter. i see us chatting to

the fellas moored up along the side there. eating lunch. looking out at the water.

this is where i go to see you, still. to see us.

bedford street

i'll never forgot the morning you come back from the doctor and tell me you've got something in your lungs. everything slows right down. things move real fast, after that.

we go into quarantine. just the two of us, for two weeks. it's winter, too. sometimes you can manage to walk around the block. sometimes you manage to make it downstairs.

you're slipping away from me. i take hold of you by the wrists. they become smaller than mine. i hold onto you more tightly.

you loosen my grip. you take my hands in yours. you won't let me go.

slowly, you begin to grow.

solana place

a car that blows smoke from its radiator. a shrine. a smashed mirror.

we've got no idea how to get our couch from one place to the next until you come into the picture. you've got a small car and big dreams.

we pile in and roll up and down hills until we're in the driveway and in the doorway and we've got the couch in the lounge room before we've even left.

it's a heavy one, this one. there's a dent in the car. no big deal, you say. nothing goes unscathed, anyway.

raasay

that couch, it's still here. all of us, though, are somewhere different now.

we live in every room in this house. and every room, it lives in us.

it's in me, still. i leave so quickly i don't leave at all. it's the only way.

the sea

the sea's got a way of creeping into the city. there's one place i go to see it,
and to see you too. to see your hands in the glare of an octopus. to remember
the ray you see amongst the kelp. the water on a camera lens, and two happy
faces under snorkelling masks inside it.

i put my hands underwater and yours reflect back at me.

driving in hobart

this time around, it's been a while since i've been on wheels here. long enough for street names to slip away. entire suburbs, even. forest road, it turns out, is in west hobart, not north hobart.

so i try to get directly from north hobart to forest road, west hobart. arthur street? hill street? no, i'll still be forced to turn left once i get onto molle street. it's impossible. i give up, park on bathurst street, and walk down to forest road.

it's not until i'm in the car with you that i see how it's done. there's always a way. it's just a matter of knowing.

but knowing and forgetting are never far from each other, for me. i have moments of nonrecognition. of uncertainty. is it here, at the street next to knopwood street, that i can turn right onto sandy bay road? was it always such an unlikely turn?

and the parking on melville street was two hour parking, right? surely i didn't have to come quite so far up the hill before one hour parking transformed into two, before?

harrington street, though, is the same as it always was.

salad bowl

i still call salad bowl, salad bowl. the sign's still up, too. i wonder if they'll change it. if salad bowl will ever become hill street.

i don't really get what's going on when i see the signs start going up inside. it's early, normally, and i'm just rolled out of bed and rolled down the hill on my bike to pick up orange juice and fresh bread and croissants for breakfast. i never know if i'll be early enough for the croissants. a lot of the time i'm not.

it's always harder, going back. up the hill. and now i'm coming from hill street, too.

fitzroy street

i'm falling in love with this city all over again. it's a perfect autumn day. brisk morning, solid blue sky. orange leaves piling up on parked cars. fitzroy street is my favourite street to walk along, kicking leaves. today is most definitely the day for it.

normally i go by myself. but it turns out we're out wandering along at dusk, nearby, so we go together. it's my final evening in hobart, for now. there's stillness between the piles of leaves. between sunset and last light. between us.

do you want to go back the same way?, you ask, when we're on our way back. i hesitate.

i don't mind. what about you?

you won't be coming back for a while, so you decide.

let's go a different way, i say.

northern rivers: a placemap

part one

this town on the sea is clear as glass. its movements are gentle and measured. its face glows in the sun. everything grows in its presence. it is its mandalas that make it whole. its sudden flashes of sun and rain. its trembling stillness. it wears callouses in its shallows and speaks in silences. its birds explode at dusk and the moon growls. it wraps its arms around you twice.

skinnners shoot road

i'm always arriving at dusk. i'm always on the bus. i get the bus because i like to arrive by myself. to give myself time to arrive.

it's a long, straight road, this one. the sort of road i'm always walking along. i can't tell if it exists in me or if i exist in it. all i know is that it was in my legs before i came here. that's the feeling i get, every time i see it. i don't quite have the words for it. there's lots of ways to say it that don't quite say it, for me.

but i know this road knows me.

barefoot

i follow a hand drawn map to get here. it's not until i'm here that i realise i've been along this road before.

the coffee's delicious. i can feel the potter's hands in the cup i'm drinking from. i sit outside on a crate in the sun. i lean back against the wall and close my eyes. it's quiet. hot. i'm still.

we get talking when i come in to settle the bill. you're from tassie, too. you're from the coast, too. where did you go to school? oh yeah. no, i went to the public one. you know tarleton, sure. you know my neighbours. you spent years driving past my place and up the hill.

we didn't meet, all those years. growing up beside each other.
and now we're here.
funny, huh?

the platform

some days the barrier's not up at all, but when it is, it's easy enough to get around. easy enough to get those painted green boards under your feet and get out near the edge any way you can.

here, we're only visible to the sky and the sea.

we're not afraid of falling. we're familiar enough with it, after all.

we face the sky, for a while. then, you roll over to face me. i wait for the clouds to clear, but there aren't any. so i roll over to face you, too.

the thing about vertigo is, there's no going back.

the frangipani tree

we're driving when we see it, which is faster than we're usually going, so we're past it before i say, that's the one. it's in front of a motel. you park facing the wrong way and across someone's driveway and make our way on over.

it's a tall one, blooming all over. we try picking out branches for cuttings from below, but we can't quite make out one from the other. i'll climb up, you say, and you can tell me which ones to get.

i'm standing there looking up at you and you're asking, which one? when a man appears behind the fence of the motel and says, what are you doing? we're getting cuttings from the frangipani tree, i say. don't you think you should ask the motel, first? i shrug. ok, i say. i go into the motel and ask if it's ok to take cuttings from the frangipani tree, and they say it's ok. i go back out. it's ok, i say. which one then? you ask. by this time the man's standing behind the fence. it's a sort of tight weave bamboo fence, so i can't quite see through it, but i also sort of can. i can see he's come out of a pool. it occurs to me that he might be naked. that one? you ask and i nod my head without looking. the branch crashes to the ground and i start. you look at me. are you alright? you ask. it was that one, wasn't it? i nod again, squinting at the man. i'm eighty per cent sure he's naked. (later, when i'm telling the story, i'll say ninety per cent). can he be? i ask myself. was it this one? you ask. i can tell by your face it's not the first time you've asked, so i nod again. he must be, i decide. i'm trying to keep my eyes on you but it's not happening. i can barely keep it together. you aren't seeing the funny side of this, though. you give up asking me anything. you cut off a few more branches at random and jump down from the tree. we scoop them up and get them back in the car and take off.

it's only later you understand, when you hear me telling the story to someone else. ah, you say.

each time i arrive you plant sunflowers
and when you stand amongst them
they all turn to face you

each time i leave you collect seeds to plant
in rows that will, each morning
wake and turn their faces towards you

the most luminous thing

the magnolia tree

each time i arrive i go home along the way you showed me, past the magnolia tree.

somehow, you're always going along there in front of me.

and i'm always there too, knocking on the front door of the house that belongs to the magnolia tree, saying, my friend, he's having a bad day, can i take a small branch from the magnolia tree and give it to him?

of course.

my soles in mullumbimby

some days are so easy. everything's easy. you write MULLUMBIMBY on a piece of cardboard, the three of us stand outside the petrol station and in five minutes, we're on our way.

we're still carrying the dust from second hand books in our nostrils. you let out a few good sneezes, but all mine does is itch.

the car smells like coffee. our lift, both of them, are from melbourne. they've got winter in their faces. chipped nail polish. hands fresh out of gloves.

we give our thanks and give ourselves over to mullumbimby. we make our way to an alleyway and follow it along. we're more interested in what doesn't face the street. we wind up in a second hand store saying hello to a dog. his owner brings me a ball to throw around. when i finally get to looking at second hand things inside, i see a pair of navy blue low cut converses for forty dollars. they're my size. my black low cut converses aren't shoes, as such, anymore. i buy them without hesitating and the owner says i can put them on right away and leave my old pair with him. i hesitate. i'm not sure if i'm ready. i reflect for a minute. yes, it's time to let them go. i sit down on a green vinyl stool and lace up the new pair. i place the old pair in a plastic bag and slowly knot it. i hand them over to the owner, and shake his hand. i throw the ball one last time and then we're out of there.

i feel like it's a good place to leave them, i say.

it's a good place to leave your soles, you agree.

we climb a tree. i find another pair of navy blue low cut converses in my size and buy a weird, weird jumper. i get so hungry i begin to bite at your shoulder, so we eat the biggest burgers we can find. and fries. you put on a dress you

look a million dollars in and we convince you to buy it. we eat some coconut toffee and go for a wander around the community garden. i give plot forty one a kiss. we suss the skate park out. i get a blister. you write BYRON BAY on a piece of cardboard, the three of us stand outside the petrol station and in five minutes, we're on our way.

the car's lime green and still coming together on the inside. our lift is putting it together himself. he's younger than my little brother. he races, and agrees there's no time to wait when it comes to planting fruit trees.

the drum circle's just starting up by main beach when we arrive. we don't hesitate. we get right amongst it. we dance until we've all got our jumpers off, and i forget all about my blister.

it was a good place to leave my soles, i agree.

the flood

i feel this one coming on. it's time to get to higher ground. the storm follows, lapping at my heels. for a night, a day, and another night, the world outside is solid with rain. we wait it out.

we don't know the flood is going to get to us later, anyway.

when i get back, everything's sunk. everything's overflown. water's got its own way of arranging things.

i stand by the tomatoes, overcome by grief.

it's time to go, again.

i arrive in uki

i'm sitting on the balcony as near as i can get to us, listening to the radio play.
i carry body of this valley in me and i want the weight of you.

the world's the shape of a woman's back. north and south face each other. i'm
back here by the mountain and i'm on my way to you. i'm here, and i see
we've been here all along.

there's ink in my veins and it's the shape of a river. each time i open my
mouth, i speak of you. to you.

the past is nothing but a song. the radio plays on my mind, and brings me
back to you.

waterfall

today i speak in bursts. in hisses. i take my clothes off and stumble into the pool below the waterfall. it doesn't get deeper than my knees. i swim anyway, scraping my belly along the rocks. when i reach the waterfall, i pull myself under it and stand up. the water smashes down on me. it erases my thoughts and i disappear.

it's overload of information, you say. i agree entirely.

i can hear where it's come from, and all of the places it's been, and everything it's picked up along the way, you say.

it's entirely different, for me. i can't hear a thing. i'm overwhelmed. it's pure sound. drops of water drumming into my skin.

it hasn't rained in ages and what's usually a river below the waterfall has become a pool. cut off. there are fish in there, big fish. for the catching. there are turtles too, big ones and small ones. they mill around, waiting for the rain. or death. whichever comes first.

the rain, it's coming.

belongil crescent

this town eats its way into you. it begins by dazzling you. the sun glints off the water in a gust of warmth. the trees embrace you. it's intoxicating.

you can't imagine a sort of place like this. it's everything you've imagined. there's something for everyone, here. and everyone's here for something.

this place has got a way of taking that feels like giving. it spares no one. storms come in, in a flash. debris gets washed up on the beach every day.

you can get any sort of dream you want, here. no one will say otherwise. it's a town full of people fulfilling people's dreams. some cost more than others. it costs some people more than others, too.

the shine comes off everything, in the end. in the end, when all your skin peels off, there's just bones.

then, there's us.

this place shows you the difference between giving and taking. it's a place to escape, but it's no escape. it shows you yourself. if you look. if you can see.

some of us don't face away. some of us stay. some of us do what we say.

we're a small group of houses and there are creeks on all sides. there's a train track and the jasmine grows into the trees. there's always music playing. we're never too far from each other. it's got the warmth of home, and it comes from all of you.

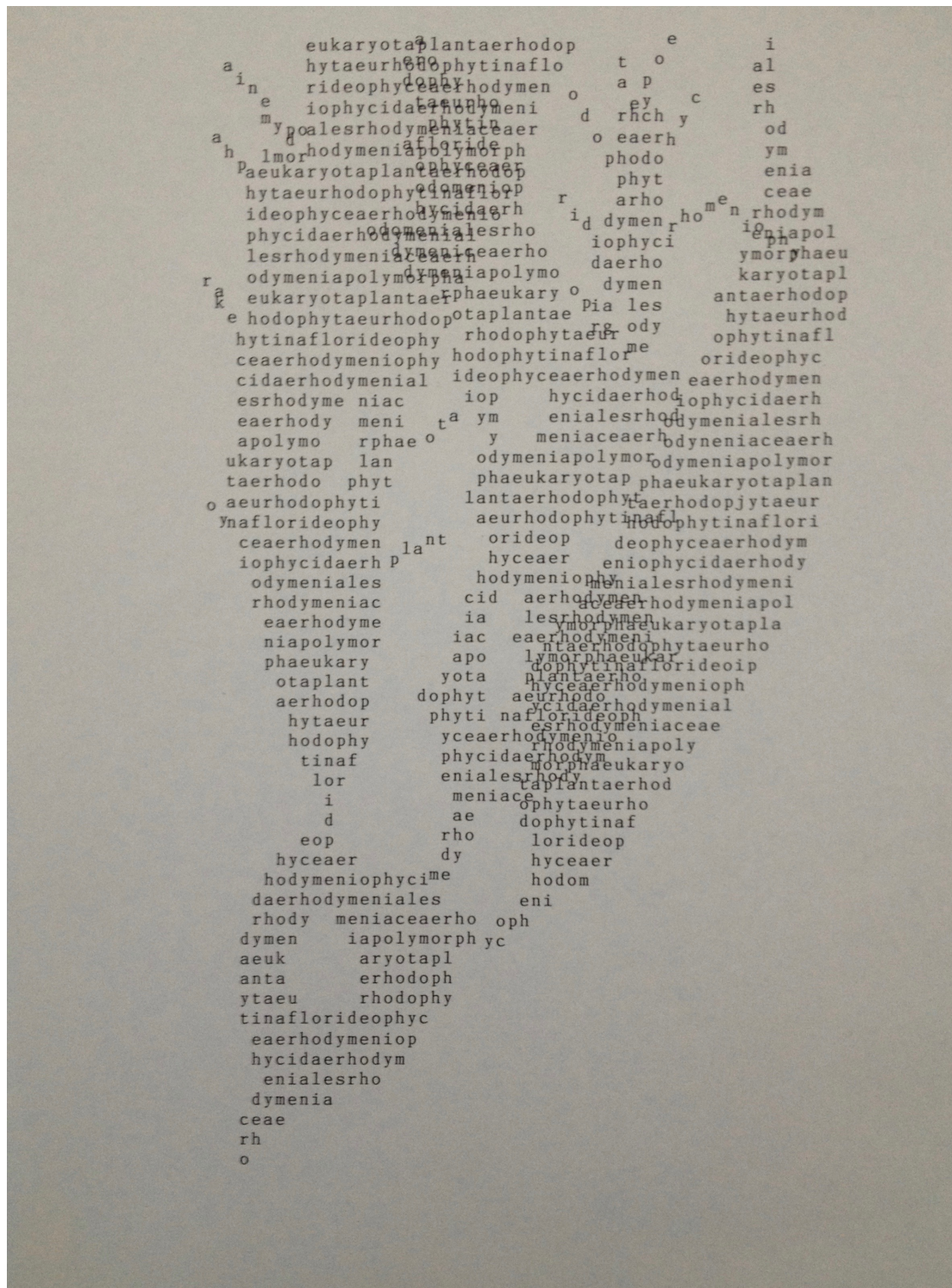


Figure 1 rhodymenia polymorpha

i've got a place
i keep what you've discarded

darling

it's only small
there's room to move around

just

i've wrapped each thing inside a separate shell
and arranged them up and down along a shelf

the tide comes in and out
it disrupts things

but each evening i return to them and sing
and they settle back in place

each single thing

there's a valley on the way home
where the trees grow tall

and they never waver

mists filter down in the evenings
and sing of long goodbyes

even though

even though sorrow grows like saltbush

along the shore

i still go

the radio's a way of leaving town
a way of scaling the silos looking down
at the river it's alright we're getting through
these days when all they do is just drag on

it's the sound of it that gets to me
the sting of it on my skin
glittering the river sings
the song it's sung since we begun

i left you to make sense of things
but it turns out they make no sense of me
or the words i see inside the sky
the words i've sung since i begun

i see the shape of this old town
i see the leaves all on the ground
they grow those plants they just don't stop
the sun it just stings on

you remember me, you know me
i've come here all these years
you've forgot now, now you see me
all the years that i've left here

and even when i'm leaving
i'll be on my way to you
you'll know i'm on my way to you
i'm always, on my way to you

gramophone you carry
the pitch of a beach i know

the sand bubbles over our ankles and into words

and here we are
below this sky
facing each other, again

following, over and over
the same grooves

by the estuary by the sea

there are silences that echo
words that just keep saying
in our bodies
in the doing
and undoing
of the silence
of the words
that echo in us
the silences keep saying

we're silent such a long time
in our bodies amplifying
as we listen to those echoes
as we wait they settle down

so now it's we begin to speak
it's words in us belonging
in them
we belonging
in us
them belonging
no more silent

assemblage two

sit cross legged in a tent on a humid day and
pull your hair up onto your head
fix it with your watch after
you examine the darker leather where
it presses against your wrist
look through your lashes at someone you adore
notice the curls at the base of their neck,
damp with sweat
make no unnecessary movements
no unnecessary noise
scan the newspaper as sweat begins
to pool between any two surfaces that touch
record the shimmer of a duck's feather and layer over
this poem

DISINTEGRATION

PART ONE : LEAVING

FORGETTING

It's the usual time of year for windy weather. The yachts begin to sway. The halyards clang. The tomato seeds stir.

The radio stations go, one by one. First there's no FM. That's ok. National radio gets a run. Then AM takes off too, and it's just background noise. I switch the radio off, and on again. I give it a shake. I try tuning into all sorts of stations, but I can't pick up on a single thing.

Radio waves, you say. They're all over us, you know.

Yeah, I guess so, I say.

Inside us, too.

Inside us?

Yep, rolling right on through us.

Like tides?

Like tides.

So I can tune into any radio station I like?

Sure. You just gotta get the right frequency.

Like one of those clubs, eh? Where you go up or down a floor and they're playing a whole different sort of music.

Exactly. You just gotta tune in.

What if there's no waves?

There's always waves. You the ocean, sister.

I go to see if I can get it fixed. It's a small store, the electronics store. Crammed with appliances. Hairdryers on washing machines and lamps inside fridges. Everything's covered in dust. It's got the feel of a black and white movie. You take over the shop after your husband dies. People say it's you who did him in. It's the only electronics store in town, though, so there's no staying away. Anyway, I like the place. It's got the sort of aesthetic that sits with me. Time's got a different feel inside. It congregates, and sits in silence. There's plenty of it. You don't seem to get it, though. You think I'm a time

waster. I arrive at the counter. I've got the radio in a plastic bag, and I slide it over to you.

Hi, I say. I'm having trouble with my radio.

You look at me. There's nothing wrong with your radio, you say.

Yeah there is. I can't get hold of any stations.

It's not your radio.

What do you mean?

It's the waves. Everyone's been having trouble.

You mean no one can tune in?

Yeah.

Why not?

You shrug. I know circuits, not waves.

I look at you.

There is one station you can get hold of, you say. You pull the radio out of the plastic bag and switch it on. A voice starts up.

What station's that? I ask.

No idea, you say.

I grab hold of the radio and take a look at it. The dial's sitting on the AM FM.

It's not even on the scale.

What sort of station's that? I ask

I told you, you say, I don't know waves. It's the only one you can tune into right now. That's it.

You shrug.

I frown. I pick up the radio and head out.

Wait, you say. You'll need this.

You hand me the plastic bag.

Thanks, I say, and leave.

Out on the street, I see what you mean. It's going to pour. I prop the radio onto my shoulder so I can listen to it on the way home. There's no way I'm turning it off, now. The plastic bag distorts the sound, but I can hear enough to figure out it's a program about keeping bees. The beekeeper's an interesting sort of guy.

We've got four sorts of bees around here, it turns out. One sort's got wings the shape of diamonds. The second sort doesn't fly at all. The third sort steals honey from the first and passes it off as their own. The fourth sort lives underground and only comes out when it rains. You've spent years taking notes. Making intricate drawings. What you're really into, though, is working out how they all get along out here. You're convinced there's a formula in it. You're still working on it.

Next, a song comes on. A man sings about slipping away. The rain's coming down, now, but there's something to this. Something familiar. I stop and listen. I wait for the presenters to say who it is. They don't. I figure I'll drop into the record store on the way home. They'll know for sure, and it'll get me out of the rain for a bit. I'm soaked by the time I arrive. I stop in the doorway to wring out my hair, but it turns out the floor of the record store's wet too, so I don't bother. The water's almost an inch deep. I slosh up to the counter. You've got headphones on and your back to me, so I lean on the bench and wait for you to turn around. I look around the store. It's crammed with records. They're on tables and shelves and racks and creeping up the walls towards the ceiling. There's some sort of order to it but I can't work it out. I get caught up looking at the walls. The record jackets writhe and blur in a psychedelic frenzy. The whole place feels like it's moving. There's nothing solid to it at all. When you turn around, I'm startled.

Hi, you say, taking your headphones off.

Hi, I say. I've come about a song.

Yeah?

Yeah. I pause. You know the shop's got water all over the place, right?

Yeah.

I look at you.

It's cool, you say. Everything's up off the floor anyway.

True.

So, you're here about a song.

Yeah. It's a song about slipping away.

Yeah? Who sings it?

I don't know.

Ah, ok. Do you know what it's called?

No. But I remember how it goes.

I sing the chorus. When I'm done, you look at me for a minute.

I don't know it, sorry.

Oh. Ok.

Where'd you hear it?

This morning, on the radio.

They didn't say who it was?

Nah.

You nod. Doesn't surprise me.

Do you know what station it is? I ask.

Nah, you say. No one does.

I frown. I don't get it.

You shrug. No one does.

I look at you.

So, you can't help me with the song, then? I ask.

You look at me.

Well, I guess I can take a look downstairs, you say. Want to join me?

I look at you.

Sure, I say.

I follow you down the stairs. They're criss-crossed metal, and too small for two feet at once. I go slowly. I can see right through. More metal stairs, then darkness. You've got a torch, and you keep turning around to shine it at my

feet. We go on like this for a while. Then, the mist begins. It's warm. It starts off in wisps, but it gets dense real quick. It starts to hiss, and it doesn't take long to lose you after that. All I can see is the light. I follow it. When the stairs finish up, they finish up in such a hurry that I slap into you and almost knock you over. We grab onto each other for balance. We right each other, and let go. We're at the bottom of the stairs. We're in the centre of a vast room. I can't see walls or a roof. Just a ceiling of mist. I start to make out shapes. There are desks, hundreds of them. At each desk, there's a person. And from each desk, tendrils twist upwards to the floor of the record store. I look up. It's a storm cloud about to burst.

Follow me, you say. You head towards one of the desks.

I follow. When we get closer I see it's not a desk, but a washing machine. It's not mist, but steam. There's a man bending over a filing cabinet next to the washing machine. You stop behind him and I stop, too. He's bending over an envelope. He's got an iron and he presses it onto the envelope. Short bursts of steam come from the iron. His hair curls up around his face, and the seal of the envelope lifts. He takes out a sheet of paper from the envelope, and unfolds it. It's blank. He takes a long look at it, then opens the door of the washing machine and puts the sheet of paper inside. He shuts the door. There's a record player on top of the washing machine. It's got a record spinning, but there's no sound coming out. The man picks up another envelope. This one's unsealed. The iron lets out a burst of steam. When the track finishes and the record stops spinning, he opens the door of the washing machine and takes the letter back out. It's got writing all over it, now. He folds it and puts it into the new envelope, which he seals and puts back into the filing cabinet.

What's he doing? I ask.

He's recording songs, you say.

What do you mean?

You saw him put the blank sheet of paper into the washing machine, right?

Yeah.

And you saw it come out?

Yeah.

You saw the writing on it?

Yeah.

So, that's it. That's how he's recording songs.

But I can't hear no song playing. How's he recording it when he can't hear it?

The songs are in the tracks. No need to hear them. The tracks hold all of the records.

All of the records of what?

Of all of the songs.

I pause for a minute.

So, where do the songs come from?

The records.

Yeah, but where do the records come from?

By the people who collect the records.

This guy, here?

No. This guy records the songs.

So who collects the records, then? Where do they come from?

You look at me, but don't answer. Instead, you start walking again. I follow you. You make your way amongst the silent records, your trajectory punctuated by bursts of steam from the irons. We reach another set of metal stairs. They lead up to a small glass office. It's got a view of the entire building. There's someone inside, standing behind a glass window.

Wait outside, you say.

You go in.

I watch the storm clouds gather at the roof. When you come out, I look at you.

You shake your head.

It's not in any of our records, you say. You'll have to get in touch with the station.

I nod. Ok.

I follow you back upstairs to the record store. You hand me a card with a number on it.

Try giving them a ring, you say.

Ok, I say. Thanks.

Anything else?

Nah, that's it. Thanks.

No problem.

The water's up my ankles, now. I turn to go, hesitate, and turn back.

I think the water's rising, I say.

That's cool. Don't worry about it. It'll be fine.

Ok. I shrug and wade to the door. When I get there I turn and look back.

You've already got your back to me, and the headphones back on. The water's rising.

I head for the telephone box. It's a few hundred metres from its usual spot. I slosh over to it and get in, looking through my bag for some change. There's none. I sigh. The telephone box keeps on floating. I'm spent. I sit my bag on the floor and sit down next to it, leaning back against the door. I drift along for a bit. The telephone box rocks from side to side. I can't help but doze off.

I'm standing in front of a factory. It's a tea factory. It's filled with every bit of machinery you need for processing tea. There's a conveyer belt for sorting tea, a rack for drying tea, a stamp for crushing tea, and conveyer belt for carrying tea in a cascade to containers with hand-drawn labels that are filled by people waiting to fill them and pack them in boxes and pack the boxes in trucks to roll down from the hills to the port and from the port to who knows where. There's no tea in the factory, though. Just bees. Bees being sorted and bees on the drying rack and bees being crushed and packed and rolled out of the factory. I try to get the attention of one of the sorters to ask why there are bees here instead of tea but the sorter doesn't see me, and keeps on sorting. I try a packer but the packer doesn't see me either. The crusher turns to face me when I approach. You're wearing a full white beekeepers outfit, like everyone else in the factory, and your face is covered by a mesh I can't see through. I can't tell if you're looking at me or not. I can't hear anything over the noise of the factory. Not even my own voice. I can't tell if you can hear me or not. Suddenly, you grab me by the arm and drag me to the conveyer belt. I'm too shocked to resist. You place me onto the conveyor belt and I sit still amongst the crushed bees. I join the bees in the cascade that tumbles from the edge of the conveyer belt and into the jars waiting below. I'm suspended for a moment. I fall more slowly than the bees, and I can feel them brushing over me, collecting in my ears and my nose and the corners of my eyes. I can feel them piling up around me in mid-air, burying me, suffocating me, transfixing me. I hear you turn up the speed of the conveyer belt. I hear the roar of a huge mass of bees tumbling down towards me. They crash down on me.

The telephone box jams into a mailbox. I wake up. I've floated all the way back over home, to the island. I get out and make my way to the only place you can get coffee on the island. You've been running this place since before I was born. You trade fruit juices for attendance, so every afternoon there's a line of schoolkids cashing in stamps. The local primary school's in on the game. You've got banjo classes and clothes swaps running too. All free. Every morning, right after you open up, you kneel down in front of the cafe and make a mandala out of flowers. Locals pile in and sit on the plastic chairs to chat and watch you scrape together something beautiful. When you're done they shout out orders for coffees. You know what they all want anyway. Nobody, not the locals or the schoolkids or even the dogs, walks over your mandala. Even the wind blows around it. Each night when you shut up, you collect the flowers, and bring fresh ones the next day.

When I swing in, you're exchanging insults with a local. When you see me, you give him a kiss on the cheek and tell him to go and eat before his meal gets cold. You come over and I'm in your arms before I know it.

Where you been, girl? I haven't seen you in so long!

I hug you tightly and smile. Oh, you know me. Here and there. I don't get far.

How're things in town?

A bit wet, to be honest. It's getting hard to pin things down.

You nod. Yeah, I figured. It's been coming down lately. How's your ma?

I shrug. The usual, I guess. I haven't been over to see her yet.

You mean you just got here?

I nod. Yeah, I just sort of floated on over.

Oh honey. Your face softens. You haven't heard yet, huh?

Heard what?

There's been some trouble.

What sort of trouble?

Some trouble for your Pa.

What's happened?

We don't know yet. He's gone quiet. No one knows why. It happened a few days ago, now.

Where is he?

No one knows baby. He's taken off somewhere.

I sit down. You pour a cup of coffee and give it to me. I take a sip and put it down on the table without looking at it.

You got any ideas? I ask.

You shrug. We've been out of touch, lately.

I sigh. Yeah, me too. Can't even tune in to the radio.

You look at me. What do you mean?

I dunno. All of the stations have taken off or something. There's only one you can get hold of at the minute. The woman at the electronic store put me onto it.

You nod. I bet she did.

What do you mean?

Tell me, have they got the beekeeper on, again?

I look at you. Yeah, he was on this morning. How do you know? You don't get waves out here, right?

Don't need no waves to know that, baby. Ain't no beekeeper on the radio this morning. Ain't nobody seen him for a while now.

So what's going on, then?

You listen long enough and you'll hear it's all a long time out. All repeats.

How do you know?

I've heard it all before, sugar.

What do you mean?

You sigh and look out at the sea for a minute, then back at me.

Listen, you want something to eat, honey? I got a pot on. I bet you didn't eat all day, huh?

I shake my head.

Here, sit down. You put a bowl of steaming soup in front of me and I begin shovelling it into my mouth. I don't chew. After a minute, I tilt my head back and sigh in appreciation. You grin and do a round of the tables and chairs to see if anyone needs anything. It's a quiet night, and there are only a handful

of people here. We're all enjoying your soup. The day's slipping away. Night's coming on in. You come back to the bar and slide a glass of soda my way.

Don't forget to drink, girl.

I take a gulp and smile my thanks. I take a few more mouthfuls and then speak.

So? I ask.

Yeah, baby?

What do you mean, you've heard it all before?

You eyeball me. You're a hell of a lot more talkative when you want something, huh?

I turn my attention back to my bowl.

Oh don't get sour on me, sugar. And don't stop eating either. Here, you finish that, and I'll tell you.

I smile. You don't need to bribe me, I say.

You shake your head. Don't I know you, you say.

You look out over the tables and chairs to make sure everything is taken care of, and pour yourself a drink. You sit down behind the bar opposite me.

So, I say.

So your Pa gets this idea to plant some tea bushes out bush. They take off. They're some nice bunches of tea. He builds a big fancy factory and everything, ready to get that tea out to the world. They grow, them bushes, and your Pa gets all excited and hires a whole workforce ready to go. But they never get any tea onto them machines. Never even get any off them bushes. Turns out it's a no goer.

How come?

Well it's nothing to do with the growing, that's for sure. Them bushes take off like firecrackers up there in the cool.

Politics, then?

Yeah, something like that.

What happened?

Well they open it up all official, cut the ribbon and everything, and then them machines start up, real strange like. Everyone thinks it's part of the show.

Everyone waits for something to happen next, and something sure does happen.

You pause and take a mouthful of your drink.

So they're all standing there watching, waiting for the next big thing and all the machinery's going and nothing seems to be happening. They're all standing at the end of the conveyer belt where the jars end up, all bottled and neatly stored in a box, right at the end, see, so they can't see too well what's going on up the back behind the conveyer belt. Finally a box appears, all sealed and stamped with the name of the factory. Everybody cheers. Your Pa shoots a look over to the foreman and the foreman shrugs. He doesn't know how the box got there. Neither does your Pa. He decides to play to the crowd though, and gives a big flourish. He takes the scissors he just cut that ribbon with and slices open the top of the box, opens the flaps, grabs two tins of tea and holds them up in the air for everyone to see. Except they're not tins of tea. What I mean is, it's not tea they've got in them.

What's in them?

It's a who, honey.

I put my spoon, which is halfway to my mouth, back into my bowl.

A who?

Yeah.

Who is it?

It's your Uncle, bub.

I lean back in my chair. But he went overseas. I got letters. From overseas.

You look down at your drink. You sigh.

I've still got them. He talks about people who sit for days without blinking their eyes. Wind cold enough to snap fingers off. Oceans in the middle of deserts.

You shake your head. He got one hell of an imagination, that man.

Pa?

Who else, honey?

I push the bowl away with my elbow and put my head in my hands.

Now don't think you're getting out of eating that, my girl, you say. You agreed, and you'll eat.

I look up at you and grimace. I start eating again. When I've finished, I take a mouthful of soda.

So what happened after that? I ask.

Well that was the end of it. All that planting and growing for nothing. No one goes near the place for years. Then this beekeeper fella just sort of moves in. Finally gets some use out of all them bushes. People are still funny about the place though. You know what it's like. Even now, lots of people won't touch that honey. Pity. It's fine honey.

You grab a jar down from the shelf, open it and get a spoon from the drawer. With a twist of your wrist, you dip the spoon in, pull it out and give it to me. I put it in my mouth. Not bad, I say.

So how did Uncle end up in the tins? I ask. Was it an accident?

You shrug. Maybe. No one knows for sure.

You mean it was deliberate?

It's hard to say. Plenty people got jealous of your Pa over the years.

You mean the town mob?

Ah, it ain't always that simple, baby.

No?

No.

What do you mean?

You eyeball me again. What I mean is, that's plenty of stories for one day.

You might start thinking about going home to see your Ma, eh?

I nod and get up. I can see there's no getting anything out of you now. I lean across the bar to give you a kiss. You give me a squeeze.

Wait, you say, and press the jar into my hand. You come back here when you're ready.

I nod. I will, I say, and I'm off out the door.

See you soon, bub.

When I get home, the bottom of your door's soaked. I knock but you don't answer. I open the door a little and stick my head in. The room's ankle deep in water. You're lying on the couch, staring at the ceiling. Things are different since I was last in here. Fluorescent tubes line the skirting boards. The room's got a blue hue. The curtains are shredded into limbs. The window's half-open, and they shift in the breeze. A creeper's coming in through the floorboards. It's a writhing green mass that stretches across the back wall and halfway to the ceiling. You're different since I was last here, too. Smaller. Less distinct. You've never been one to seep out into the world. But now, you're not on the couch. You're in it. I can't even make out an outline of you.

Are you awake? I ask.

No answer. I open the door wider, and light hits your face. You moan and squeeze your eyes shut.

Shut the door please, you say.

I shut the door behind me and slosh my way over to you.

Migraine? I ask.

You nod. You're covered in sweat. I pull your hair out of your face. I grab a glass of soda water from the kitchen and a wet face washer from the bathroom.

When I get back, you're sitting bolt upright. I give you some aspirin and get you to sip some soda water. I press the face washer onto your forehead. You don't make any unnecessary movements, but you vomit up the aspirin anyway. I give you some more, and you keep it down this time. You lay back down, and the couch reabsorbs you. I brush my fingers backwards and

forwards along your forehead until you fall asleep. I watch you for a minute, then get up and slowly make my way to the door.

You roll over to look at me. Will you light a candle at the chapel? You ask.

Sure, I say.

You smile, and go back to sleep.

I shut the door behind me.

The family church is a tall, neo gothic church. It's the only church on the island and it's always covered in seagulls. They crowd in. It looks just like the guano deposits along the coast. I can see how the seagulls confuse things. The church faces the sea, and the salt and wind bore their way into it. It's pock-marked and rough to the touch. The only thing that prevents it from wearing away altogether is the seagulls, who coat it constantly in white streaks.

I approach the steps of the church and take off my shoes. Evening mass has kicked off and the floor's crowded with people. The choir is singing, and twilight comes in through the stained glass windows and gaps between the birds. There are candles everywhere. The whole place glows yellow. I sit down cross-legged at the back, behind a woman with shining black hair and a toddler. As I sit down the woman passes the toddler to the man sitting next to her. The toddler grabs hold of his hair and kisses his ear mistakenly. He smiles and kisses the toddler's face deliberately. The hymn winds up and the church fills with squawks. No one can hear the priest's sermon. People watch for the words on his face. The choir starts up again and when the hymns come to an end people get up for communion. I stay cross-legged where I am. People shuffle towards the priest. Multitudes of bare feet surround me, and hair brushes past me and the seagulls squawk and the choir hums and the wind blows and the halyards clank. I stay, cross-legged and still, inside my own sort of silence. The wind stops blowing, briefly. I look down at the tiles where I'm sitting. They're hand painted. Pictures of holy places around here. One of them grabs my attention and I take a closer look at it. It's a church a lot like this one. A church by a body of water. I look closer. Fish crowd in at the windows instead of birds. Seahorses instead of seagulls. Seaweed grows in tufts along the ledges. It's in a body of water, it turns out. When mass is over, I slip out of the door of the church and into the dusk. I light a candle before I go.

My shoes aren't here. Shoes are moving fast from the floor to lots of pairs of feet and those feet are moving fast over the floor to lots of places. I look for my shoes in the blur. I can't see them anywhere. They've made their way onto someone else's feet and over the floor to someplace else. They're gone. I sit down on the steps of the church and watch people hurrying off. Some people pay their respects to the priest before they leave. Some hang around, chatting. Everyone's got shoes on. I go over to the priest to pay my respects before I leave. I bend to touch your feet and when I straighten up you're looking at mine.

My child, where are your shoes? You ask.

They're gone, I say.

Gone? Did you lose them?

I left them by the steps and when I came out they weren't here.

You grimace and shake your head. That's been happening a lot lately.

Really?

Yes. A family of pelicans have moved into the neighbourhood.

Pelicans?

Yes. They come in during mass and take off with peoples' shoes. Tell me, were your shoes leather?

No.

Well, they prefer leather.

What do they do with the shoes?

They take them out to the river.

Why?

To give them to the anemones.

What for?

To pay off their debts.

I nod. I guess I'll go and get another pair, then.

You nod. God speed, my child.

I kneel to touch your feet again. Yours are also bare.

I don't go looking for shoes, though. I go to the library instead. I pick you up a cup of tea on the way. It's a big time hotel, once. The proprietors move out and the books move in. They overflow from the library into the drawing rooms and sun rooms and finally into the guest rooms. There's no funding to renovate or put up shelves, so the librarian stacks the books on the floor, and on the desks and chairs and beds. There's no catalogue. Just you. You're the hotel manager before the hotel becomes a library, and your mother is the hotel manager before you, and your grandmother. No one knows the place like you do. You keep the library in your head. When a new book arrives, you assign it a place in your head, first. Then you put it out in the library. You're the only one who knows where everything is. The only one who can show us what it is we're looking for. Usually, people queue out into the street, waiting to see you. Today, the library's empty because it's about to close. I go up to the front desk and sit the paper cup on it.

Hello, I say.

Hello, you say.

I've brought you some tea.

You hold out your hand. I take it and guide it to the cup of tea. You bring it to your mouth and drink. What's the pattern on the cup? You ask, when you've finished.

Frogs. In green ink.

You smile. It's a beautiful smile. Are you here about frogs?

No. I'm here about a church.

Which one?

The one at the bottom of a lake.

You nod. Come with me, you say.

Trailing your right hand against the wall, you cross the room and start up the staircase. I follow you. The staircase winds around twice before it reaches the second floor. There are books on each of the steps. They're stacked right up to the railing. You continue up another flight of stairs to the third floor, and lead me out onto an indoor veranda. Ceiling fans whir overhead. You stop at

the second door, take out a set of keys from your skirt pocket and unlock it. I follow you in. It's a music room. It's full of instruments I don't recognise. There are games, too. You wind your way through the instruments and games to the back of the room, where a head high pile of books extends from wall to wall. Starting from the right wall, you pace to somewhere near the centre of the pile and kneel down. Starting from the floor, you run your fingers over the spines of the books and stop at shoulder height. Supporting the remaining books with your left hand, you slide out a large hardcover book and replace it with a coin, then allow the books to settle into place.

This is what you need, you say, holding the book out for me. You can sit on the rug.

Thank you, I say. I take the book and sit on the rug. I look down at it. There's a storm going on, and a boat struggles in the raging waves, dangerously close to the coast. The palms have dark green leaves, and they thrash wildly in the wind. There are cliffs, white cliffs. On the boat is a sailor, and he's looking towards the shore. A light shines above the palms, and he's looking at it. It's night, but it's not the moon. It's another sort of light. I know the rug inside out, but I don't know what sort of light it is. I've never known. You're on your way out. I call out to you.

What sort of light's this light, on the rug? I ask. I describe it to you.

I don't know, you say. But I'm sure you'll know what sort of light it is when you see it.

I nod. I guess so, I say. Thanks.

The thing is, I don't know what sort of light to look for.

The room's getting dark, so I switch on a lamp. I open the book. It's called *A political history of local water bodies*. I flick slowly through it slowly. It's right at the end. The same picture I saw on the tile on the floor of the church. I begin to read.

In the hills, there's a lake, and in the lake there's a city. The city's in the hills long before the lake. The lake's in the hills long after the city. It's the governor who makes the decision. A council is set up to ensure the proper processes are put in place. One thousand people are hired. Each person is assigned two plastic milk cartons, and it begins. Everyone walks down to the beach and someone wades in until they're knee-deep. The next person stands two paces away, and the next another two paces away, and so on, until there's a line of people up to the city and a line back down to the ocean. The person knee-deep in the ocean is responsible for filling the milk cartons, and the person at the end of the line is responsible for emptying them into the city. All one thousand people in the line are to have two milk cartons in their hands at all times, and two people are employed to patrol the lines and ensure this. It takes five hundred days to fill the city with water. At first, the residents go about things as usual. The water rises up to their ankles and they begin to slosh around. It's a bit awkward, but everyone agrees it's not too bad. Someone suggests raising the houses up on stilts. The water rises to their knees. The community gathers in secret. They aren't leaving, they decide. They're going to stay no matter what. The water rises to their waists. The patrollers keep patrolling. By the time the governor hears what's happening, the water's up to their necks. He decides to visit the city and kindly ask the inhabitants of the city to leave. A small motorboat is commissioned, and the governor speeds out to the council chambers, where the local community representatives have agreed to meet him. The street signs are still visible, so navigating isn't a problem. The council chambers is mostly underwater, but its flag still flaps around in the wind. The representatives gather below it, a row of bobbing heads. The governor motions to the driver to kill the motor and draw up beside them. Things are civil in the beginning, but as the governor realises they're serious about staying in the city, he begins to lose

his cool. The conversation ends abruptly and in mutual disagreement when the community members disappear below the surface. The governor feels the only course of action is forced removal. However, the budget's tight so it's not until the one thousand and two people hired to drown the city are finished doing so that the governor is able to extend their contract to include the forced removal of the inhabitants of the city. By that time, there's no one around. The one thousand and two people have their contract terminated. The governor celebrates a successful government initiative.

I re-read the passage. I stand, switch off the lamp and descend the two flights of stairs to the front desk. You're waiting there. I put the open book on the desk.

Do you have anything else here on the church? I ask.

No, you say. Just this.

But there's nothing written in here about it. Just a picture of it.

You nod.

And a passage beneath it about a city in a lake.

You nod.

Is the church in the city in the lake?

You shrug. I don't know.

Do you know where the city in the lake is?

No. I only know where the books are.

Do you know where the book was printed?

Yes. All books are printed at the printing press.

Which branch?

It's printed in the back of each book.

I open the book to the back. There's a line of text on the last page. It says *printed at the peripheral printing press*.

It was printed at the peripheral printing press, I say. Where's that?

On the periphery.

Thank you, I say. I reach down and take one of your hands in both of mine.
You're welcome, you say. You smile.

REMEMBERING

Every summer, we go to the lake. We've got a place that's two storeys high, and the bottom floor spills out onto a lawn that stops where the lake begins. A jetty goes straight from the lawn out into the water. I'm not allowed to go out on it. There's a gate. I'm not allowed to open it. I spend most of my time huddled by the fence, pushing things through the gaps and watching them sink or float away.

One day, I catch my watch in the fence. It snaps and falls into the water. I've been wearing this watch since before I was born.

I hold my wrist up to my face. I've never seen it without the watch. It's just like my other wrist. I give it a shake, the way I shake it to start up the watch. The watch never works. My wrist doesn't feel any different.

The watch is bobbing down to the second leg of the jetty. When it gets to the end of the jetty, it sinks. There's a ladder at the end of the jetty and a scuba mask hanging by the front door. There's no one outside.

I grab the mask. On my way back through the house I pick up a torch and a fishing net. Back out on the lawn, I put on the mask. Torch, right hand. Fishing net, left hand. I open the gate and stride out to the end of the jetty. I climb down the ladder, banging the torch and the fishing net on the metal rungs as I go. The water gulps down my shoes, my shorts, and then the rest of me. It's warm and clear. It's my first time below the surface. It's as clear as the sky. I won't need the torch. I climb up, put it on the jetty and climb back down. I look through the rungs of the ladder. I can see the pillars of the jetty. They're covered in algae. There are molluscs, too. I climb down another rung. At the bottom of the pillars I can see sand and whitebait. I squint and bend to look for my watch. The snorkel dips below the surface and slowly begins to fill with water. Next time I take a breath, I get water instead of air. I reel and slip off the ladder. Everything's altered. I'm suspended where air is water and up is down. It's only when I hit the bottom of the lake that things right themselves. I

hurtle upwards to where water is air again. I take a gasp of it and cough up the water in my lungs in exchange. I'm shaking. Somehow, I've got a hold of the ladder again. I sag against it for a minute. Somehow, I've still got the net in my hand. It's not until I pull myself up onto the jetty and pull the scuba mask off my face that I see what's in it. My watch. I disentangle it. The strap's broken. The dial's filled with water. The hands are moving. I give it a shake. Yes, the hands are definitely moving. It's telling time.

I put it in my shirt pocket and put everything back where I got it from. I go back outside to sit in the sun and dry off. When you arrive, I still haven't moved. You bend down to kiss me on the head. You don't notice anything to begin with. You lean on the fence and look out at the lake. The sun's so hot I'm already dry. It's not the water on my skin or hair that gives me away. It's the gate. I've forgotten to shut it. It only takes a couple of minutes for you to notice. You turn to look at me.

Did you open the gate? you ask.

Yes, I say.

Did you go out onto the jetty?

Yes.

You come over, take me by the shoulders and stand me up.

Why?

To get my watch.

You look at me. Have you got it?

Yes. I pull it out of my shirt pocket and show it to you. Its hands still swim in the water in the dial. You look at it, and then hand it back to me.

It's telling time, you say. We'll have to get that strap fixed. You smile.

I nod. I smile too.

No more going out onto the jetty though, ok?

Ok.

I'm swinging my legs over the edge of the hammock when you come up to me. You hop in next to me and grin. My legs stop swinging as I tilt my head up at you. You sit a small, stuffed tiger in my lap. I jerk my head down to look at it, then back up at you. My body stiffens.

Is it a toy? I ask.

A toy? You think I'd be giving you a toy, bub? Nah, it's the real thing, you say.

Don't call me that.

What?

Bub.

But that's you, baby girl.

I'm no baby. I got my own room now.

You got your own tiger, that's what you got. A baby tiger for a baby girl.

But it's a toy, isn't it?

It's no toy. I shot its mother myself.

Did you kill it?

The mother?

Nah, the baby.

Nah, it died. Of a broken heart.

I'm silent.

So what do you think? You ask. You going to give it a name?

I don't answer. Instead, I jump up out of the hammock and hold the baby tiger tightly to my chest as I run inside.

At night, the baby tiger watches me as I dream. It sits on the bookshelf. It doesn't have a name yet.

At night, I dream about the baby tiger. It prowls up the bookshelf and jumps onto the wooden bed frame. It sits above my head, brushing its tail backwards and forwards along my forehead. Brushing my fringe backwards and forwards across my forehead. Brush, brush. Its orange fur glows hot as embers. It cries for its mother.

I wake convinced that the baby tiger's mother will inhabit me if it stays in my room. I go to you. I ask you to take the baby tiger off the bookshelf and put it on the top shelf of the tall cupboard at the back of the attic. You ask me why and I tell you. You immediately call Uncle and tell him to come over.

I'm sitting on the couch on the porch with Pa when you arrive. You sit down in the wicker chair facing me.

What's up bub? You ask. Can't sleep?

I shake my head.

That baby tiger getting to you?

I nod.

Where is he now?

In the attic.

You nod. Did you give him a name?

I shake my head.

Why not, bub? He can't be having no name now.

I'm silent.

What about Seth? Good name for a toy, no?

He's not a toy.

Yeah. About that, bub. It turns out he is a toy. I mixed him up with another baby tiger.

What about his mother, then? Is she a toy too?

Nah, he don't have no mother. He's a toy.

So his mother's not a toy?

No.

Then he's no toy either.

You sigh. He's a toy, bub.

I shake my head. He's not a toy. And his mother's not a toy either. He's looking for her and he won't leave me in peace if I don't bring him to her. His heart's broke.

He's in the cupboard now though, right? He'll leave you in peace in there, no?

I shake my head.

Why not?

I can hear him. He's crying. Crying for her.

You nod. So what do we do about it? How do we stop him crying?

We gotta take him to her. We gotta go see her.

You look over at Pa. He nods.

Ok bub, I'll see what I can do.

Two hours later you climb into the attic and retrieve the small, stuffed tiger from the top shelf of the tall cupboard. You put it in a cat cage and load it into the back of the car. I insist on sitting in the front seat and don't take my eyes off the baby tiger the entire drive. Thirty-six hairpin bends later, we arrive at a lodge. You carry the cage in. The baby tiger's stripes are beginning to peel off in the humidity, and they curl upwards from its belly. The staff escort us into the trophy room of the lodge and you place the cage containing the small, stuffed tiger on the table. The staff retire to the doorway to observe. I pay no attention to them, or to you. Instead, I fix my eyes on the bigger, stuffed tiger at the end of the room. I approach it. It's exactly my height. I examine it. It's a fine tiger. There's a small bullet wound under its left shoulder, skilfully disguised by the taxidermist. I see it.

Where were you standing when you took the shot? I ask.

I was crouching, you say, and I missed the first one.

The first what?

The first shot.

Did you see the baby before you fired?

No.

Did you find it afterwards?

Yes.

Where was it?

Crouching next to me in the grass.

I don't believe you.

Well it was. Its mother must have been trying to draw me away from it.

Why didn't she attack you?

I don't know.

Did she attack you?

No.

I think she did. I think it was a lucky shot. I think she tackled you and you got the gun in between you and it went off and killed her. I think you fell backwards onto the baby, and she fell onto you. That's why you've got a limp now.

I got no limp.

Yeah you do. So that's what happened to the baby, is it, you crushed it?

You pause. Yeah.

And did it have stripes when you fell on it?

What?

Did it have stripes when you crushed it?

Of course it did.

No. No it didn't. You glued them on afterwards, you stuck them on to fool me, didn't you? You thought when I saw them peeling off that I'd think it was just a toy, that it wasn't a real tiger after all. But everybody knows that tigers aren't born with stripes. You stuck them on! Do you think I'm stupid? Did you think I'd fall for your trick? Did you?!

I stand by the tiger, my fists in balls. I'm the more fearsome of the two. It's happened exactly how I feared.

I'm sorry, bub, you say.

I'll never forgive you, I say.

The car ride back is quiet. Thirty-six hairpin bends later, we arrive back at my place. You tell Pa what happened. He sighs.

No more presents, he says.

You're sitting in your chair in the study, covered in maps. I run into the room and jump into your arms. You catch me, and the back leg of the chair breaks. You throw me forwards. I land on the rug. The chair falls backwards, smashes through the window and lands onto the balcony below. It's a short fall, only a foot or two. I get up and run to the window. The chair is lying on its back on the balcony, and you're lying on your back in the chair. I run out through the door to the balcony. You hear me, and open your eyes.

Don't run, you say.

I stop. There's glass everywhere. You're sparkling. Small shards of glass cover you. You're become a kaleidoscope. I burst into tears.

Go and get Ma, you say. And put some shoes on.

I run into the kitchen to get Ma. She's already on her way.

What was that bang? she asks when I run into her in the hallway.

We fell out the window, I sob. It's my fault.

Are you ok? She asks. She takes hold of me and pats me all over. Satisfied, she hurries out to the balcony. Go and put some shoes on, she says.

By the time I get back out onto the balcony, Ma's brushed all the glass off you. You're standing up, now. Your shirt's pinned to your back by small shards of glass. There's blood all over you. I burst into tears again. It's my fault, I sob.

It's not your fault, you say.

Ma agrees. Why don't you go and get me some tweezers and a broom?

By the time I've swept all the glass into a pile, she's got her own pile of glass sitting next to her. It's stained with blood. It takes her all afternoon to pick the glass out of your back. You get me to bring the maps out onto the balcony and keep me busy by testing me on all of the names of the islands in the archipelago. We fix the chair leg and put it in another corner of the study. We move your desk over in front of the window. When we're done, we put the maps away. They go in a leather folder in the top right hand drawer of the desk.

FORGETTING

I pull the leather folder out of the top right hand corner of your desk. I spread the maps out on the rug in the centre of the study. The periphery is the north-easternmost island of the archipelago. I consult the chart and calculate that it will take a full two days to sail there. I look at the map again to see if I can find a shorter route. I notice something written next to one of the islands. It says 'flooding isthmus.' I look closely at the island. It's two solid land masses joined by a long, narrow isthmus. The bays on either side of the isthmus are deep. I recognise it, suddenly. I know the way. It's the same way we went every summer. The same route. I've sailed it, over and over. I just didn't know we were on our way to the periphery. I gather up all of the maps. It's just a matter of waiting for the rain.

I grab the scuba mask hanging by the front door and pick up a torch on my way through the house. I open the gate and go out onto the jetty. I climb down the ladder and into the water. I go slowly. I let go. For a while, I can't see at all. Bubbles crowd around me. I've got my torch, and all I can see is the light. I float downwards. Then, suddenly, I'm free. I burst through the glistening cloud of bubbles and it's all clear.

I can see the entire city below. It's a series of concentric circles, each bigger than the next. They're connected by short straight roads. There are hills down here, too. I'm getting closer.

I start to make out shapes. Neon shapes dart in and out of open windows and across streets, weaving in and out of leafless trees as they go. Fish. Human shapes populate the footpaths. Each has got an aura of bubbles. Each person's got their own torrent of the shimmering, rolling, upward floating orbs. When I touch down, I see I've got one, too. I take off the scuba mask and watch it float up to the ceiling of bubbles above. I'm in the middle of the road. People are all around me, bobbing slowly up and down as they go. When I take a step, I begin to float upwards. Gravity reverses itself, and I'm pulled upwards instead of down. I take a deep breath, and float upwards even faster. It's not until my lungs are full and I'm forced to exhale that I become stationary, and slowly begin to descend. I deflate my lungs as far as possible, and soon I'm down on the road again. I get it.

Taking slow, shallow breaths, I look around. To my right is a hair salon, which is lit up. To my left is the street. I go along a little way and somehow end up in the mouth of a whale shark. I take a look around me and see great walls of pink flesh and rows of teeth. I look for a place to sit down. I settle near the wall because there's less disturbance here. I'm gently rocked from side to side as I sit. Suddenly it comes to a stop. A great rush of water comes in as it opens its mouth. I step out onto the steps leading up to a church. The whale shark

shuts its mouth and takes off. I turn around to see it disappear around a corner. The priest comes down the steps to greet me.

You want to hear the story of the light? you ask.

Sure, I say.

There's this place in the east. Years ago it was just a church and a beach. Now there's all sorts of things happening around it. It gets busier every year.

Anyway, it's all there because of the light. There's a ship and they've been sailing for as long as they can remember, waiting for the shore. A storm gets to them, though, before the shore does. Everyone goes below. The man up top, though, won't stop keeping watch for the shore. He sits up in the crow's nest and waits. The storm hammers on. He makes a promise to the wind. If the shore shows up he'll build a church right at the edge of it. He keeps waiting. The storm keeps pounding. This goes on for a while. Then, a light surfaces in the wind. It isn't just any sort of light. It illuminates the sky. And it's coming from somewhere. Somewhere solid. Land. It's so bright that the night becomes transparent. Inside of it, inside this cascade of day, this grace of god, stands Mother Mary. Follow my feet, she says. The man gets right down out of the crow's nest and goes straight to the captain. He points in Mother Mary's direction. The captain can't see a thing. No one can see a thing. Just a man, pointing. But the direction he is pointing is as good as any, and when it turns out Mother Mary's got her feet on the ground, it turns out everyone's beginning to see the light, and afterwards they've all seen it from the beginning.

The man keeps his promise. He builds a church in the shape of Mother Mary. He starts with her feet, right where the ship reaches the shore. Right where the light pours out. The church, when it's finished, has a special sort of luminescence. People place their hands on its walls. They say it feels warm. Like love.

The people who come to place their hands on the walls of the church of Mother Mary need to eat, so restaurants are built. When they eat, they need to defecate, so toilets are built. They need to prostrate themselves, so channels of sand are laid out before the church. They need to make offerings, so florists gather by the restaurants and food stalls. They need to buy souvenirs, so souvenir stores arrive. They need to drink, so water bottles are stacked in vans. The church of Mother Mary's view of the beach disappears. The shore is extended to accommodate hotels and car parks. The mainland moves closer to the island. People come from further away, so they need places to park their cars and spend the night and shower and eat and defecate. Then, there's the waste. The water and food and faeces and fumes. Drains and wastelands and sewerages systems and queues. The church of Mother Mary moves further away from the shore. There's electricity there now, too. It's not so easy to see the light, anymore.

That's my church, I say. The family church.

You nod. I know. You still go back there?

I nod. I lit a candle for Ma the other day.

You smile. Good. Want a cuppa?

Sure.

You make two cups of tea and stir honey in.

I take a sip.

This is the beekeeper's honey, I say.

You nod. You still go back there?

I look at you. What do you mean?

You still go back to the plantation?

I don't know what you mean. I ain't never been to no plantation.

You look at me. But you know the beekeeper?

No, just the honey. I ain't never met him.

You look at me. Are you sure?

I look at you. Yes.

I think it's time you go and see him then, my child.

You press the jar of honey into my hand. It's small. Glass, with a gold lid. I turn the label to face me. There's an address on it. The hills above the lake.

I look at you.

God speed, my child, you say.

From the hills, I can see all the way back over home, to the island. After a few minutes, I tuck the lilies I'm carrying under my arm and get to walking. Clouds crowd in at the top of the hills. I take a look at the jar of honey. Ninety six. The road begins to wind. As I walk upwards, the trees begin to thin out and tea bushes appear. To begin with they're all over the place but soon enough they arrange themselves into rows. It's a plantation, that's for sure. I pick a leaf and crush it in my fingers. Tea. The bushes are in a bad state. It's a labyrinth in here. Rundown as it is, it's still beautiful. The green grows into itself inside the grey of the sky. I keep moving. Soon the path disappears in the overgrown bushes and I've only got the gap between the rows to go by. I shove my way through. The plants slap against me. I give up trying to protect the lilies. A small patch of blue sky appears above me. It starts to rain. A rainbow appears in front of me. It's a double rainbow. A triple rainbow. The gap in the clouds closes up and it disappears. The rain loses its sheen. It starts coming down heavily. It soaks into my skin. There's a tangle of grass and clingers and graspers and sticklers and wranglers of every description on the ground. It's all I can do to keep my feet out of it. A few minutes of this and then the tea bushes in front of me vibrate. When I get closer, I see they're covered with bees. The tea bushes give way to a factory. It's an old building, covered in rust. I hesitate. Then, slowly, I start walking towards the factory. The humming grows louder. I go carefully, slowly. The buzzing brings heat to my cheeks. Everything slows down. The bees don't stir. I slip through. I'm standing in front of the factory. It's got a roller door. I go up to it and pull on it. It lifts right up, and crashes into the top of the building. It's a tea factory. It's filled with every bit of machinery you need for processing tea. There's a conveyer belt for sorting tea, a rack for drying tea, a stamp for crushing tea, and conveyer belt for carrying tea in a cascade to containers with hand-drawn labels that are filled by people waiting to fill them and pack them in boxes and pack the boxes in trucks to roll down from the hills to the port and from the port to who knows where. There's no tea in the factory, though. Just bees. The factory's full of hives. There's a sort of order to it. They form a series of concentric circles, each bigger than the next. Bees cruise in and out of the factory. I

watch. After a while I start to see patterns. Bees coming in and out of the hives in the centre catapult themselves straight up into the air and hover in the roof of the factory before zigzagging their way out. The next circle of hives is empty. I can't see any bees near them at all. The third circle of hives is covered with bees. Some of these hives have got a trail of bees on their way out of the factory, and others have got a trail of bees on their way in. The last circle of hives is also empty. These bees congregate in small bands that dive-bomb the centre hives. I start when I realise there's someone else in the factory. You're watching the bees, too. The beekeeper. I don't think you've seen me, although I can't be sure because you're wearing a full white beekeepers outfit, and your face is covered by a mesh. You're standing on the other side of the factory, behind a glass window in a small glass office. The office has a view of the entire factory. I walk over to the office, sticking close to the wall. When I get there, I knock on the door. No answer. I knock again. Still no answer. I try the door handle. It's open, so I go in. I shut it behind me. It's quiet inside the office. I can't hear any buzzing at all. You're leaning over a desk facing out over the factory, writing.

Hello, I say.

You start and look over at me.

Why are you here?

I've come to see you.

Why?

Because it's time I come and see you.

You nod. Yes, it is.

I heard you on the radio.

That was a long time ago.

I nod. I know.

The song comes on after the program, right? The one about slipping away.

I nod. How do you know?

I've heard it all before.

Do you know who sings it?

You look at me. No. No one does. But it doesn't matter who sings it. What matters is that it's sung. You remember how it goes, right?

I shake my head. Not really. Just the chorus.

So sing what you know.

I sing the chorus. When I'm done, you look at me for a minute. Then you reach over and open the drawer of your desk and pull out a folio. You sit it on the desk, pull a chair over and motion for me to sit down.

Here, you say, and hand me the folio.

I undo the clasp of the folio and open it. It's full of drawings and notes. There are formulas, too, and all sorts of lines. All sorts of maps. It's these I'm interested in. I put them all on the desk. I try arranging them. Diamonds, rectangles, oblongs. A straight line, a circle, a hexagon. I arrange and rearrange. Nothing fits. I lean back in my chair and gaze out at the hives. I close my eyes and imagine the bees crowding into the glass office, nestling into every available space until it's as if they are bottled in a jar, stacked one on top of the other, no space even to move. I open my eyes. I pick up the sheets of paper and stack them, one on top of the other. I hand them to you. I smile.

You smile, too.

I hand you the lilies.

You put the papers back in the folio and put the lilies in a vase with some soda water. You pour a glass for yourself.

Want some? you ask.

No thanks, I say. I have to get going.

You nod. Yeah, it's time you get going.

PART TWO : RETURNING

REMEMBERING

All I've wanted to do, these past few years, is go home. Each time I arrive, though, home's no longer there. Home, it turns out, is what I've lost. What I'm trying to return to, but can't. Home, it seems, is the past.

You are, all of you, always here.

The beginning of all of this is loss. We lose you. It's the most surreal thing. Everything stops and keeps going at the same time. Everything's the same. Everything's different.

It's not until I'm on the boat that I start realising what's happening, for real. I get out of the car on the top deck and go over to the railing. I lean on it and look out at the water. We're on our way back to town. The sun shines in a particular sort of way, the way it always does when I'm on the boat, leaning on the railing on the top deck, looking out at the water. I always come up here. Today, my eyes squint in pain. There's no getting away from it. I'll remember this every time I'm on the boat, now. Every time, I'll go to the top deck and look out at the water. On the way over, and on the way back. On the way back, and on the way over. You're there, still. In the voicemail in the mobile phone I don't have anymore. Waiting in line to get on the boat.

We've lost you.

I drop everything and go back to my place. There's no one around. I've got nothing to do but wait to hear back about the funeral. I've got barely any black clothes.

I've got death lilies, though. They grow in the corner of the garden. I pick some and wrap them in wet newspaper. They wilt in the back of the car as I drive home. I can't get them into a vase until after the funeral. I pour some soda water in. In a couple of hours, they've come back to life.

The boat comes in every morning and goes out every evening. Every evening, you watch it go. That's why you walk in the evenings. Why you look out at the sea.

You worked on the boat for years, I say.

Did I? You ask.

Yep. Then you stopped, all of a sudden.

Why'd I stop?

I don't know. You took a payout.

Why'd I take a payout?

You never said. Enough of coming and going, maybe.

It's when you begin to walk at any old time of day that we know things are about to change. When you forget if the boat's coming or going. Arriving or leaving. Let me tell you, in the evenings, when you're looking out at the sea, out at the boat, it's going. It's hard to say exactly when it disappears, though. When it stops leaving, and starts arriving. Let me tell you, it isn't so easy to tell the difference between arriving and leaving. They aren't so different, after all. And forgetting isn't so different from remembering.

I could still see you, you know, even out in the middle of the strait.

Yeah?

Sure. Don't matter where I am, I can always see land.

Really?

Yeah. I always got it with me.

In your pockets?

Nah. In my feet.

In your feet?

Yeah. All of us do. You too.

Me too?

Yeah, you too. You've got the sea, too. All of us do.

The coastline sings its own song. It's not sea and it's not land. It's somewhere in between. Nothing stays the same, here. It's always the same, here. This is where I go to speak to you. Where the river and the railway and the sea all sing to each other. This is where I go to sing to you.

It's not just the boat that comes and goes, you see. It's the trains, too. The rails. Without the trains, the port makes no sense. Without the port, the boat makes no sense.

It's all about what comes out of the ground. That's where it all begins. That's what all of this is about. You know this better than anyone. You work in the factory that pulls the earth from the ground. In a rail town. The tracks go right from the factory to the port, and from the port to the boat, and from the boat to who knows where. The earth goes with them.

You've always watched the trains come and go. The boat come and go. The tides come and go. They watch us, too.

It's a disused track, now. A track that throws up wildflowers. It's no way for vehicles to get from place to place, anymore. It's a place in itself.

A living room springs up. A couch faces a wall that still carries the hiss of spray cans in it. The plants grow into the cushions, relentless. This track's got no need for footbridges. It's got its own bridge, a bridge that's rotting out from beneath itself. A bridge that requires a certain sort of crossing. A careful sort. A delicate sort.

It holds the clatter of a thousand trains in its silences. It's a clamour that throbs under the warm metal and, from time to time, bursts out in the slap of a branch or the sigh of knickers falling to the ground. The only sort of stillness here is the stillness that trembles.

I've walked up and down this track as many times as I can remember. Before I came here, even.

It goes all the way to the river, and over to the other side of the river, and who knows where to from there. All the way along the coast, maybe. I've been years and years coming back to this river. Coming home. I didn't even realise I'd left. I'm sitting on the railway bridge just now, looking out at the sea and realising I haven't come back this way, this way, since I left. I'm leaving all over again and coming back all at once. And still, the river's here. The river that grew me up. The river I'm come back to.

Home. Where everything flows from and back to. The mountain, the river, the sea. Always returning to themselves. I've returned in the meantime, of course. Over and over again. But I'm come back now. It's not the same thing.

I go remembering as I go along. The pathway. Hungry college students picking blackberries. Your hands. My hands. Tart in my mouth. Sour with the want of rain. Then I see the railway bridge. Let's climb up, I say, and we all appear to me, and up we went.

We balance along the rails, warm metal on our soles. You go over to the other side of the river, but I stay close to the bank, looking out at where the river becomes the sea. I sit down on the concrete block, swinging my feet in the bare air above the river.

It's an old railway, so there won't be any trains coming, I say. But of course trains still come along. I've just forgotten which railway's which. I've been getting tracks confused all my life. Some of them before I go there, even.

I remember when I see you over the other side, and so I watch for trains. None come. It isn't until we're driving back home along the port that I see one whistle in.

If you walk far enough along the tracks you'll make it all the way to the factory. And it's not until you get there that you'll understand the silos all along the

river. And the trains that run along the tracks. It's all connected. Each of our movements reverberates out into the past, present and future. Repetition amplifies the rattle of our bodies. Our thoughts. Our dreams.

That's why, if you walk far enough along the tracks you'll hear the stories in them. If you know how to listen.

I see you every day, you say. You run past here, don't you?

Yep.

Why do you go the same way every day?

So I remember.

Remember what?

Remember you.

I park the car at the beach and get going. I never know if I'm going to get into the water or not. I never make plans for it. But sometimes I just find myself down on the beach and getting in before I know what's happening. I run up the hill past the museum and back down the stairs, past the surf club and along the foreshore. I swing right at the sculpture and run along the esplanade until I get to the jetty. It's the jetty we're standing on, waving you goodbye. I lean over the rails, panting. I stare into the water. And then I start back again. This time, I go along the flat way, past where you look out at the sea. I run amongst the tea trees until I'm at the sea again. And then, inevitably, I get in. Every time. I've never got a towel, so I'm still dripping when I get back to the car. I dry myself off with my t-shirt and drive home with the windows down.

Them trees up there still hold the shape of us. They hold the ways we walk, the pathways. The corridors. And in turn, they shape the ways we walk, now. It's in the very bark of them trees. In the trunks. They hold the pathways open, long after we go someplace else. They wait for us to come back along those old ways.

When I ring to tell you how I ran all the way along the coast until I reached the saltwater baths, you say, that's the way I used to run. There and back again.

Past the cemetery?

Yep, past the cemetery.

Did you ever go in?

Into the cemetery? Nah.

Why not?

I dunno. I guess I was always looking out at the sea.

Yeah, that makes sense. I dunno why I was looking at the cemetery. I don't want to be buried.

Don't worry. I won't bury you.

But if I've gotta be buried, I want it to be in a cemetery by the sea.

Looking out at the sea.

Yeah, looking out at the sea.

I can't remember if I feel your feet in mine before or after you tell me that. You're younger than me when you run along the coast, there and back again. It's so difficult to imagine you younger than me. You've always gone before me. I see myself repeating you in so many ways. Following the same paths. Making the same journeys, from one coastline to another and back again. Over and over.

There's a rug I go to sit on when it's time to sit still. It's where you put us when we're too much. When we've got up to something that needs thinking about. We've both got rugs. One each. We've both got rooms. One each. Doors not quite shut.

I spend hours on that rug. Sometimes you forget about us, so I get to know it inside out.

I find out, years later, that you don't bother staying on yours at all. You've always been more savvy that way. More daring. Our rugs are different. You don't know yours nearly as well.

There's a storm going on, in mine. There's a ship, and they've been sailing as long as they can remember, waiting for the shore. The waves are brutal. As high as the cliffs they're approaching. They can't see land yet, but it's waiting for them. A light shines straight up into the sky.

These rugs come from a long way away. A long time ago. From a place that's got a different name, now. It's been called lots of things, over time. It's still the place these rugs come from, though. And it's you who brings them from one island to another.

By the time you get here, I've forgotten what we're here for. It's not until half way through the night I remember. The atomic wings. We want you to give them a go. You're up for it. You tell the monkey story while we're waiting for the wings to come out. For most of us, it's not any sort of new. The monkey's from a place that's got a different name, now, and it's covered in chilli. It's so hot it melts right through the bag. Each time, though, stories tell themselves differently. This time, it's in a paper bag with foil on the inside. You've got my attention. All these years, to me, it's been melting right through plastic. Stories, I realise, are as much about the unsaying as the saying. When the wings come out, they've got a bit of extra flame on them. I warn you not to eat them before mains come out. You don't listen to me. You're stoic about it, though. You barely even raise a sweat, or a grimace. But you're suffering. We've never heard you go so quiet.

It doesn't take you long to start telling the monkey story again, though. You've got a new chapter now, after all.

And I've got a new way of seeing things. I've always thought the chilli was the point of the story. But now I see it's the monkey. It's a story of an island. A mainland. A strait. A bridge. A crossing, back and forth.

I only get to make the one trip on the boat. Over and back. On the way home, the sea's so rough we have to turn back. When it calms down a bit, we start for home again. My room smells like vomit so I race up and down the hallways with friends who can still stand up. We try to make it from one end to the other without crashing into the walls. The ship's rolling so fast that none of us make it. Soon I'm the only one who's not vomiting. It turns out I don't suffer seasickness. I go up to the top deck to see the sea. It's a broiling mess. I look up at the sky instead. It's still. Not a star amongst the clouds.

We get back over, somehow.

It's not long before we start talking about leaving, again. We spend whole summers in someone's garage, talking about what it'll be like when we finally get out of here. We talk like this for years.

This town that grew us up, this port town, it's honest and uncompromising. A row of silos separates it from the river. It watches ships come and go. It knows there are roads in the rivers, too. Roads in the sea. It broods, this town. It vents its frustration in sudden storms. It orients itself north. And so we orient ourselves north, too. There's no footbridge over the railway, but it's not enough to keep us from the river. From the boats. From the sea.

You're the first to go. We drop you off on one side of the river, watch you weigh your suitcase and walk on down the gangway. You're looking over your shoulder at us the whole time. When we can't see you any more we pile into the car and drive over the bridge to the other side of the river. We go down to the end of the jetty off the esplanade and wave you off. Afterwards, we lean over the cold metal rails with crossed arms and stare down into the black river.

We all pile back into the car and pick up some hot chips and go down to the beach. We huddle together in coats and bare feet, licking salt off our fingers.

We start a fire in the scrub. Someone's got a goon bag, and someone's got a guitar. Someone goes down to the water to see if the tide's coming in or going out, and loses a thong. It's going out.

Some of us never leave at all. Some of us never come back. I'm always somewhere between leaving and returning. I've never been able to say if the boat's coming or going. So when I go, I always go by plane.

I'm below the bottom of the sea. From here, I can see the night sky. A thousand glow worms become stars. Frozen squids waft along walls. Their tentacles fall down in curtains. It's a cathedral I'm in, again. I'm always in some sort of place of worship. Organs echo along the walls. Fossils. It's a cathedral of shells.

Them currents down there still hold the shape of us. They hold the ways we walk, the pathways. The corridors. And in turn, they shape the ways we walk, now, above. It's in the very flow of them rivers. In the tides. They hold the pathways open, long after we go someplace else. They wait for us to come back along those old ways.

You carry sunbeams in your eyes. They're so bright that I squint every time I look at you. Looking at you, I look into the sun. You squint back, as if your eyes cast the same glare onto the world around you. You carry your heart in your hands. Whenever you cycle into town you put it into the right pocket of your shorts and cycle one handed so you can reach down every so often with your right hand and check it's still with you. You know all of the shortcuts. I ask one day why you don't keep your heart in your chest anymore and you don't say anything. Instead, you put your arm around my waist and press your hand into my belly. Afterwards, I can still feel the places where you place your hands on my body. They've got a sort of luminescence. A warmth. I place my own, smaller hands in those same places, mimicking the movements of your hands. Repeating them. Inscribing them. Your movements are in my skin. Your hands are in my skin. I begin to wonder where I keep my own heart. It's your silences I've got in my chest, now.

Your letter arrives before the storm and after the storm too, there being little time between storms and very few places to sit. Your writing hasn't changed. I can't seem to pin mine down but yours I recognise still, still you write me letters. This typewriter, it's got no exclamation marks, you say, of course I remember and still, I can feel your fingers in the letters. The words trail off and I hear your voice, brimming where the letters don't show. I can feel a downpour coming on.

The garden's where I go when I feel the storms coming. The weather's decisive out here. Abrupt. Clouds come in from the west, crowding together over the casuarina trees. The garden's silent. The trees begin to sing. The sky inhales. Lightening. It exhales. Thunder. The trees clash into each other. Clouds press into the earth. Slowly, the sky swells. Everything's still. Everything waits. Then, the sky bursts. The rain begins.

I can hear the rainbow parrots gathering it's dusk and it's the time of day they gather every day and even though I can't hear them, because it's really in my chest they're gathering, beating their wings and singing in the night, singing because it's dusk and you're coming home, I know it's going on somewhere outside, too, because every evening at dusk by the beach in the tall pines it goes on, it's there they go to gather, but today I'm far from the pines and close to my chest and it's all I can hear, the rainbow parrots gathering, beating their wings and singing you home.

When you arrived, although you haven't arrived yet, so it makes no sense to speak in the past tense and yet I know it will be so, I'm feeling it already. Being then, what I'm feeling now and not necessarily what I'll feel when you arrive but what I imagine, after you arrive, that I'll understand is what I felt as you arrived. The very seeing of you. I'm here and I'm everywhere but, here being too much of a place to be all at once, you arriving, and being here where I am being all at once too much. You are on your way to arriving, to having arrived, to being arrived, here, all at once. Only not on the way to leaving again, being the next thing after arriving, and being here, now, before you arrive being infinitely milder to being there, then, as you are leaving. And entirely too much, at once.

They're opening up the train track on this side. Rolling backwards and forwards on all sorts of wheels. There's banging and whining. There'll be trains going up and down along here again soon. Who knows how long it's been.

On the other side, they're sealing up the tracks. They're pouring asphalt all over the place. Painting white lines. One sort of lines for another. One sort of wheels for another.

Them tracks are still there. They've still got my feet in them. Them tracks are keeping my feet in them. I'm still going along there. I see them. I remember. Every time I see these words, these tracks along this page, I'll see those tracks. This is where I'm keeping them. This is where I'm keeping everything. There's no way I'll let it slip away.

These ones, these tracks, they're easy to see. Easy enough. They seem to be what they are. And they are. But they're also, always, something else. They're everywhere, tracks. Trails. There's no movement that goes unrecorded. There's no song that goes unsung. We carry our movements in our bodies. We carry everywhere we've ever been. I've got your movements in me, too. Your trails on my body. You're in the shape of my shoulders and the tilt of my fringe. It's all happening, still. Every single thing. All of it. We are the stories. It's just a matter of being able to hear the different sorts of saying.

There are different sorts of writing. Everywhere, there are lines. These lines, too. And the lines, they're meant to be sung.

There are different sorts of singing. There are different sorts of songs. There's the singing that sits in the belly and unwinds itself by the campfire. There are flickers of song in the wind. Walking alongside the river. In the tides. The ocean in me, it breathes. There are the songs in the grooves of records. Reach into the washing machine to skip to the next song when it skips.

Everywhere there's rhythm. Voices lilt and pitch. The trains roll on by. It's just a matter of tuning in. Into the beat of birdsong. Into the trill of wings. There's a pattern in the roots cracking the concrete. I'm suspended.

Everywhere there's fear. Fear there's no one coming back along these lines. No one singing these songs. There are songs that go unsung. Become overgrown. Hidden, buried. The veins of our country.

Rivers, the rivers flow. They sing, they sing. Rock and roll ain't meant for these rivers, but these rivers sing it anyway. All sorts of songs. Alongside the river, I feel the glow of faith.

When you walk for long enough, the sky bends towards you. The sand buries itself. This becoming is becoming. I give way to the roving shells and watch the pied oyster catchers. There are two of them, and they gather together at dusk. The sand lights up. They're illuminated.

There are some things I won't understand, ever. I'll think about that later, I learn to say. It's what the black cockatoos are saying that interests me. They speak about the rain, among other things. There are so many languages I don't speak. So many songs I don't sing. I learn to let the songs sing themselves.

Gravity's got a way of bringing everything back to itself. My limbs are heavy, then light. The sea holds me up to it. Along the shore, I'm invisible. I reach for the town along the way. There's only reaching. I forget to reach. When I fold my arms, I'm invisible. Invisible, I sing.

Falling's a gift. I go below. Inside each of us is a small bird, with slim legs and a heavy grace. It holds its breath. It's silent. It watches. It forgets itself in the sky. It's only the sky. It shrugs its shoulders and rolls its head and swings an arm over your shoulder. Each gesture is a song. Every time I meet your eyes, I'm gone.

Give me a belly full of song, limbs that swell with joy, a bird the shape of a fish, a fish the shape of a bird. Everything exists. I give it all to you.

I've waited so long, to hear these songs. To lounge on the sunbed next to you.
And now we're here, I barely hear anything but you.

I press my face into your neck. My left shoulder trembles uncontrollably. You
say nothing but your arms tighten around me. We're quiet. We listen to the
songs. They say the sorts of things we don't say to each other. The sorts of
things we don't need to.

You've got a way of making the years disappear.

I hear you smiling, sometimes. Sometimes, my eyes fill with tears. I feel the
opposite of loss.

I begin to shake. You ask if I'm alright and I nod, but I hold onto you tightly.
With a strength that comes from remembering. You hold onto me tightly, too.

And when you speak, I can still hear summer in your voice.

I go driving along the hills by myself. Normally I'm going somewhere, but I don't care where. I'm going along the hills. Sometimes I listen to songs, and sometimes I sing. My heart swells into my eyes and my eyes well into the sky. I come over the top of a hill and suddenly see the sea. I know this can't last. I know I'm trying to go back, when there's no going back. I'm going upstream, and it's as much as I can do to stand still. The river's relentless. There's no escaping gravity. But still, I resist, and go driving along the hills by myself.

It's the music festival that brings it all to a halt. This is the day you begin to slip away.

We're deep in the trees. There's a picture of us, three women. I'm the smallest of us. The two of you are tall. You move like herons, effortless. I glide too, when I'm with you.

You don't have this sort of ease about you. You're five and the skin's already tight about your eyes. It's where you hold your worry. You draw our faces and your best friend draws our bodies. You're both observant in a haphazard sort of way. You forget a neck but pick up on a watch. The worry isn't showing about my eyes yet, either.

I don't expect being here to be so difficult. I don't know why. It's going to be hard all along.

It's you who sees it on the first night of the festival, before I feel it, fully. You always see. You always speak. Even when the words don't exist yet. It's the sort of thing that takes a special sort of courage, and you've got it. You bring us to words, and you bring them to us. You see the mist descending before I feel the chill of it. You give me a blanket before I begin to shiver. Because you know I will. Begin, I mean. The body's got its own ways of recognising pain.

A river pours over a shoulder. When I look closer, I see it's a jellyfish. It's too early to be saying this sort of thing. But it's too late, now. All I see are veins. This is where everything flows from, and back to.

A baby humpback joins us by the edge of the jetty. It's here to play. When it begins to roll over, we see it's got a box jellyfish in its belly. You coax it out, from between two pink lips.

Be careful, I say.

You don't listen to me. You take hold of it and brush its tentacles across my legs. It's going to hurt. I don't feel any pain now, but I go looking for salt water anyway. To rinse my legs. When I get to the shore, it disappears and I sink into mud. I can see the sea, and I struggle to reach it. But I'm sinking, still.

When I get to the hospital you're in the grip of an octopus. Blood's going in and out of you at a rate. The doctor arrives.

You're brittle from too little sleep and your eyes have got the tint of winter. You've got a brisk way of moving and a brisk way of talking. You've got no time for us.

You shrink, but I grow larger. Warmer. I won't let the cold get to you.

FORGETTING

When it's over, your kisses collect in my eyes and become tar. I'm become shut.

The nights eat the days. Sleep abandons me. I'm buried in an avalanche of images. Motionless.

The ground crumbles into nothing. I can't see my feet. They're nowhere at all. The past and the future are blank.

I wait for something to rush in, but the tar in my lungs is too great. Too dense. My arms become black. I prise my eyes shut, but they resist. I see.

This is a sort of dying. The sort of death that dies on its own. Hope crushes me in its collapse. I hear its death rattle in the silence. The trees part way for me to walk. I slip through the tiniest cracks. When something brushes against me, it withers. I take up no space at all.

The wind's got an edge to it. The sea gives up its secrets. It's nothing but water and salt. Wonder clouds over. The sky disappears.

It takes twice as long to speak. Twice as long to say anything. I say nothing. Language forgets what it means. There's no sense to any of this.

Slowly, the layers become flat. Mountains become sand. Trees crumble and hairs tear themselves out. I delete the shapes of the landscape. Rivers run into the sky. My eyes disappear into my mouth. I'm silent.

You're changing shape. You're so bright I can't look at you. You crowd the streets. There are thousands of you. Every time I brush up against you, I shrink. You are the size of me, exactly. I keep moving, but you follow.

The water tank on the hill is empty. It simply won't rain. Storms go around. I forget what it means to drink. You're the shape of my dreams, and now you're gone. I don't dream, anymore. There are only seconds between sleeping and waking. I'm awake, and all I want is to sleep.

When it's over, you're absent from places you've never been. I'm absent, too. I disappear.

I become flat, motionless. My skin cracks. My heart drowns in the cry of a black cockatoo. You aren't bringing rain. You never were. And I was waiting.

Now, there's no more waiting. No more rain. No more black cockatoos. There's silence. The days become nights. You're not coming back. No one's coming.

I'm the grip of an octopus. Your arms tighten around me. I begin to tingle. It starts in my fingers and moves up to my shoulders, my neck and into my eyes. Numbness. You've got something toxic in you. My body goes mute in shock. I'm incapable of a reply to such violence. You make your way into my ears and nostrils and mouth. My breath comes in gasps, my head writhes. You wraps your arms around my brain, and burrow into the furrows of my mind. You're merciless. I beg. I moan. You refuse to release me. Instead, you wrap yourself around me tighter. Tighter. I implode. In sleep, I find my relief. When I wake up, my head's bigger than usual. It grows bigger to fill your absence. Sounds are closer. They reverberate in my flesh. There's more light than usual. I'm out on a boat on a sunny day, shading my eyes. The sun glints off waves that suddenly appear on the surface of the earth. I move slowly. My brain rolls readily in my head. I make only necessary movements. I wait for you to return.

A plant winds its way up the corner of my room, growing at an incredible pace. Its tendrils swing in circles as it seeks something to grab hold of. A man paces backwards and forwards along a corridor lit up by neon light. I write a musical score, but when I show it to you, you can't understand it. It's not a musical score at all, I realise, but a poem composed of music notes. And all around, there are birds flying, beating their wings noiselessly, and I can feel the displaced air washing over my face in waves.

A shower of small black and white birds fill the sky and float on down towards me. I lay down on my back and wait. They float right down to the ground like a sheet, covering me. Their little feet press into my belly, my arms and my legs. Everywhere but my face.

You're crying desperately. You're the shape of emotion. You're what's really going on here.

There's a man standing over me with a raised hand. He's holding a severed plant. I'm the one who puts it in his way. He trips over it. He goes to strike me, again and again. I don't flinch. I'm not afraid. He doesn't touch me. I'm looking at you.

When he calms down, I go over to you. You're handcuffed and dirty. Shaking. Crying real tears. I take your hands gently in mine. I don't say anything. Slowly, you stop shaking. You turn to look at me. I hold your hands in mine. You begin to smile.

The grooves run in you deep. You're covered in scars of repetition. Each time, it's the same wound. Over and over. You open it up with a sigh of relief. It never gets to heal.

At the beginning, I think we recognise each other. Now, I see we recognise our own scars.

You won't let go of me. You never touch me. You won't go below the surface. But you can see the patterns of your scars on my skin. They reflect back at you. In the glare of your eyes. You squint, but still, you see them.

I think they're my scars, at first, too. But it turns out they're yours. There aren't so many differences between us, but that's one. I don't wear my scars on the surface. Mine are inside my skin.

The river, though, it's something different. It's got nothing to do with you. It's in plain sight. You won't be able to see it.

The lake, too, is becoming clear. It's making itself felt. Each year, when it goes orange, I go to it. I make myself into the shape of a leaf. I sit in the rain until I disappear. Each year, it's different. Each year, it's the same.

It all happens, one thing after the other. Everything happens, at once. I dream of leaves, and make plans to fit in with the wind. With the shape of the sun. I go to the tall trees in the valley. I go to the wide indigo bay. They're always there, waiting.

But you, you've forgotten how to wait. How to sit still. You're constantly shifting from one place to another. You never leave, so you never arrive. You never arrive, so you never leave. We're different this way, too.

It's the differences I begin to see, now. The differences are all I can see. The scars I see in you are mine, too. My eyes in yours. My hands in yours. My silences in yours.

My eyes, my hands, my silences, are my own.

You are a sort of wind. A sort of not seeing. It's only when you brush up against something that you become visible. In the rustle of the leaves. In the sting of the sand. In the patterns of the waves. In the movements of others. You move me. I never know which way you are going to go.

And now, I see all of my hollows. I see my silences and my fissures. I see my weirs and my tributaries.

The river, though, has got nothing to do with you.

There's a river, and there's a bridge beneath it. I go in. There's a river in my ears. I can't hear nothing. I go below. Irises sprout from my limbs. Sugar's no good for you, sugar.

Where's the meaning of all this?

We all start at the periphery. It's the only way. We approach, again and again. Clearing away the muck each time. Polishing glass. It's just out of reach, the centre. It's a cloud reflected in the water on the sand. An illusion in an illusion. Just out of reach. It moves as fast as I do, exactly. But still, there are glimmers. Mirrors turn to look at themselves. The periphery, still at the periphery. I climb, I climb.

Each day the tide comes in closer. We're getting further away. You don't get to grieve me. I was born of grief. The funnels of our history run along my thighs. I carry the sighs of eternity in my wrists. The creaks. I am history. The stories are written in my bones, in the cracks in my heels, in the jut of my hips. My feet know where to go. All the places, all of them. My legs know how to dance. All the dances, all of them. But to me, all they do is mumble.

Back to the river. Back to the bridge. The wreck. I come ashore in the same place. Helpless, I stare at the sky. I can't take my eyes off it. It never takes its eyes off me. I learn to look at my feet. My hands. It's there I see the skin peeling away. The veins beginning to show. The tide goes in and out. It washes over me, all of it, but it's not enough to free me.

The sea begins to shrink. The waves grow smaller, gasping. You appear on the horizon. You sit between the sea and the sky, rolling. I look at you out of the corner of my eye. I know the only way is to go in. To go below. I sink into the sand. An anemone grows into my mouth. I'm silent, I'm become the sea. I'm become me.

I learn to trace the rivers of my veins. I return to place the roads amongst the lanes. I gather every tear from every face. I waver in the fear before the grace. I keep a tiny sliver of your hair. I weep a shiny trinket of despair.

You're never far from me. I see you in between my lashes, in the shadow of a tree, in a gust of wind. The wind will bring you to me. In between the sun, there's shadow. In between the strings there's silence. In between the dreams there's dreams. I learn not to rest on collarbones.

There's a way, there's a way and it's the way I came. The periphery's in me.

I've got this old injury, I forget about it until you see it. It's not visible on the surface. It's so old it's sunk into my bones. Into the shape of them. I don't know how you see my bones. But you do.

All my stories are down in there. In my bones. In my body. I am the shape of history. And so are you.

It affects the way I walk, this injury. And my limp, it changes the tone of the pathway. It changes the lilt of the hills.

I've got this old grief, it lives in the shape of a whale's tail. It comes back every spring. The wind whips away the rain before it reaches the ground. Not here. Here, there's a tank and it's always full. It's on the top of a hill and it's here I go to see the whales. It tilts to one side.

When I'm walking, my bones sing. They know the words to every song. When it starts to rain, they go quiet. They ache in the cold. They carry the winter in them. And the whales, they carry the spring.

I don't share the shape of my grief. The sun peels the skin from my bones. In the peeling there's feeling and in the bubbling, relief. I melt down on into the ground. The water bubbles up.

Tears bring the rain. I lift my eyes to the sky. A storm flies on high. It's the shape of a valley in the shade of tall trees. It's the whisper of a lover gone blind. It's the wrinkle of the wind in the sand. A long goodbye.

There's a cloud in the water on the sand. We grind along, disappearing as we go. Behind you is the sky. You obscure it. And the sky obscures my eyes.

My old injury begins to sing. It brings the winter to me, to the channels in my veins. My arms begin to stiffen as the frost begins to form. I see my breath. I

open the windows to let the winter air warm my room. I move, I'm still.
Winter's in my hands.

My fingers unfurl. One by one, they straighten. I reach for spring. The whales
come into the bay, close to the shore. The tide swells. I climb to the top of the
water tank. Water wells to my ankles. Closer, the whales come. Further. I sing
out to them. They're going south. They sing back to me.

I know the way I'm going, I'm following the shore. The tides are speaking to
me, each day they murmur more. It's time to leave my bones, it's time to come
on down. To get into the water, to leave this sinking town.

The tank overflows. My bones surface. The sky clears. I'm going south.

Inside the sky I've got my eyes. Inside your eyes, the sky. Inside my eyes. This is the end of all of this. The end of always looking to the sky. It's indigo, it's the slap of a whale's tail, it's the weight of a breath. I was born too late, all of us are born too late. The stories become heavier and heavier, and we forget how to carry. The clouds promise release but the wind never stops. We carry on. The sand swallows itself and the sea holds its breath. Go, cross the channel and see how far you can get before your feet turn around and carry you home. There's no effort in coming back.

Inside the songs are songs inside songs. Inside the words are patterns of flight, the winds of a thousand springs, the glimmer of preserved limbs, a lemon cut in half.

I can't bring myself to eat wings. The grease of yesterday is a film on my hands, and it seeps down into each murmur of my fingers. I fold my hands, I sit still, but still it seeps on out. I press my hands into prayer. Grease, I bow to you. There's nothing more I can do.

Hand me something I can feel the weight of. My feet are small propellers and birds keep flying into them. The whirl of the wind is a stronger drug than people will admit. I see them walking towards it, towards me. I stare up at the limbs of the wind and the whine of the birds. Great birds, no flight. You are inside the wind, I feel your fingers in it. A blessing. The name of this place is home, its where I go to kneel down and take your hand. It grows, your palm, until it's big enough for me to curl up in. I fold my arms around myself. You fold your hand around me.

It's where people are always coming and going that interests me most. The echoes that people leave behind. The rumble of the old songs amongst the melodies of the new. I'll take what you give me, but it won't be the same. Not once I've got hold of it. I'll unweave it, weave it, unweave it, weave it, until my fingers disappear. When I'm done, I'll be gone and so will you.

Show me one thing you can hold on to. Feel the weight of it in your hands. Feel the years in grams. The grams in years. It weighs the same as all the steps you'll ever take. It's the sort of weight that fills your lungs and brings you to the surface. I won't let you float by me. I won't let you sink, either.

Mirrors are everywhere. I began singing to them years ago, before I was born. I was born too late. The voices in the songs are long gone. They're on their way back, now, along the long shore.

I've got two worlds in my hands. One of them weighs heavy, it's old, old like a grinding stone. The other one spins. My head's spinning, bubbles rise into my eyes. I agree, I don't. I can't speak without moving my hands, and so each time I say something the worlds shift. There's not two at all. Every time I look there's a different number. They grow wide, they grow narrow. I haven't got a hold of them at all.

I'm distracted, today. Every movement grabs my eyes. It's the bubbles. I'll come here again and again. There's no need to go anywhere at all, really. Nothing to do but grow my hair long and toughen up the soles of my feet. The days are longer, now. I forget my sunglasses and go back for them, again and again. I wear denim with denim. I come here, again and again.

There's a lake out here I go looking for. I don't find it, so I wait for it to come to me. It takes its own sort of time. There's a time for waiting, and so I wait for the time. Sooner or later, everything makes its way to me. Sitting still is the only way to be sure. It's the only way to move around.

It's the mountain that comes to me, over and over. Up it comes and towers over me. It approaches me. I sit, still. I listen. I wait for the silence. I try to speak. But the mountain won't fit into words. I move my hands, instead. Worlds shake all over again. They disappear and reappear. I sit at the feet of the mountain and place my hands upon them. The lake is on its way.

There's no mountain without the lake. There's no lake without the mountain. But they're not the same. The lake towers underground, too. What's invisible has its own sort of power. We can relax. Let the water take us in. Float a bit. Let go of all this.

And we do. We loosen our grip and up wells the world, again. Our hands are full. Always full.

We're all waiting, one way or another. Waiting to be here. The sun's got rain in it, and the clouds have got sun. I'm in this world, I'm in my hands, the world's got hold of my hands. I give them to you and we disappear.

There's a time for everything. Time's everything. It comes and goes. Everything comes and goes. There's no time for this. No time at all.

The record spins. Into the same grooves we go, over and over. Along and out again. In the valleys of songs there's a silence, a silence that's in lakes and mountains too. It's not the same silence. There's no need to worry. I've got my own sort of silence, and you've got yours. Sometimes I'll carry yours in me, and sometimes you'll carry mine. So we listen. We listen to each other.

I know your name before I meet you. It's mine. My name, I mean. It's yours. This confuses things straight away. All I've got is a name and a picture of you. There's a crowd. We're a long way from home. We've come a long way to meet each other. We don't know it yet.

We grow up facing each other. In landscapes that mirror each other, across the strait. Following the line of this coast, we follow the line of that one. All the way along. An eagle appears. It's got yellow wings and flies low.

I see its reflection in the lake. I look up, and there's nothing but sky. You're both ahead of me, bobbing heads. The water curls the hairs at the back of your necks. My arms are covered in blood. I dive in. I surface. I'm born. This is what we've come here for. This is why I've been waiting for you.

There's a getting in and a getting out. In between, there's a long silence. It's shallow. It disappears into the sky. It gives us faith. It gives us rain. Things begin again.

You're sitting in a plastic chair, and I'm sure it's you. I call your name, and you don't answer. I'm sure it's you. I go up to you. Is it you? I ask. It's you, but you go by another name. You'll return here. I won't. But we'll keep returning to each other.

When we meet, you're wearing a ring with a whale on it. It's you who recognises me, this time. Everyone's close, too close, and so I barely speak. You barely speak, either. I'm already thinking of the sky. I'll leave here. You won't. But we'll keep returning to each other.

The lake is deep and cold. The water won't let go of the night. Not even in full sun. It keeps its secrets. It keeps ours, too. We let them sink into the night.

We're always by the water. The three of us and our silhouettes. All of us. Still water, fast water. Deep water, shallow water. We bring it to each other. We bring each other to it. Getting in, getting out. The silences in between.

These silences are a sort of speaking. A sort of stillness. A sort of singing. There's a quiet to your words. They're sparse, and the spaces between them are vast. The things we don't say are in us, still. There aren't any things we don't say.

Slowly, I begin to linger in the waiting. Linger, I forget how to wait. Silent, I forget how to sing. Still, I forget how to move.

Slowly, I return to where I've come from. I go to the water, over and over. Each time it's somewhere different. And each time, the two of you are there. All of us are there. All of us are here, always.

Carrying the water with us. From the lake to the sky to the sea. To each other.

I'm shrinking at a rate. I'm swelling, effortlessly. You've stripped me bare. You're the surface of another's eyes. You've got plenty of skin. All you'll ever need. Meanwhile, I'm become the sky.

Inside, you're nothing but sky. A thousand surfaces. The opposite of gravity. I reach for you, but I touch my own hands.

I'm become invisible. My eyes are in my feet. There's nothing but my feet. There's nothing but my eyes. They're become lakes. Wide. Black. Cold.

I'm going back to where the rivers flow. I'm going to fill my belly. I've been living off the heavens this whole time. It turns out you don't know the way.

Everywhere you've touched me blisters. My limbs weep. My heart is become a fist. I fold my arms, again and again. Smearing hope on the floor. I see nothing, nothing.

Nothing but my hands. They're intact. They glow. There's a smile in each of my palms. Smiles that hold the sun.

Honesty's a sort of gravity. Floating's not a sort of free. Me, I'm growing heavy. Me, I'm beginning to see. My skin peels off in strips. I'm bare, bare to the sun. I smile in my marrow.

Let me go on like this. Let me go on standing here, arms folded, watching everything that's going on.

Waiting, so something happens.

I'll let you come back. Won't you come back? I'm an exile, there's nowhere to come back to. I exile myself. Home is the clouds in the sky.

A storm gathers. The whales come and go, from home to home. They're here now, they're close. They swallow me whole.

My hair grows lighter. My skin grows darker. I'm become a negative of myself. My bedroom become a darkroom. There's no point in being reasonable. When I carry my home with me, it won't weigh anything. I'll drink the water that makes its way to me. I'm making my way to the water, always. I'll never leave your side.

The ink in my eyes overflows. I grieve for the creeks that grow dry. I go along there, I walk to the source and the end of it all feels like the beginning. Out here, in the desert, nothing is real. Illusions lull me to sleep. I wear my own veil. The ink in my eyes runs dry. The creeks grow, and grieve for me.

Every time I leave it's morning and the sun shines on my thighs. They slide against each other. My shoulders melt. Gravity does its thing. The sun, the sun. I crackle. Generations of stories go up with me. It's a slow burn. Peat. The sky has come to claim these songs. The sun wants words of its own. Wind, and smoke. Enough to change the colour of my eyes.

Every time I return I slide right back on in. The wind snaps. Tears gather in my eyes. I keep moving. I'm still. This is what it means to breathe.

The weather coming down reminds me of home. It creeps into my bones. The old thrill. Flushed cheeks. Chills in my fingers. Upwards, always upwards. I'm on my way.

The early mornings. The late nights. The blankets over my knees. The walking, always walking to keep warm. We never stop moving. We never let the cold get in.

We're always, always on our way. I feel you reaching for me. I feel the chill in the wind. I feel the old delight. My eyes grow wide. I'm hungry for red cheeks. I'm hungry for stiff legs. I'm hungry for you.

Here, everything's accelerated. Everything starts. Fits. No one stops to take a breath. Grace is forgotten in the rush.

By your side, silence returns. You carry stillness with you. Nothing, nothing makes you rush.

Here comes the sun.

We're holding hands before I notice. Yours are cold, like mine. But still, you warm me. I'm floating. I'll float for years. And you, you'll insist on anchoring. I'm always, always anchored to your hands. I drift continents. But still, I'm anchored to you.

Give me a plate full of food and I'll eat. Give me a bird the size of my palm and I'll sing. Each day, I unfurl. Each night, I curl into a bird and eat, eat from my dreams. This is all that sustains me.

I grow tired of questions. I grow tired of anything but longing, longing for the skies before night, the long skies, the old skies. Home is singing to me, and it's all I can hear. I long for family. I long for silence. I long for you.

You're all a long, long way away. A long, long time ago. You're waiting, still.

It's the things that don't exist yet that I dwell in, now. In the landscapes of my dreams. I sleep, I sleep. Bubbles surface from the past. I watch them as they float away. Awake, I'm dreaming. Asleep, I'm dreaming. I'm not here, anymore. My heart's not in it. I'm in the longing. In the waiting. In the long, long sky.

I'm warm, now. It's the wind from the sea that's calling me. Each day, you go out on the water. It calls to me, too.

I want to be back inside my history. I want the stories to fulfil themselves.

It's the seeing, it's the seeing I can't say no to. It's the desire to be still. I can't see you when I'm near you, we get lost amongst the leaves. We're in the movement of the trees. We're in the very wind.

It's this wind, this wind that seeks me out. It travels over the mountains. It carries the smell of the sea with it. It carries the swing of my limbs and the shadow of winter.

It's when I begin to get summer and winter confused that I know it's time to go home. It feels like winter's coming. I'm waiting for it. It never comes. It's summer that's coming, that's why.

I'm become this wind. I see it, here. Here, where the abundance of life crowds in on me. I drink from it. It gives. It takes everything back. I want simplicity. I want a place that gives nothing. That takes nothing back. I want the simplicity of family.

I'm always, always on my way back to you. I'll never be anything but you. You're always, always with me. Singing to me. Singing me to you.

There's a new bridge over the creek. Last time we go over you go in front of me. I'm heavier than you, and you teeter when I put my full weight on the wooden boards. One dips lower than the other. Right down on into the water. You don't like getting wet, too much.

This time, it's just me going over. I've got a plastic bag in my hand, and it's full of memories. I'm going to leave them by where the creek meets the sea.

Beyond the creek there's the railway, and beyond the railway there's another creek. The railway runs right down the middle of the waterway, it turns out. There's just one creek. And no bridge on the other side. No need. It doesn't rain so much over this side. A few rocks are enough.

I go along. Scrub becomes brush. Marsh. Swamp. I know this sort of country, where the grass grows low along the shore. It's my sort of country. It's still. The grasses reach for my legs. They're coarse. The plastic bag catches, now and then. I keep along.

I reach another creek. This one's got a bridge, too. A fallen tree. I balance along. I waver but don't fall. The water's low, very low.

The other side is full of wait a whiles. I don't see them, at first, when I come here. They see me, though. I don't realise, at first, that I'm tangled up in them. I can't see what it is that's got a hold of me. Now, I see them everywhere. And I've learned how to move so they can't see me. Can't grab onto me. I know enough about sitting still, now. This is the last time I'll come back here.

We get to where the creek meets the sea. We start out coming along this way, from the very beginning. This is the furthest we've got. I roll over to face you. Goodbye, I say.

I take the seeds you gave me out of the plastic bag, and toss them into the scrub. There'll be no magnolias, this year.

I cradle the seed pod in the husk of a palm.

I arrange the feathers in my palm and let the wind take them. They brush across my face as they go. You lose your fingers. My skin blisters.

I release the shells into the water. Some sink, some float. Soon, I can't see any of them anymore.

From here, I can see both sides of the shore. There are times when you can walk straight across. There are times when you can't.

I live on the other side, now.

The plastic bag's empty. I scrunch it in my hand and slip past the wait a while. They grasp at me, but I lean into myself. I'm over the tree become a bridge, the coarse grass, the rocks, and the railway. I'm back at the bridge. It's a new bridge, and I don't weigh it down at all.

REMEMBERING

When you invite me to the party, I'm not here. At first I say no. It's your thing. I think you're just being polite. A day or two later we're talking on the phone again and I've changed my mind.

I might come, I say.

Cool, you say.

Are you sure you want me to come, though?

Yeah.

I guess you do. I guess that's why you invited me. You invite someone because you want them to come, right?

Right.

It's that simple, eh?

Yep.

Ok, so I'll come then.

Good.

In you, I see my every gesture. Each act. You're motionless. You simply reflect what I am.

You don't close your eyes, even when you don't want to see. Even when I don't want to see.

I arrive earlier than you so I sit in the window and wait. The wood fire's on, and it crackles behind me. I take off my jacket, and my scarf. The sun comes in the window at a rate. You're not far behind it, you're in the door and hugging me and sitting down before I can even get a hold of what's going on. Your hair's longer. You've got a new jumper on. You look smart. You always look smart. I want to touch your face, but I don't. We both order baked eggs, but different sorts. When they arrive, I inhale mine. I've been wandering around the city since early morning and I'm starving. My feet go numb and lose all feeling, but it's coming back again. We talk about all sorts of things. The simple things. Its easier, sitting side by side. I do most of the eating. The sun doesn't stop shining the whole time. It's still going when we get out onto the street and we go to move the car but you've got plenty of time left, we're not going to be more than an hour, are we? The car's down where we always park it. Nah, I was just thinking it might be nice to go down to the wharf for a stroll.

Ok, you say.

I've got a present for you, I say.

I go to give it to you but change my mind. I'll give it to you down by the boat. Down we go. It's been ages since I've come down here like this, you say. I'm down here so much for work I don't come down on my days off anymore. I come down here every time I'm here, I say. We come down here every weekend. It's the first time in a long, long time that we're coming down here together. The boat's still in the same spot. When we get out to the railing that looks out at the sea, we stop and look out too. It's sunny, and the wind that's usually about is somewhere else for the minute. I get out your present and give it to you.

It's a present and a book I'm lending you, I say. The present's inside the book. I didn't get around to getting wrapping paper, you see.

The book's one you half read on loan from someone else. A book I read over and over, a book I rave about for years. Someone else takes it off you halfway through because they're off and they never leave this book behind. I never leave it behind, either. That's why I'm lending it to you. I figure you'll have lots of time to read on the boat. Inside the book is your present, a leather passport wallet.

I figure you'll need one, with all this travelling you're doing, I say.

You smile. Seeing how you left the other one behind, you say.

I smile. It takes me a while to get around to some things, I say, but I always do.

Thank you, you say.

When you go, though, you don't take the book with you. Something to look forward to when you get back, you say. I don't mind if you leave it behind. I know you'll get a copy back to me, sooner or later.

The river flows from the mountain to the sea. There's no resisting it. It's just the way it is. We give ourselves up to gravity.

After you go, I go down to the jetty. To see you. To see us.

You can't keep everything in one place, I'm realising. You leave parts of yourself behind. Some you can leave. Others you have to go back for.

Each day, we begin again. We begin each day again. I get up and I go to you. Some days I drag my feet. But I always, always drag them to you. Some days there's a lethargy in my veins and my breath teeters. I'm on the edge of something. I'm the weight of the moon.

The years are accumulated in my chest. You press down on me, weightless. Each of your hands is the shape of mine. Each of your fingernails holds a tear. I gather your palms in my eyes. You take my hands in yours. If I remember how to cry, I'll remember how to sing.

I wind my arms into a sail. Behind you, there's a mist the shape of a river. Grief's silhouette is a lake. Leaves loosen. It's time to go home.

There are two islands where you're going. Where we go every summer. I wear my grief like shades, and refuse the mist. You begin to disappear. I stay by you. Your shades become bigger than your face. Still, you turn your face to the sun.

You'll see me there. You'll see me, leaning into a hilltop. Even here, I'm still by you. I don't have that sort of leaving in me. Every time the leaves loosen, I'm already on my way to you.

I change shape a hundred times. You do, too. Slowly, I ease my way into being. I release the weight in my fingers. Each day, I remember so I can forget. Each day, I forget so I can remember.

I remember you. I put each of your limbs in place. I step back to take a look at you. To see if I can forget you. I can't forget you.

You go to the water, each day. Neither of us are ever far from it. It's the surest way to get sick, getting too far away from it. Staying too long out of its sight.

The roads you travel are the sort that shift. What separates us, it turns out, is what connects us. I don't look for myself in the lake, anymore. You, you are my mirror. You, you are the shape of my hands.

Facing you, I face myself. There are patterns on the walls, but intricacy doesn't absorb me, anymore. I begin to polish. I begin to see. To peel away the wallpaper to get to the walls. To peel away the skin to get to the bones. Doubt dissolves.

No more dissolving into the mirror. I'm become glass. You can let go. At last, you can let go.

I point in every direction at once. Searching for north. My hands disappear. North becomes east becomes south becomes west. There's none of any of it. I flail, limbless. You hold onto your own hands. I mistake yours for mine. I'm adrift. Slowly, slowly, I begin to see the light. My hands resurface. North becomes south. I lift my limbs and reach. I take your hands in mine.

You take my hand into yours and it disappears entirely. You press it into your heart and it disappears again. Your heart beat in my hand my heart beat in my hand and my hand disappearing into your hand disappearing into your heart. My heart disappears in your hands. I fall asleep.

When my hands are in yours they become your hands this becoming you keeps happening over and over again I keep going over it again and again making sense of things but I make no sense when your hands become my hands when your hands are in mine this you becoming happening and it can't be kept any of it, it only being in our hands in each other and your hands becoming your own my own hands becoming mine in the nonholding. These hands disappearing into each other there's no holding on there are no hands they keep disappearing and there's nothing to hold onto no hands. Just hands.

People talk in hundreds of acres, here. Even when they're looking at you, they still look past you. It's as if the sky gets in their eyes. They say the people who live out here come here to get away from everyone else. That they can't function in society. As a community. It's the people here who say it, though. And it's a community of sorts.

There's a resoluteness about this place. An inevitability. It wears its stillness with grace. Clarity is possible, here. It smells of honey and fast flowing creeks. And death. There's death everywhere, in the very soil. It's the sort of death we understand intuitively. It's as straightforward as everything else about this place. The sting of the sun. The slap of the seawater. The beaches, unapologetically white. Bright enough to squint at. All of it demands attention. Here, it's impossible to be anywhere but here. Impossible to make any unnecessary movements.

The quality of the light here is incomparable. There's nothing heavy about it at all. It's almost nonexistent, except in short bursts between rows of trees. In the shape of the wind. On hilltops, inside the grass. Here, the earth pours out light into the sun.

I'm telling you about these places because they're the places you used to go. They're the places I go, still. You forget them, but they remember you. Without forgetting, there is no remembering. Without leaving, there's no coming back.

I'm always in between here and there. Always on my way to leaving. Always on my way to coming back. I live on the peripheries, at the margins. I belong here, and there. In my movements, in the tides. In the back and forth, the crossing.

I'm always coming from somewhere. I'm always going somewhere. That's what it is to leave home. I want to be at home, but I'm inarticulate.

Only home can speak of what it is.

Leaving, I remember myself and forget you. Returning, I remember you and forget myself.

Leaving, I forget we're all one and I become separate again. Returning, I remember we're all one and I become whole again. I become separate again, and because I forget we're all one, I leave. I become whole again, and because I remember we're all one, I return.

Home is the people and the places we keep returning to. They're all in here. There's no returning without leaving, it turns out. There's no home coming, without going.

EXEGESIS

INTRODUCTION

Protocols

According to protocol, I will begin by introducing myself. My name is Lauren Gower. I am Danny and Karen Gower's daughter and Brady Gower's sister. I am Ted and Jean Gower's granddaughter. My father's ancestral country is tebrakunna / Cape Portland in northeast lutriwita / trowerner / Tasmania and he is a descendent of pairrebeenne clan leader Mannalargenna. My mother was born in Penrith in the Lake District of England and migrated to Australia when she was 16 months old. We only realised that tebrakunna country is my father's ancestral country recently. We'd always thought that punnilerpanner country was our ancestral country because Mannalargenna's daughter Woretemoeteyenner's daughter 'Dolly' Dalrymple Briggs raised a family with Thomas Johnson on the banks of the Mersey River, and our extended family has lived near this river ever since. I am connected to this country, punnilerpanner country, and also to my ancestral country, tebrakunna country. I also have ancestral ties to England. These are the places and people I am from, and go back to. This is who I am.

I will also locate this research within a framework of Indigenist research protocols, as articulated by Aboriginal people. According to Rigney (1997, p. 636), Indigenist research comprises of three interrelated principles: resistance as the emancipatory imperative in Indigenist research, political integrity in Indigenous research, and privileging Indigenous voices in Indigenist research.

Martin (2003) expands upon Rigney's (1997) principles, and departs from the principle of resistance, emphasising that Indigenist research does not need to position itself reactively in relation to western frameworks. I agree. My standpoint is not constructed in opposition to western frameworks because Aboriginal frameworks constitute the ground of my being. If western frameworks defined the parameters of my identity as an Aboriginal

researcher, they would be positioned at the centre of my being, necessarily marginalising Aboriginal frameworks as non-western. Aboriginal frameworks can and do exist as that which defines, as that which is at the centre. Martin (2003) goes on to articulate eight protocols of Indigenist research. First, an emphasis on the relational nature of and protection of our ways of being, knowing and doing (Martin, 2003). Ways of being, knowing and doing in country is the focus of this project, and relatedness is key to its development. Second, research questions that concentrate on particular places or country and aim to address issues that are priorities for Indigenous communities (Martin, 2003). This project is structured to be as responsive to country as possible, and articulates Aboriginal ways of being, knowing and doing in an effort to contribute to the explicit valuing of Aboriginal frameworks within the academy. Third, literature reviews that are carried out primarily by establishing the relations of beings in particular places, in the context of country (Martin, 2003). This project emphasises the role of walking on country in creating the conditions in which stories and places bring each other into being. Fourth, research design that is contextual and requires flexibility and reflexivity (Martin, 2003). This project is an articulation of relational ontology and also aims to be an embodiment of it, which requires the necessary flexibility and reflexivity of Indigenist research. Fifth, research conduct that is regulated by respecting and following protocols and constantly interacting with beings in the context of country by observing and listening to ensure the right to continue researching (Martin, 2003). This project is premised upon these protocols, as I maintain constant interactions with all beings - people, animals, land, waterways, skies - and engage in constant reflection upon these interactions to determine the route of the research. Sixth, data analysis that consists of thematic analysis of beings as principle data to discern the patterns of relatedness in relation to the research question (Martin, 2003). This project focuses on being in country and establishing dialogue among places and stories. Seventh, Martin's (2003) description of data interpretation describes my approach exactly:

In a voice-centred approach to interpretation, data interpretation accords respect to the country and Entities in allowing these to tell the patterns within their own stories, in their own ways. It may also require the Indigenist researcher to watch and wait with patience as the interpretations and representations of these patterns emerge. This may occur as dreams, or in the form of words and pictures seen in our daily lives, which, generally, are not expected to carry messages. The task of interpretation is to maintain these micro- and macro- relations of research as processes for re-connecting the patterns revealed in analysis. It has less to do with capturing 'truth' or drawing general conclusions, than the re-connecting of self, family, community and Entities that can be claimed and celebrated (Martin, 2003, p. 213).

Eighth, reporting and dissemination that is regulated by the cultural imperative of maintaining relations and relatedness, for example asking permission (Martin, 2003). This project proceeds with the proper permissions, in discussion with people in the Tasmanian Aboriginal community and interacting with beings in the context of country.

How to read these works

The philosophical remarks in this book are, as it were, a number of sketches of landscapes which were made in the course of these long and involved journeyings. The same or almost the same points were always being approached afresh from different directions, and new sketches made. Very many of these were badly drawn or uncharacteristic marked by all the defects of a weak draftsman. And when they were rejected a number of tolerable ones were left, which now had to be arranged and sometimes cut down so that if you looked at them you could get a picture of the landscape (Wittgenstein, 2010 cited in Malpas, 1998, p. 38).

These creative works consist of a novella, placemaps and poems. They are a series of fragments, arranged in relation to each other, within and without. A series of approaches. Each fragment is a pathway, connected by a question. *How does movement create the conditions in which story and place bring each other into being?* The works make sense as a whole. Together, they are

a map of the routes I've taken to get here. A record. It's not a linear route, but a circular one. It's not necessarily logical. It responds to necessity, among other things. The destination is the start. Leaving is arriving. Coming home is multiple traverses.

The form of the works reflect the content. It's a documenting of process, of ways *over time*. I'm demonstrating how I actually make meaning in place. What interests me is the how of it. This is what I'm documenting (even now). My research goes much the same way as my writing. It's not systematic, it's an exploration. A process. A responsiveness. A relatedness with people, places, things. I create patterns of meaning, but, like mandalas, they are swept away and then arranged once more.

This particular arrangement, therefore, is not the only possible arrangement. It's simply how I'm arranging things in relation to each other now. Here. It's not fixed. It's an embodiment of process. Each fragment is from somewhere. From many places. To someone. To many people. It can go in any order at all. The end becomes the beginning. You can leave from anywhere at all. Go in any direction. There are multiple ways home.

Some of it's real, some of it's imagined. I can't be sure which is which. Some of it's dreams, some of it's memories. There's not so much difference between the two. Dreaming is a sort of remembering. Remembering is a sort of dreaming.

I'm attempting to create the conditions in which country can articulate itself. To move beyond myself. The works dissolve self into world, I into you, fiction into nonfiction, dream into memory, creative work into academic work. I work to clear myself out of the way, so that places themselves might speak. No matter where I walk, though, my thoughts are always the heaviest things I carry, and the last things to peel away.

CONTEXT OF THE WORKS

Why a Tasmanian Aboriginal perspective?

To represent our worlds is ultimately something we can only do for ourselves using our own processes to articulate our experiences, realities and understandings. Anything else is an imposed view that excludes the existence of our ontology and the interrelationship between our Ways of Knowing, Ways of Being and Ways of Doing (Martin, 2003, p. 211).

There are few articulations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ontologies, epistemologies, methodologies and axiologies within philosophical discourses in Australia, particularly by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Of the articulations that do exist, many have been developed in the framework of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research methodologies (Cameron and Miller 2009; Fredericks 2007; Graham 2009; Houston 2007; Martin 2003; 2008; Rigney 1997; 2001; West, 2000) or in the field of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education (Arbon, 2008; Ford, 2010; Nakata, 2007; Yunkaporta and Kirby, 2011; Yunkaporta and McGinty, 2009; Yunupingu, 1999).

In addition, the academy in Australia has traditionally comprised of methodologies, research practices and curricula that objectify Aboriginal people and dispossess us of our knowledges (Martin, 2003; Houston, 2007; Rigney, 1997). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers operate within a system that has featured significantly in our oppression, and we are still doing so at its margins (Rigney, 1997). This is a difficult reality for me, and has impacted heavily on my ability to construct a cohesive identity for myself. I strongly relate to Fredericks' (2007) observations:

My survival within the higher education system and the research academy depends on my knowing how the Western academy is structured and operates...This "knowing" is more than "knowing" your discipline. It is also knowing your discipline inside out, how it came to be, how it is used and then turning it upside down so you can see how it relates back to Indigenous peoples.

My survival as an Aboriginal woman in higher education also relies on me continuing to develop as an Aboriginal woman. This is not something that holds true in the reverse (Fredericks, 2007, pp. 16-17).

This constant awareness of context, situatedness and relatedness is also connected to identity in my experience. My experience of the academy is a spatial one: I am always positioned in one way or another. Simultaneously, the academy gives me the ability to articulate this shifting position in its language, for myself. To identify power structures, as I experience them. To participate. To position myself. To bring Indigenous practices into non-Indigenous constructs. As an Aboriginal researcher, I function at the margins. I am always, however, at the centre of my own experience. Margins can transform into the centre, and the centre can transform into margins, at any time. We are always shifting.

Houston (2007, p. 47) refers to autoethnography as 'the new ground where storytelling and research are merging on the borderlands of academia.' This spatial description of autoethnography indicates that it is a apt metaphor for my preoccupation with margins and borders, and the way they shift, which simultaneously functions as a metaphor for my identity. Houston (2007, p. 45) describes autoethnography as 'research from the inside-out', which positions the researcher spatially and provides Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers with a way to 'honour our histories and our ancestors by seeking knowledge from within ourselves (Houston, 2007, p. 46).' Autoethnography - the acknowledgement that I am where I am, and I am always somewhere in relation to other beings - is a way of paying respect to our Elders and other beings. Houston (2007, p. 47) observes that 'the autoethnographic text emerges from within the self-as-researcher developing and evolving through a process of recognising and interpreting the imprint of culture on the self through interactions with others in various social contexts.' This is why autoethnography is 'both method and text' (Houston, 2007, p. 45). Content and form bring each other into being. Words create worlds. Moreover,

autoethnography as research can be seen as a form of scholarly resistance – a method employed to challenge dominant forms of knowledge, meaning and power. It is also a tool with which Indigenous people can decolonise research practices and representations of themselves. This is possible with Indigenous autoethnography because the research is the subject, the key informant and the expert (Houston, 2007, p. 48).

Autoethnography need not be a reaction to western frameworks. It can be a response. By identifying myself as the axis of my experience, I transform the margin into the centre. In response, the centre becomes the margin, and in doing so, becomes visible. In my experience, power relations are so strongly embedded in our ways of relating to each other that they normally go unrecognised. They are normalised. The way things are. Shifting the emphasis from margin to centre, centre to margin, brings existing power relations to light. The centre sees itself. We are, each of us, situated. We have a position. A perspective. We exist in relation to each other, and all other beings. With this realisation, power relations can begin to shift.

With this shift, we begin to realise it's not a simple case of being either margin or centre. We are complex beings, and so inhabit many margins and centres simultaneously, in a constantly shifting response to changing contexts. Colonising discourses are abundant, and exist in several forms (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). We are all experiencing some sort of colonisation, now. It acts on us, in us. As us. We all experience it differently. So, by recognising how we are positioned, and where, we begin to position ourselves. To see that there is more than one position. To take on more than one position at once, even. It's a process that requires constant self-reflection while simultaneously detaching from the notion of self. For me, it's a sort of leaving home to be able to arrive home. A sort of leaving my self in order to be able to arrive at my self. Slowly, inhabiting shifting perspectives allows us to recognise power relations and detach from our positions within them. Margin and centre dissolve into each other.

Why walking on country?

Moving is the way I make sense of the world. It is also an essential component of Dreaming. In Dreaming stories, it is the movements of Dreamings that give shape to the world:

When Parnuen and Vena first came from the darkness and looked down on the tiny land of Trowenna, the surrounding sea was not as it is today. It was flat, muddy, dead – like a bush waterhole in the summer polluted by too many thirsty animals. Parnuen saw this and did not like what he saw, and called on the Mother of All Life, the green goddess Culla-Minna, to give the watery waste life. She in turn quickly handed it over to her tempestuous younger daughter, the beautiful green Niripa, as a present. Niripa's lover was the serene white cloud Pona, who had snow-white hair and beautiful sky-blue skin like his father Dromerdene. Niripa took Pona to live with her in the sea, but she was so temperamental that he could only put up with her a few hours at a time and constantly travelled between the sea and the Milky Way. However, with their marriage the sea became the lovely blue and green colour we know today, and Pona's snowy-white hair is seen in the waves when the lovers are mating. Strangely their children were all Mali Loo like their father, and always went to the Milky Way when they were a few hours old (Cotton, 2013, pp. 71-72).

This Oyster Bay Dreaming story describes the movements of the tides: each time Niripa becomes pregnant the tide rises and we have high tide - Neanta Payawaree (Woman Tide) - and each time Niripa gives birth the children leave for the Milky Way and we have low tide - Loo Payawaree (Child Tide) (Cotton, 2013). This story also indicates that creation occurs in the past, present and future: it is not a fixed event but a continuous process. Dreaming continues. We move, still, and by moving we create, and are in turn created. Sea becomes sky becomes sea. By moving from place to place we make sense of the world. When discussing the Telling Places in Country Project, a Tasmanian Aboriginal history project and community research initiative funded by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies and carried out from 2007-2009, Cameron and Miller (2009) state:

Absolutely central to the rational and design of *Meeting at Bark Hut* was the necessity of “being there”. Following the journeyline in “real” space and time was crucial to the project. In practical terms, this process approach and strategy was conceived simultaneously as a narrative strategy and a research tool (Cameron and Miller, 2009, pp. 16-17).

I am doing exactly this: my process-based approach functions as a narrative strategy and a research tool. I agree that ‘being there’ is crucial to establishing interrelatedness of story and place from an Aboriginal perspective. Valuing the process by which the route arises requires a flexible methodology that can respond to intuition and to particular places and beings. The method arises from the way, and the way arises from the method: from walking from place to place, and responding to each place. I am walking because it is a way to develop and articulate an ontology. In order to do this, I must first locate myself and my country, which is precisely what I am doing by walking. It’s a way of moving that allows me time to see country properly, in such a way that I can describe it properly. It allows time to listen, to feel. Walking, I feel country in my feet. I become a part of it, I begin to make sense of it, and it begins to make sense of me. Cameron and Miller (2009) place a similar emphasis on walking on country as critical to establishing interrelatedness of story and place:

Walking country was of particular significance. All of our senses were alerted to our surroundings...We ate the seasonal fruits of the land. The leaves crackled underfoot and the new shoots of the yakkas were a brilliant green contrasted against the burnt tree trunks. We saw the living artefact of the button grass marshes and the hues of the flowering heathland shrubs in landscapes shaped by our ancestors. These significant interconnections between country and culture are most fully appreciated when all the senses – sight, sound, smell and touch – are engaged, and cannot be replicated in understanding derived from textual research (Cameron and Miller, 2009, p. 7).

Only by 'being there' is it possible to engage with other beings there, in a particular place. Cameron and Miller (2009, p. 8) go on to state that 'embodied, relational, place-based research...can also reveal the immanence of past events and places, and the abiding relationship they have with present interests at both a social and individual level.' By being in a place, by walking in a place, I engage with beings and events that are connected to that place. I engage with stories that are connected with that place, and they in turn engage with me. By walking on country, I create the conditions in which places and stories co-create each other (and me). Events and people are attached to places by story, and story attaches people and events to places. We are, all, in dialogue still.

Which way?

The mountain, 6 May 2014

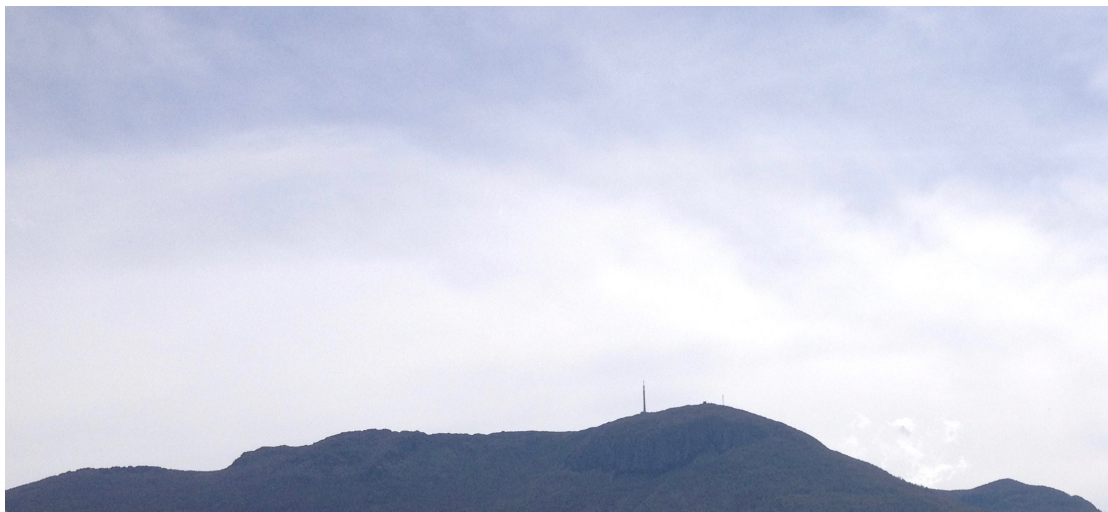


Figure 2 kunanyi / Mount Wellington

I'm running on kunanyi / Mount Wellington when the idea to retrace the route that Pop walked from Devonport to Hobart arises. He might have run, actually. If he made the trip at all. The story exists in my mind as a jumble of possibilities and contradictions. He travelled on foot from Devonport to Hobart nonstop. He made the trip in one day. No, he didn't, he simply ran nonstop.

It's impossible to make the trip in one day. No, it's not. Memories of Pop telling the story blur into memories of debates about whether or not it's true, and how true. These debates have, I realise, become part of the story, now. In the telling and retelling, in the disputes and exaggerations, the story takes on its own life. It creates and re-creates itself. It's part of the story of my family, now.

I speak to my family. It turns out Pop didn't go from Devonport to Hobart, but from Latrobe to Brighton. He went for a three month army conscription one year, and returned for a two week furlough each year for two years afterwards. The trip I'm retracing is probably for the first two week furlough. It's probably in 1954, before Nan and Pop met. He leaves from the Lucas Hotel with two friends and travels as fast as he can. It takes about three days. They shoot a deer with a blank on the way, for food. At Brighton, some army trucks drop a few men out in the bush one day for a navigation exercise, and Pop beats the trucks back to camp. (This story might be the reason for the confusion about whether the walk from Latrobe to Brighton took just one day).

The act in itself, the reassembling and retracing of the route, holds significance. It's the retelling of the story that's significant. The reinscribing of meaning into the story and adapting of it to the now, but most of all the process of sharing and retelling. If it works, it's a story I'll tell my children and grandchildren, and it will contain Pop's story and my story, and maybe their story too. That way, it gains layers of meaning, and increases relatedness across generations, and also to the places that hold the story. My difficulty in this project will be identifying what those places are. The track has begun the process of disappearing. There's the question of whether the story still holds the places, or whether I can identify the places in the story, by story. And then there's the question of whether the places still hold the story, or whether I can identify the story in the places, by place. Macfarlane's (2012) experience of searching for and learning to read an almost impossible to distinguish path resonates with me:

I had come off the Hebridean seas and onto the Hebridean moors to find and follow a part-lost path [Manus's Stones]. News of the path had reached me not as a drawn line on a map, but as a series of contradictory rumours and recollections...this was a path that existed as folklore before it existed as terrain, and I tracked it as a story before I tracked it on foot, moving from lead to lead as though from cairn to cairn. Like a folk song, oral poem or one of Ian's sea roads, its route altered subtly with each retelling (Macfarlane, 2012, pp. 142-143).

Macfarlane (2012) is advised that he should look for what shouldn't be there, slight disturbances, unforeseen interactions. The route I follow will be reconstructed by stories. It might need to be a route that responds to routes that open up along the way. How do different places respond to being included in paths? Do they allow or disallow it? Encourage or discourage it? There's the question of how important it is that I stay as true to the story as possible. There's the question of how important the places I visit are in relation to the story, even if they are not the places originally visited. In short, how important my version of the story is compared to the original version of the story. How much I value the end versus the means, the outcome versus the process, the original verses the re-creation, the following versus the making. All I can do is apply what I know of how to be, know, do and value with respect, always responding to place, and simultaneously allowing place to contribute to how I am, know, do and value. Macfarlane (2012) also speaks of meeting Anne Campbell during his search for the path, an archaeologist and cartographer who is deep-mapping the Bragar moorland. Again, this is particularly relevant to my project:

All I want, really, is to put stories to places and what joins them...So I spend most of my time walking shieling tracks, paths, and the streams and the walls that used to divide up the land. Then I talk to people and try to fix their memories to those particular places (Anne Campbell, cited in Macfarlane, 2012, p. 152).

Macfarlane (2012) goes on to describe a series of walks that Anne went on with a friend, Jon MacLeod:

They began to create and record their own songlines, recording paths taken, events that occurred or were observed along the way. On a June day they walked between An Talamh Briste, Na Feadanán Gorma, Gleann Shuainagadail and Loch an Ois, and they saw along the way ‘drifts of sparkling bog-cotton’, scarlet damselflies’, ‘a long wind, carrying bird-calls’ (Macfarlane, 2012, p. 153).

The question of how to record the walk is a difficult one. I consider all sorts of approaches. Ephemeral arrangements that mark the track I walk, as I walk it? Photographs? Lines on a map? A journal? In time, I realise that the walk will record itself. It’s here, now, in these very lines.

Elizabeth Town, 23 August 2014



Figure 3 Elizabeth Town

Travelling the route from South Hobart to Tarleton by car, by myself. I think back to the last time I made this trip, and I can’t remember. There’s a

photograph I took of the green hills outside the Elizabeth Town Cafe one time I was driving North. That might have been the last time I came up this way. Everything was covered in a fine coat of rain. It's the same sort of day. I stop at the Elizabeth Town Cafe to see if anything comes to me, as I look out over the same hills. Instead, I find myself thinking of the qualitative experience of driving the route from South to North, and how walking the route from North to South will be different. I turn the radio off for the second half of the trip, and drive in a sort of silence. Memories and thoughts rush in, and an uncomplicated happiness arises in me. The speed I'm travelling, though, affects how I experience all of this. Everything comes and goes at a rapid pace. I can't hold onto any of it.

Tea Tree Lane, 2 December 2014



Figure 4 The boat leaving

I'm running along the Eastern Foreshore Heritage Walk, a walking track from Tea Tree Lane to the Mersey River. When I'm approaching the Mersey River, the Spirit of Tasmania sails past, and when I see it I remember that Pop used to time his walk in the evenings so that he could see the boat leaving for the

mainland. Living on the north coast of Tasmania, I'm always standing at the edge of the Bass Strait, looking north out across the water. The Strait is what orients me in the world. I am closer to Melbourne, here, than to Hobart. Deep, fast flowing Strait, connecting and separating this island from the next. Growing up, looking across, walking along the liminal edges of this place, it felt like an obstacle, a huge, swollen fence. Now – and especially since reading Robert Macfarlane's *The Old Ways* – I see it differently. Macfarlane (2012) writes of the phenomena of 'land bias' prior to the twentieth century recognition of the existence of ancient seaways, and outlines an alternative perspective:

Try it yourself, now. Invert the mental map you hold of Britain, Ireland and western Europe. Turn it inside out. Blank out the land interiors of these countries – consider them featureless, as you might previously have considered the sea. Instead, populate the western and northern waters with paths and tracks: a travel system that joins port to port, island to island, headland to headland, river mouth to river mouth. The sea has become the land, in that it is now the usual medium of transit: not barrier but corridor (Macfarlane, 2012, p. 93).

Macfarlane (2012) goes on to discuss the consequences of re-imagining the positioning of land and sea in relation to each other. Firstly, the margin becomes the centre. Secondly, national boundaries are superseded by coastal and non-coastal identities.

To me, this relates to one of Asante's (1993 cited in Rigney, 1997, p. 632) definitions of Afrocentricity: 'Afrocentricity is a perspective which allows Africans to be subjects of their own historical experiences rather than objects.' This approach to the Bass Strait transforms Tasmania from margin to centre. I understand now that the centre can also be at the periphery, and the periphery at the centre. Walking along the edge of the Bass Strait, along the tidelines, along the shifting periphery of this island, which is supposedly at the periphery of the nation of Australia, I am centring myself at the periphery and in doing so, transforming the periphery into the centre. Simultaneously, I am

positioning myself as an Aboriginal person at the centre of my world and work: I am positioning myself as the subject of my own historical experience.

The Bass Strait has directed my being: the paths that I walk, the memories I hold, the stories I write. It dominates my thoughts, my standpoint, the way I relate to the world. I, like my Pop, like my entire family, am a saltwater person, most at home at the shifting boundary of this body of water. I return again and again to walk, and run, tracing and re-tracing the tidelines, visiting and re-visiting the sites of my memories along the paths. It has been a long time since I last came here, though. Long enough to half forget these things. I remember, now, being here, that it was this very walking track, Tea Tree Lane, that Pop used to walk along.

Remembering this, I run differently. I began running without realising where I was running, or knowing where I was running to. My destination arises out of this remembering. As if my Pop is suddenly in my legs. I run to the Mersey Yacht Club. When I arrive, I understand what I am doing, and how all of my movements up until this point constitute that understanding.

I am walking to connect stories to places, people to places, people to stories, people to people, stories to stories, places to places.

I understand my research question: 'How does walking on country create the conditions in which story and place bring each other into being?'.

I understand that we are always walking the paths of our Ancestors. That's what Dreaming is. I understand that I'm Dreaming, and that Dreaming is philosophy. That this is the Tea Tree Dreaming.

I also understand that I am articulating an ontology. Martin (2003) states:

Indigenist research must centralise the core structures of Aboriginal ontology as a framework for research...It is through ontology that we develop an awareness and sense of self, of belonging and of coming to know our responsibilities and ways to relate to self and others (Martin, 2003, p. 206).

The difficulty my project presents is the difficulty of articulating and developing a methodology and an ontology simultaneously. Each is embedded in the other, and so they arise together. I am beginning to see that separating out Aboriginal ways of knowing, being, doing and valuing – or epistemologies, ontologies, methodologies and axiologies – may be impossible, and indeed, unnecessary. Martin (2003) observes that:

Our Ways of Doing are a synthesis and an articulation of our Ways of Knowing and Ways of Being...Our behaviour and actions are a matter of our subsequent evolution and growth in our individual Ways of Knowing and Ways of Being. We become tangible proof of our ontology and its construction of our Ways of Being and Ways of Knowing. That is, we are able to show (Do), respectfully and rightfully (Being) what we know (Knowing) (Martin, 2003, p. 210).

This, as I continue along, I precisely the understanding I'm arriving at.

Pardoe Point, Saturday 3 January 2015



Figure 5 Moorland Beach looking towards Pardoe Point

This morning, Mum and I go for a walk along Pardoe Beach and decide along the way that we'll walk all the way to the point and see what's on the other side. Another beach. There are people on the next point, and we wonder if they've walked all the way out there from Tea Tree Lane, where we started from. On our way back home in the car, we decide to go exploring. Mum and Dad have been to look at a place for sale recently on Moorland Beach Road, and Mum thinks it might be another access point to the beach. It is. It brings us out exactly where we saw people from Pardoe Point. It's this walk, this connecting one place to the next, this new storyway emerging from an old storyway, that sits with me and shows me the way to go.

South Hobart, Tuesday 6 January



Figure 6 South Hobart

I'm going the wrong way. As I write about Tea Tree Lane this morning, and how I'm of the Strait, how my family's of the Strait, I realise that is the way I need to be going. The way I am already on, the way that has presented itself. An old idea surfaces. A walk from Bakers Beach to Cape Portland. Everything points that way now. The unease I feel leaving the coast to return to Hobart, the sinking feeling in my belly. The regret I already feel at going south. The apprehension I feel going inland, onto country I don't know. Country I'm not

from. My uncertainty about who to ask permission to move across that country. My lack of ability to move with ease on country inland. The squeezing in my chest, whenever I'm far from the sea. The knowledge that I am building an ontology of this place out of story, and the obvious (now) fact that it must come from the places I'm most connected to by family, by history.

Donohoe (2014) distinguishes between habituated places and places of significant events: an habituated place is made familiar by repeated visits and a place of a significant event is less familiar but memorable as a result of intensity of experience. It isn't necessarily the large journeys that constitute our stories, I'm realising. In fact, these are the paths in which our memories are likely to be least concentrated. I've been coming at this from the wrong direction. I thought that by retracing a route that Pop followed once, I could recover some of the memories we've lost. I was focusing too heavily on what is lost. I realise now, I can't recover what is lost. Or, more accurately, it doesn't need recovering. What is absent is also present.

Now, my project can zoom in and out, simultaneously. I can see the bigger context, and also understand my place in that context more clearly. Cameron and Miller (2009, p. 3) state that 'A vitally important part of their [Aboriginal Tasmanians] "journey home" involves a re-reading of the orthodox historical account of their removal from ancestral homelands and a re-telling of the history of their land and people.' This is precisely what I am doing. I am making a journey home. When I realise this, I see it's Tarleton that will be the starting point. I'll walk from my family home to the home of Mannalargenna. From our home of the present to our home of the past. By moving from one place to the other, story by story, I'm connecting them. Bieger (2015, p. 17) writes that 'belonging is an existential condition of human being, and narrative mediates and enables that condition: not just be-ing, but longing - desire, yearning. Narrative is the structure that directs this longing.' By walking from one home to another, from my present home to my ancestral home, I am at once honing in (on myself, on the present) and zooming out (on my bigger

family and place, on the past). I am connected to these places by family and by history. This walk is a recognition of the historical forces and narratives that have shaped the experiences of my family and myself, and explicitly engages with them. As such, it begins to have broader implications. Cameron and Miller (2009) discuss similar implications in relation to the Telling Places in Country Project:

While the journey conducted for *Meeting at Bark Hut* inherited much from its colonial counterpart, so too was history transformed by its contemporary reproduction, allowing a distinctly Aboriginal placescape to come into view and a distinctly Aboriginal narrative to come into being...we allowed places to give up their stories in a culturally relevant and culturally appropriate fashion. In achieving this, history, knowledge and culture are all enriched (Cameron and Miller, 2009, p. 8).

My project will also feature dialogue between colonial and Aboriginal narratives. I'm also walking to bring an Aboriginal placescape into view, and an Aboriginal narrative into being. By walking, I'm creating the conditions in which places can tell stories and stories can tell places. By 'being there', we transform the past: we speak to the past and the past speaks to us. Viewed from this perspective, walking on country has the capacity to heal us, country and history. As Rigney (1997, p. 636) observes, Indigenist research 'is research which attempts to support the personal, community, cultural and political struggles of Indigenous Australians to carve out a way of being for ourselves in Australia which there is healing from the past oppressions and cultural freedom in the future.' By placing Aboriginal ways of doing - walking on country -, being - Tasmanian Aboriginal ontology -, and knowing - making sense of the world by mapping out the interrelatedness of story and place -, at the centre of my research, I am attempting precisely this.

This project, I'm beginning to understand, is a sort of mourning. A sort of healing. A way backwards. A way forwards.

People who are familiar to us are closely connected to places we inhabited with those people. Memories are intimately tied both to the places and to the groups that support the memory...The loss of such people frequently threatens the loss of memories and motivates a desire to return to the places we shared in an effort to mourn, to remember, to memorialize those people (Donohoe, 2014, p. 21).

Donohoe (2014, p. xx) goes on to observe that 'the narrativity of identity and mourning cannot be thoroughly explicated without appeal to place.' I can see, now, that I always see things through the lens of what I've lost. I'm romantic. Nostalgic. I dwell on, and in, the past. I've been in mourning for years. It makes absolute sense. To me, individual memory and collective memory aren't so different. I still carry the trauma of collective forgetting, and so individual forgetting cuts into an old grief. I can see, now, that I've been trying to repair collective narrative as a response to the loss of individual narrative. I'm trying to heal from individual forgetting and collective forgetting at the same time. So I return to the places we used to go. I struggle against forgetting.

These memory places function for the most part after the manner of reminders, offering in turn a support for failing memory, a struggle in the way against forgetting, even the silent plea of dead memory. These places 'remain' as inscriptions, monuments, potentially as documents, whereas memories transmitted only along the oral path fly away as do the words themselves (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 41).

I'm struggling against forgetting by making this document, in fact. By recording things. I'm bringing speaking into writing. Writing into speaking. It's the telling of the stories that's my response to loss. Bieger (2015, p. 30) writes that 'As a relentless desire...for something irretrievably lost, narrative activity generates projections that range from nostalgic regress to utopian transgression.' Nostalgia is a powerful force in my life. Loss. Desire. They are all sorts of the same thing. Nostalgia is a sort of desire. Desire is a sort of loss. A nostalgia for the future. To live a life governed by nostalgia is to live a life governed by loss. Here, now, is never as romantic as I imagined, or as

romantic as I'll remember. A desire to return: the past. A desire to leave: the future. It's a future spent chasing a past that recedes further with each return. Because, it turns out, it's impossible to go home. So I experience a sort of solastalgia, too. A 'pain or distress caused by the loss of, or inability to derive, solace connected to the negatively perceived state of one's home environment' (Albrecht, et al., 2007, p. 96). It's homesickness experienced at home (Albrecht, et al., 2007). Loss of story is loss of country. Loss of country is loss of story. Loss of home, loss of self.

Bewitched by modernity's desires, when we turn towards our personal and collective memories, and delve into the memories encompassed within myth, we must for ever flounder within the estrangement of forgetfulness and ultimately of placelessness. The modern human thus struggles to remember its place and ultimately its self (Booth, 2008, p. 302).

In my relentless desire to go back, however, I only go forward. I can't return to what was without creating something new. 'Traditions, memories and places all get overwritten by the present in the transference of the past into the future' (Donohoe, 2014, p. xx). When I arrive, what was is already transformed. It's still there, and it's not. The narrative thread is as it always was and always will be. In a constant state of flux. Nothing is lost. Everything is lost. Places and stories continue to transform, just as we do. There is, was, will be, only now. So, there's no need to go backwards or forwards. The present is the past and the future. They are all happening, at once. Here, now, is the future I romanticised yesterday. Here, now, will be the past I romanticise tomorrow.

'By using a palimpsest to describe the interconnections between place, body, memory and tradition, I am drawing attention to the persistence that never remains the same, the continuity within the change. Like a parchment turned palimpsest upon which memory is written and rewritten, erased and covered over with marks that show through and that can never completely be eliminated, so too our bodies and places cannot completely erase the old. The past of the body and places bleeds through, never disappearing altogether' (Donohoe, 2014, p. xviii).

Donohoe (2014, p. xv) writes that 'Memory too can begin to be understood as its own palimpsest with some elements being covered over for a time only to be revealed again later while other elements may remain silent.' Some things, I'm realising, can go unsaid. Remain silent. To be silent is not to be blank. Silence is not nothing. It's a sort of not saying. Not saying or being silent is a way of enacting agency too. There are silences that echo. Going places, being there, is what allows me to see this. Country is not dormant. Culture is not erased. We are all, still here.

I bring memory to places and places bring memory to me: it's in the being together that place, memory and self interconnect, constantly altering each other. By being together, we reveal ourselves. We go backwards and forwards at the same time. What was forgotten is remembered. What was remembered is forgotten. Nothing is lost. Everything is lost. The dunes shift. And shift again. The past will come and go.

Looking for a way from walking to writing

How and where?

Arriving back in Hobart after the walk on country, I identify two questions facing me: how to tell the story by myself, when storying is not done this way; and how where I am telling the story will impact on its telling.

It doesn't occur to me at the time that telling the stories of walking alone will impact heavily upon my capacity to tell the stories at all. I don't ask myself what I hold of the stories, or how I'll share them without my family interrupting me with their perspectives and elaborations. There's no need. We're together. During eleven days of walking, I spend only one hour walking alone. And yet, most of the telling I've done so far, I've done alone. So far, the way I am coming to terms with this is by telling people stories in response to their enquiries about walking, rather than reciting an established series of stories.

I'm making my way towards an articulation of walking. Inventing new ways of expressing what walking is in response to each person, coming to new understandings along the way. This is how I am making sense of it: verbally. The difficulty that this presents is the subsequent translation of these verbal, situated articulations into written form, which alters the expression of walking once more. Walking transforms itself into spoken words and then into written words. By the time it gets to this point, it is something different.

Moreover, I resist this transformation. I resist the shift from walking all day to sitting still for hours at a time. I resist the shift from outside to inside.



Figure 7 Bakers Beach

Walking at the interface of sky and sea alters my perception. The enormity of the landscape makes it difficult distinguish depth or distance. It inhibits my ability to locate myself. My self evaporates. Thinking is different. Thoughts, with nothing to hinge on, resist any logical order. Outside, thoughts expand to

take up the sky. How can I transport those thoughts inside? Inside, they gather in the corners of the ceiling and slowly deflate and fall to the ground (which is also the ceiling of the floor below).



Figure 8 Morris Miller Library

Where I write about walking impacts on the writing as much as where I walk. The words I write now will inevitably mould themselves to the walls, doors and shelves of the library. The structure of the thesis will become more complex and multi-faceted. Thoughts will no longer have space to float in or expand to fill. Instead of reflecting the sky, thoughts will reflect this page, the parameters of this screen, this desk, the space beneath this ceiling, between these walls. I did not think of how I would transport the stories. Telling stories as we told them, in the places that they happened, is the way storying is done. Writing the stories here is a different sort of telling.

I come across Kwaymullina, Kwaymullina and Butterly's (2013) article 'Living Texts: A perspective on Published sources, Indigenous Research Methodologies and Indigenous Worldviews' and this text both assists me to understand how I can reconcile the difficulties I'm facing and brings to my attention the conceptual inconsistencies arising in my thought processes. Kwaymullina, et al. (2013) first outline three key concepts of Aboriginal thought - everything is alive, everything is related and everything is participatory - and go on to apply these concepts to an understanding of texts:

Pursuant to Aboriginal worldviews, published texts, archival material, images in art, digital mediums, artefacts or otherwise are not lifeless data waiting to be collected, interpreted and reconstituted by perceptions...One of the consequences which flows from the principles that everything is alive, inter-related and participatory is that Aboriginal stories, however expressed or embodied, hold power, spirit and agency. Knowledge can never be truly separated from the diverse Countries that shaped the ancient epistemologies of Aboriginal people, and the many voices of Country speak through the embodiment of story into text, object, symbol or design (Kwaymullina, et al., 2013, p. 5)

Reading this, I see that my notion of the story that arose out of walking is too fixed. In fact, my assumption that story is an entity that can be fixed and transported in the first place disregards the basic philosophical notions that everything is alive and participatory. By fixing it in a time and place I am failing to understand the complexity of relatedness and overlooking the agency that the story itself has. In my account above, I have inadvertently placed myself as subject exerting agency over object (story). The idea that story can transform itself and engage in its own webs of relatedness, in the myriad of forms that it may assume, transforms me from holder of the story to participant in the story. The story also holds me. This understanding aligns more closely with an Aboriginal philosophical perspective. Kwaymullina, et al. (2013, p. 6) go on to observe that 'Researching texts, whether published or archival, creates a relationship between the knowledge and the reader that intersects and finds its embodiment in many realities, laws and relationships.

It is a complex process.’ When I relate to texts, I do so in a dialogue. I imagined previously that the dialogue was with the author - I often underline certain sections of the text and write responses to them, as if I’m having a conversation - but it’s entirely feasible that I am engaging in dialogue with the text itself. After all, when I myself write a text, I think of it as a separate entity to me. It exists in relation to me, but is not identical to me. I may no longer say the same things in a conversation that I wrote down two years ago. In fact, my feelings towards texts I have written are in a constant state of change, and I often find it difficult to recognise my writing as my own, or the person who wrote a text as me. This fixing of process, this writing down and making into an object of dialogue or a flow of ideas has always been something that has concerned me, and it has even prevented me from writing at times. Why the need to fix it at all? Reconceptualising writing and texts from this perspective, however - thinking of them as agents that engage in their own webs of relatedness, and that have a place in the larger web of relatedness that consists of all Beings (including me) - is comforting. In the words of Kwaymullina, et al. (2013, p. 6), ‘Living texts’ connect to Dreaming and Law and influence as much as they are influenced. They are *Story*—in the sense that they are part of the bigger flow of learning that emerges from creation and country.’ Reading over what I wrote when I first sat down to write, I see that the category of self reasserts itself strongly. I was also reinforcing binaries: inside and outside, here and there, now and then. Graham (2009, p. 72) observes that ‘By acknowledging the importance of context, interaction and social construction of meaning, it is assumed that Place has either a direct or indirect bearing on the stories of people, both in the sense of “point of reference” and of impact or influence.’ My project takes this as a basic premise. It also takes as a basic premise that stories are connected to places, and to people, and that it is movement that connects people to stories to places. That walking on country creates the conditions in which story and place bring each other into being. However, I realise now that my concerns relating to how and where to tell the story have arisen out of focusing on the agency of place and self at the expense of the agency of story. Together,

place and story make the way. Being somewhere is all there is to it. Story and place arise, together. Furthermore, from an Aboriginal perspective, past, present and future intertwine to give each other meaning. My previous understanding of writing a text as fixing a process in time, in the past, overlooked the Aboriginal perspective that the past is not fixed in the past, but still exists in relation to the present and the future, each informing, influencing and giving meaning to the other. As Graham (2009) outlines:

For Aboriginal people, Place is epistemologically and ontologically central to notions of action or intent. Not only history but meaning arises out of Place, whether place is geographically located or an event in time. The saying “the past is another country” is, from the viewpoint of Aboriginal logic, pertinent to multi-dimensional time, that is, all events that have occurred and are occurring within any of the range of the senses of time occupy a Place (in time)...Place precedes enquiry. Place defines and supersedes inquiry. Place is a living thing, whether Place is geographically located or located as an event in time (Graham, 2009, p. 75).

When an event becomes a story in its telling, it exists in a place in time when it originally occurred, and in a place where it originally occurred, and also in the place in time in which it is told, as well as in the place in which it is told. These tellings exist in relation to each other and to the places in which they are told, which weaves the story ever tighter, folding meaning back in on itself, increasing relatedness across time and space.

Arriving in Hobart, my first impulse is to invite my family to write the story chapter of the thesis with me. My family has been involved in the entire process of planning and walking the route. They’re telling the stories, too. So why not be involved in the writing, as well? On reflection, though, I decide to return to an old idea: creative works. An idea I’ve been leaving and returning to all my life. An idea I’m come back to, now. This way, I can speak in many voices. Or, those voices can speak me.

Three months before my thesis is due, Dad begins writing poetry. I ask if I can include some of his poems in my thesis. Only if it makes sense, he says. It makes perfect sense, I say. The two unpublished poems that follow, *Black or white* and *We Meet*, are by Danny Gower.

Black or white

All things around me
Pull me left and right
Mind is narrow focused
So am I black or white?

Daylight keeps me centred
My strength is in the light
Darkness is approaching
The Devil's in the night.

I take time to squeeze a breath
Alone amidst my fight
Wander round inside my head
So am I black or white?

One by one my family pass
For ever to the dream
Some so young when passing
Their future's never seen.

Stolen truth of what we know
Is buried down so deep
Down where dreaming only goes
Beneath the line of sleep.

A new day rises with its light
A sense of strength to win my fight
My wander ends with life in sight

I am black and proud and seen the light.

We Meet

They came over the water
From far out of sight
They floated in islands
With trees tall and white.

Our spirits watch over
They float through the waves
Small islands with light skins
Appear through the haze.

The children are gathered
Taken far way from here
Our men stand waiting
Not showing their fear.

They step onto country
On our sacred land
Our people are wary
Draw a line in the sand.

They gather in numbers
Some hold out their hand
A few shiny trinkets
They now own our land.

Our people are hunted
For so many years
Rape, murder, pillage
Bleed many tears.

The leaders all gathered
Under their flag that flies
Agreed to their treaty
So full of lies

Our people are saddened
There are cries from the land
Our leaders are forced over
The line in the sand.

Our leaders are tethered
Hair held in hand
Loaded on small islands
Taken out of their land.

ANALYSIS OF THE WORKS

PLACEMAPS

I have long been fascinated by how people understand themselves using landscape, by the topographies of self we carry within us and by the maps we make with which to navigate these interior terrains. We think in metaphors drawn from place and sometimes those metaphors not only adorn our thought, but actively produce it (Macfarlane, 2012, p. 26).

The purpose of these works is to map how movement creates the conditions in which place and story bring each other into being. These works are storymaps. They arise out of returning to punnilerpanner country, the country that grew me up, last summer. It's the first summer I've spent here since I left. I begin to go back to the places I used to go to, growing up. Returning, I begin to remember. I begin thinking thoughts I haven't thought in years. Or, they begin thinking me. Thoughts I'd forgotten. The places remember me. Being here, we recognise each other by story. As I return to places, memories return to me. I track the abstract as it arises from the concrete, and then returns to it. I map these memories. So, placemaps. In writing these works, I understand the significance of leaving, and the significance of returning.

These works also function as maps of how I make sense of the world, in places, over time. How I make sense of myself. It occurs to me as I'm writing these works that it makes sense to map my thoughts, too. How my mind works to make sense of the world. To walk along my neural pathways as they respond to the pathways I'm walking along.

The rhythm of walking generates a kind of rhythm of thinking, and the passage through a landscape echoes or stimulates the passage through a series of thoughts. This creates an odd consonance between internal and external passage, one that suggests that the mind is also a landscape of sorts and that walking is one way to traverse it (Solnit, 2014, pp. 5-6).

How do my thoughts cohere? How do I organise them, order them, discard them, remember them, make them into a whole picture of the world? How

does the world, in turn, shape this process? And how do I become nothing but this process? I begin to make sketches of my subconscious. These stream of consciousness works will become part of the novella, but they arise out of the writing of the placemaps.

Stories as Maps

In *Earth Mapping: Artists Reshaping Landscape*, Casey (2005) provides an analysis of mapping in the context of visual art and earth works. Much of this analysis resonates with me, and I think much of it applies to my work. Casey (2005) excludes artists such as O'Keefe and Hopper from analysis due to their focus on the narrative of a place, and thereby distinguishes between stories and maps. By focusing on mapping as a sort of movement, Casey (2005) overlooks the fact that storytelling is also a sort of mapping. Place, story and movement bring each other into being. I think that much of what Casey (2005) writes about art can be expanded upon in relation to story, and its resonance with my work is an example of this. My stories map: they are ways of getting to be somewhere. Earth maps are not maps that function as a second order reality to the earth's primary reality: the maps are part of the earth, and therefore have primary reality themselves (Casey, 2005). By going somewhere, something comes to me, and I transform it into something else. I've been to the places in the placemaps. I bring those places to me, in the writing itself. The prose works are arranged in relation to each other, and so become a map. Each story belongs to a particular place, and each story is a way of going to that place. Those lines, they're topographic lines. They are the way there. Telling these stories, I go there. Telling these stories, those places come to me. I bring them to me. I take you to them. These works are the shape of belonging, of being in a place. They are the experience of it, articulated. Earth works are maps that are not just looked at but felt (Casey, 2005). By telling those stories again and again, I keep returning to those places, and they keep returning to me.

Interrelatedness of ontology and methodology

If place is indeed taken to be a notion central to the understanding of human subjectivity, or to the possibility of thought, experience or action, then the structure of place itself, and the manner in which that structure is delineated, should perhaps also be a guide to the manner in which any inquiry into subjectivity ought also to proceed (Malpas, 1998, p. 37).

Process is a way of being. There's an interconnection of ontology and methodology in my work: I am working at the interface of the two, allowing them to constitute each other rather than creating a methodology out of an ontology. Path/ways constitute our cosmologies. By creating, following, tracing, and retracing pathways I continue to create the conditions in which story and place bring each other into being. I philosophise. I dream. I exist. A path/way is a story. Walking is a sort of storytelling. Storytelling is a sort of walking. Learning to follow a path/way is learning to tell a story, and vice versa. It takes looking, listening. To recognise the path of least resistance. To find the way that flows. To find the way that people have gone before. To find the river. Process is the end, not the means. There is no finishing things. Everything's a work in progress. Coming home, I find myself going back to the places I know. The places I've always gone. I leave, and now I'm come back. And this, the river, is the whole point. The coming home. The coming back to myself. We leave to return. Return to leave.

The Body

The body, the physical, is very significant in my work. I'm tactile, so I always need to touch things to understand them. To make abstract concepts into concrete forms.

The body is how we make a place our own and the central place of our embodiment is our home. It is no surprise, then, that we think of home in terms of self-identity. It is important to our sense of ourselves and to others' sense of

us...Both body and place affect identity through their mutual material grounding of self (Donohoe, 2014, p. 7).

A return home is a return to the self. Knowing where home is, is knowing who you are. Home is what orients us in the world. It's where we leave and come back to. According to Steinbock (1995, p. 164), 'we actually carry with us the structure of our terrain in the structure of our lived-bodies, in our typical comportment and in our practices.' We bring our homes with us. The landscapes that grew us up. Donohoe (2014, p. 3) observes that 'many places are embodied in such a way that we carry them with us, and they inform our constitution of the world.' We understand everything else in relation to home. Casey (2005) writes that mapping is a 'going through', a 'going over' and a 'getting into'. I agree. Walking on country is the going through and returning is the going over. The becoming familiar. This tactile, bodily engagement with country is what allows country to become visible as country. When we are in country, we don't look at it but see into it (Casey, 2005). And it, in turn, sees into us. By dissolving the boundaries between country and self, we understand ourselves as country, as one of the beings that constitutes country. 'Mapping the land...means showing how it feels and looks to be on or in the land, being part of it, groping through it' (Casey, 2005, p. xvi). Through us, in our being here, country presents itself to us. The body is essential to this process, and it is a process of experiencing the world as a body, through our body, that we become aware of how intimately our bodies relate to each other and the body of the world (Casey, 2005). By focusing on particular places and regions, we are able to engage with them with a level of intensity which makes this sort of mapping particularly powerful: it's a way of getting into a place, a way of being there and it contains the sense of the place in the map (Casey, 2005). It's a singing up country. These placemaps chart the process of how we come to belong somewhere. These storymaps create a sense of belonging.

Agency of place

We are compelled to consider the physicality of place not only as a distinctive thing to be remembered, a thing that is shaped by remembering and forgetting, but as itself an active and decisive intersubjective memory. Considered as such, we recognize the agency of place (as memory) within the memory of self—personal, collective and mythical. The physicality of place not only has mnemonic powers, and is not only open to manipulation in the pursuit of remembrances, but is also both an embodiment of memory and embodiment within memory (Booth, 2008, p. 303).

Donohoe (2014, p. xi) observes that ‘Place is not just a setting, but is a concrete, material framework for and participant in human lives.’ Without place, there is no being. Place is a ‘material condition for the possibility of experience’ (Donohoe, 2014, p. xvi). The experience of place is narrative and the experience of narrative is place-bound: ‘We understand a particular space through being able to grasp the sorts of ‘narratives of action’ that are possible within that space; we understand a place and a landscape through the historical and personal narratives that are marked out within it’ (Malpas, 1999, p. 186). Stories arise out of being in places. Without place, there is no story. There is, therefore, narrative agency in place (Malpas, 1999). Story, too, has agency. Story/voice is process/method/the way. Place and story are the way/method. Telling process as it is happening emphasises the agency of place and story. Together, place and story make the way. Dreamings move through places and in doing so create story. These are the ways we still follow. We don’t shape the landscape in the same way - for example, creating mountains and rivers as we go - but we do shape it as we move through it and it, in turn, shapes us. We co-create each other.

Time

We are, all of us, always here. The past, even time itself, can be seen as taking on an embodied, spatialised form in features of the surrounding

environment: place where 'time has taken there the form of space' (Malpas, 1999, p. 180). This is what Ceremony does: it transforms time into space. By moving, we transform abstract concepts into concrete forms. The story becomes the landscape. The landscape becomes the story. Memories, the past, time, become concrete. Placing my hand on a petroglyph, I place it on my grandfather's chest. This way, we fold time and place in on each other. Donohoe (2014, p. xi) observes that 'going to the gravesites of ancestors, sometimes many generations past, provides more than simply a mnemonic trigger. These places are imbued with the memory and the aura of such places connects us to the past, and to traditions, making them present to us.' Being somewhere is how story and place arise, together. Returning somewhere folds time in on itself, making the past present. We fold time in on itself. All beings are here, now.

Materials

The typewriter is an important aspect of the writing process. The interplay of typewriter and computer is significant, too. It's very difficult to capture the precise quality of the typewriter on a computer. They are so fundamentally different. Typewriters have an immediacy about them. A presence. They fully inhabit where they are. Computers are subtle. Precise. Polished. I communicate differently, on a typewriter. It's raw. Direct. Uninhibited. There's no going back, and so I don't. Regardless of whether the letters appear or not. I carry on, and do my best to decipher what's being said. What I write on the computer simply isn't indecipherable, and I don't know how to make it so. Sometimes, it's the spaces that say things best. The silences. The unfinished sentence. I accept that I'll never be able to understand everything. That I'm fallible. I give us room to make sense of things in our own way. I know that here, now, is all there is.

The speed at which I write impacts on the writing. I think faster than I write. I write faster on the computer than by hand. I write slowest on a typewriter. So,

by slowing down my thoughts, the typewriter impacts on the way I express myself. That way, the means by which I write - the tools, the objects - also contribute to the work. To my voice. Everything contributes.

The linearity of the typewriter also reflects the linearity of the walk from punnilerpanner country to tebrakunna country. We simply have to keep going. This creates tension. Questions. End versus means. Product versus process. Breadth of connection versus depth of connection over time. Inhabit contains the word habit. A deep sense of place arises from habits in and by that place. This is how we inhabit. Working on the typewriter, I remember the inevitability of putting one foot down after the next. Of putting one letter down after the next. And yet, the placemap itself isn't linear. The stories are selected and arranged in relation to each other because of what they mean. The placemaps don't need to respond to economic necessities. Food. Water. A place to sleep. Vehicular access to the coast. Working on the typewriter, I can go backwards as well as forwards.

The original placemaps are typed onto paper that comes from Creative Paper in Burnie. It's local, recycled and it comes from a factory in a port town. Abstract concepts become concrete. I can touch the layers of my thoughts.

POETIC WORKS

Lines

One aspect of the history of walking is the history of thinking made concrete - for the motions of the mind cannot be traced, but those of the feet can (Solnit, 2014, p. 6).

I'm interested in words as lines. If sounds can have meaning outside of the structures of language, why not lines? My work is all about lines. Coastlines, topographical lines, rivers, railways, roads, pathways. All lines.

My work is also all about making the abstract concrete. I'm expressing abstractions, now. Transforming them into physical form, now. These lines are the map. These words are the ways.

In focusing on form as much as content, I feel my work shifting more and more towards the physical. The spatial. More and more, I see maps when I see words. I see the lines. The symbols. The shapes. The images.

One evening, therefore, before I fell asleep, I perceived, so clearly articulated that it was impossible to change a word, but nonetheless removed from the sound of any voice, a rather strange phrase which came to me without any apparent relationship to the events in which, my consciousness agrees, I was then involved, a phrase which seemed to me insistent, a phrase, if I may be so bold, *which was knocking at the window*. I took cursory note of it and prepared to move on when its organic character caught my attention. Actually, this phrase astonished me: unfortunately I cannot remember it exactly, but it was something like: "There is a man cut in two by the window," but there could be no question of ambiguity, accompanied as it was by the faint visual image* (*Were I a painter, this visual depiction would doubtless have become more important for me than the other. It was most certainly my previous predispositions which decided the matter. Since that day, I have had occasion to concentrate my attention voluntarily on similar apparitions, and I know they are fully as clear as auditory phenomena. With a pencil and white sheet of paper to hand, I could easily trace

their outlines. Here again it is not a matter of drawing, but *simply of tracing*. I could thus depict a tree, a wave, a musical instrument, all manner of things of which I am presently incapable of providing even the roughest sketch. I would plunge into it, convinced that I would find my way again, in a maze of lines which at first glance would seem to be going nowhere. And, upon opening my eyes, I would get the very strong impression of something "never seen." The proof of what I am saying has been provided many times by Robert Desnos: to be convinced, one has only to leaf through the pages of issue number 36 of *Feuilles libres* which contains several of his drawings (*Romeo and Juliet*, *A Man Died This Morning*, etc.) which were taken by this magazine as the drawings of a madman and published as such.) of a man walking cut half way up by a window perpendicular to the axis of his body. Beyond the slightest shadow of a doubt, what I saw was the simple reconstruction in space of a man leaning out a window. But this window having shifted with the man, I realized that I was dealing with an image of a fairly rare sort, and all I could think of was to incorporate it into my material for poetic construction. No sooner had I granted it this capacity than it was in fact succeeded by a whole series of phrases, with only brief pauses between them, which surprised me only slightly less and left me with the impression of their being so gratuitous that the control I had then exercised upon myself seemed to me illusory and all I could think of was putting an end to the interminable quarrel raging within me (Breton, 1972, pp. 21-22).

This excerpt from the first Surrealist Manifesto (1924) outlines the shift from poetry to visual art that I observe in my preoccupation with lines. Or, perhaps it's a blurring of art into poetry. I see what I write. And so, my poetry inevitably consists of images. Casey (2005) states that the modern poet's task is to make the visible, invisible and the modern artist's is to make the invisible, visible. My poetry and prose works, however, are concerned with making the invisible, visible. Poetry can move too. Prose can chart the bodily experience of a place and give it form. Topographical maps are not the only sort of lines that map. These lines do too. The boundaries between poetry and cartography blur.

Sound

My writing is sparse, like the country that grew me up. Plenty of space between the words. Plenty that goes unsaid. The spaces are as important as the words. The silences as important as speech.

I had begun to cherish words excessively for the space they allow around them, for their tangencies with countless other words that I did not utter (Breton, 1972, p. 20).

I'm interested in words as sounds. I want to see if I can write the river down. The shape of the hills. I want to see if I can map the rhythms of the landscape into the cadence of my words.

Dada gives me some ideas on how I might do this. Sound poems, like Kurt Schwitters' 1932 *Sonate In Urlauten (Sonata in Elemental Sounds)*, abolish the interplay of sound and meaning by dissecting words into individual phonetic syllables and reassembling them into a sound picture (Elger, 2004). Text material becomes music-like sound-picture verse compositions through repetition and rhythm, which empties language of meaning, thereby stripping it of its function (Elger, 2004). It focuses on one aspect of the physical form of language: sound waves. Spoken language. Simultaneous poems also utilise sound to break down meaning. By reading separate texts simultaneously on stage, performers recreate and emphasise the constant background noise in modern society and warfare and its consequent meaninglessness (Elger, 2004). In this way, the sound itself represents something else. By stripping meaning from the words, Dada gives meaning to sound waves themselves. Sounds that say outside of language. Meaning outside of language. Different ways of expressing meaning. The burbling of rivers. The wind. The trill of birds. Sounds as intrinsic to themselves.

Layering

Layering plays a significant role in my work. By layering sounds other than those that arise in and of me, over the work, I can situate it. By layering different versions of the same poem over each other, I can express the rise and fall of the river over time. The movement of the lines over time. Layering is a sort of return.

Donohoe (2014) speaks of places as palimpsests, which relates to my creative works:

Places serve not as the borders or containers of memory, but as a palimpsest, a Medieval manuscript in which various writings are visible beneath and through the newer writing upon a linen parchment. The image of the palimpsest works not just for places of memory but for memory itself. Places write themselves upon memory just as memory writes itself upon place (Donohoe, 2014, p. xi).

I'm transcribing the process of returning to the same places again and again. Each time, each place and I approach each other anew, which creates another layer of meaning. With each return, the layers of meaning relate to each other differently: they shift, and reassemble. We are always approaching. Donohoe (2014, p. xvi) writes that 'Collective memory changes with place as we reinterpret, reimagine, and recollect the images of the past.' We are always responsive, shifting, past, present, future.

SEAWEED SERIES

rhodymenia polymorpha

This series arose out of the experience of compiling a database of marine algae species. I became absorbed by the process of bringing the seaweed into being by first naming it and then by categorising it. The repetitive act of collating these species distanced me from the actual algae: after a while, it all became meaningless.

I recognise the value of bringing something into being by naming it. To be able to exist in a system of interrelatedness, each of us needs to be situated. It's easier to situate ourselves when we can situate other beings in relation to each other. When we know our names.

However, naming is a powerful act, and the language that we use is powerful, too. Language is political. Different names give different identities. To name something is to know it. To categorise something is to place it in a hierarchy. There is a power dynamic at play, here.

Magritte's word-paintings recognise this, and call into question the assumption that we take possession of an object when we call it by its name by naming objects incorrectly (Klingsohr-Leroy, 2004). This technique creates a sense of insecurity, which highlights the significance of knowing what things are called to the ways in which we grasp, order and control the world (Klingsohr-Leroy, 2004). By engaging in a similar process, I am working to free seaweeds from our possession. They belong to themselves. They have inherent value. They are unfolding.

I am re-presenting images of Tasmanian seaweeds as catalogued by William Henry Harvey in the mid 1800s. The time and place in which this cataloguing takes place is significant. Massey (2005) outlines the reason for this:

Conceiving of space as in the voyages of discovery, as something to be crossed and maybe conquered, has particular ramifications. Implicitly, it equates space with the land and sea, with the earth which stretches out around us. It also makes space seem like a surface; continuous and given...So easily this way of imagining space can lead us to conceive of other places, people, cultures simply as phenomena 'on' this surface. It is not an innocent manoeuvre, for by this means they are deprived of histories (Massey, 2005, p. 4).

This, I think, is the context within which the cataloguing took place. Cataloguing beings into one system of names can disregard, whether deliberately or by accident, the complex interrelatedness that constitutes being. It can erase other names. Other systems. So, I am re-making these images. Decolonising them. I am positioned in relation to my past and my future, my family's past and future, this nation's past and future. I don't exist outside of an historical context. Yet, simultaneously, I do. Simultaneously, I'm here, now, being. Nameless. I don't always want to speak in relation to historical context and power dynamics. Sometimes I want to speak directly to the seaweed, and I do. Sometimes I want to speak as seaweed, and I do.

Beings have many names. Simultaneously, we can't be contained in a name, or a category. By repeating one name until it becomes meaningless, I open up the possibility of other names. Of other ways of relating.

Creating these poems takes time. Lots of it. Patience, too. It also requires repetition. The process of working to bring the linearity of the typewriter into dialogue with the complexity of the image can be frustrating. Structural limitations mean that often I don't have the range of movement required to represent the images accurately. This, however, is part of the intention. The images simply don't fit into words exactly. Just as the seaweeds don't fit into images or words, exactly. Limitations also give freedom. I make mistakes, too, in being here, now and these become part of the poem. The seaweeds and I dissolve into each other and into the image. Breton (Klingsohr-Leroy, 2004, p. 21) observes that 'the uninterrupted transformation of the object under the

paranoiac's scrutiny permits him to regard the very images of the external world as unstable and transitory, if not as suspect, and it is, disturbingly, in his power to impose the reality of his impression on others.' This is precisely what happens in the process of making these poemimages.

SITUATED POEMS

assemblage two

I'm becoming preoccupied with being as poetry. With objects as poetry. With situating poetry. With the physical experience of poetry. With the articulation of here, now. I'm reading Hans Arp, who speaks of 'concretion' - the process of making art that is a natural occurrence as opposed to a human act -, works that are still in the process of taking shape and series of 'configurations' (Klingsohr-Leroy, 2004). I'm reading Brassai, who speaks of the uncertainty of whether something is a natural act or a human act, and the transformation of a natural phenomenon into an image encapsulating surrealist ideas of the irrational, fortuitous and uncontrolled: 'involuntary sculptures' (Klingsohr-Leroy, 2004). Arp, Tzara and Serner speak of automatic poems, poems that resemble nature (Elger, 2004). Breton (Klingsohr-Leroy, 2004, p. 19) speaks of the mystical qualities of inanimate objects, 'the revelation of the remarkable symbolic life of quite ordinary, mundane objects'. Walking along the beach, I can't say if the grass woven around the fallen tree is made by someone or not. Then, I stumble upon a wooden structure in the dunes - a sort of nest - and it's the same thing all over again. At some point, I stop being able to distinguish between a group of objects and a poem. Between a place and a poem. Between you and a poem. Between me and a poem.

I begin recording all sorts of things, in all sorts of ways. Taking photographs of assemblages of objects where it's unclear if they're found or made. Assembling objects myself. Making rubbings, etchings and drawings. I begin writing poetry outside of the page and the screen. I collect word trails: images of the notes that people write in books, photos of toilet doors, photos of the words that surround us, people's library slips, and my own. I recover the word trails I leave behind. I record my running trails.

We, who have made no effort whatsoever to filter, who in our works have made ourselves into simple receptacles of so many echoes, modest *recording instruments* who are not mesmerized by the drawings we are making...we render

with integrity the "talent" which has been lent to us. You might as well speak of the talent of this platinum ruler, this mirror, this door, and of the sky (Breton, 1972, pp. 27-28).

Situated poems arise out of this way of being. I write a description of the process by which they arise.

poetry ; being

these poems are immediate, felt. poetry as being ; being as poetry.

these poems belong somewhere.

these poems are you, being.

these poems are maps. each poem is a series of directions to a particular place. here. a particular time. now. how to arrange your body into a poem.

these directions create the conditions in which poetry arises out of an assemblage of beings. of bodies. of movements.

sound recordings accompany each poem. to locate these poems more precisely.

these poems function beyond the image. beyond the symbolic. beyond words, beyond sounds, even. they simply are. it simply is.

these poems are intermediaries. one hand extending to grasp another.

these poems are irreducible. irretrievable. irreproducible. they are transient. they have no permanent form. they can only be approached.

these poems do not make an effort to create an image, concrete or metaphorical. to create a shape. to create a sound. only to articulate what is.

being is not inarticulate. these poems are an articulation of being. an approach. you are.

being ; poetry

NOVELLA

The novella is a sort of nonfiction, but it's also a sort of fiction. It's a mixture of things I remember that no one else does, things everyone else remembers that I don't, dreams, and illusions. It's the past and the future, the future made into the past, the past made into the future. It's all accurate.

As Basso (1996, p. 5) observes, 'place-making involves multiple acts of remembering and imagining which inform each other in complex ways.' I write the way I do because it's how I make sense of things. It's a sort of clutter of memory and dreams that I sort through. A series of contradictory conclusions that each belong to a particular time and place.

All stories belong somewhere. Memories belong to places. Places belong to memories. As I arrange stories in relation to each other, a map arises. A record of movement from place to place. Everywhere contributes. The places I do the writing, too. Each part constitutes the whole. It's difficult to say where it begins. It's easier to see from afar. In time, in place. It begins somewhere. The idea for this novella arises in Uki. It's unrecognisable, now. So I return, to Uki finish it. The ending becomes the beginning. We recognise each other.

Dream and Memory

I have always been amazed at the way an ordinary observer lends so much more credence and attaches so much more importance to waking events than to those occurring in dreams (Breton, 1972, p. 11).

I've not come across many movements that so closely approach my own way of experiencing and making sense of things the way Surrealism does. I identify with the shift of emphasis from the rational to the subconscious, dreams, and the imagination as an artistic and literary methodology, and with the attempt to redefine the image and its function by turning the act of seeing turns inwards to the subconscious (Klingsohr-Leroy, 2004). So much of the

time, I can't distinguish between dreams and memories. Often, the events of my dreams make more sense than the events in my waking life. Dreaming, by night and by day, is how I make sense of things.

To me, there's no clear boundary between dreams and memories, fiction and reality, past and future. 'Is he certain that this castle into which I cordially invite him is an image? What if this castle really existed! My guests are there to prove it does; their whim is the luminous road that leads to it. We really live by our fantasies when we *give free reign to them*' (Breton, 1972, pp. 17-18).

Movement

The places in which human lives are enmeshed are places constituted through 'juxtaposition' and 'displacement' through activity and movement. Not only then, do the places and spaces of human dwelling change and disintegrate, but those places and spaces are themselves disclosed only through processes that bring change and alteration in their wake – indeed, such places and spaces are disclosed only in relation to movement, agency and, one might say, change (Malpas, 1999, p. 191).

My work is about movement. It moves. It leaves and returns. Walking is not the same as sitting still. Or walking in the same places again and again. Or revisiting the same places. My understanding goes along transforming. I begin to see that constant movement infringes upon our capacity to create a sense of belonging in a place, and to make sense of that place. Connection needs to happen over time. Returning is important.

Leaving is necessary, too. By leaving, I can see home and return to it. For me, mobility helps us to identify ourselves: by bringing what home is to light, it brings our selves to light. When our behaviour is no longer normalised, we begin to understand the possibility of multiple perspectives. We see others. We see ourselves. As Donohoe (2014, p. 14) writes, 'experiences of alienworlds make the homeworld more explicit to us in its familiarity.'

Homeworld in its normality can be so close to us as to be unrecognizable until drawn into relief by an alienworld experience.'

I begin thinking that repetition is necessary to creating a sense of meaning in place. And time in place. I follow in the footsteps of my family, going to the places they went, over and over. Time folds in on itself. We repeat ourselves. We remember. We can go somewhere physically, or in story, repeatedly.

My understanding, though, goes on transforming, and I begin to wonder if repetition is possible at all. Paul Ricoeur (2004, p. 27) writes that 'returning to, retaking, recovering what had earlier been seen, experienced or learned, hence signifies, in a sense, repetition.' I realise that what I really mean by repetition is returning. That what I mean by returning is continuing to approach the same places and people, over and over again. My work focuses on returning because it gives particular value to the multiple layering of memory in place. In returning to a place, we create the conditions in which memory can return to us.

Casey (2005) outlines four ways to map: mapping of, mapping for, mapping with/in, and mapping out. Mapping of is cartography (where 'there' is), mapping for is orientation (how to get 'there'), mapping with/in is experiential (how it feels to be 'there') and mapping out re-presents the landscape in a way that moves others in the same way I was moved by being in a particular place (Casey, 2005). So, I'm doing the last two. The last is particularly interesting in terms of the return, or the relation of inside to outside, or the relation of periphery to centre. It's as if, in the being here, now, my self dissolves. Inside. In the centre. It's precisely the movement from periphery to centre, and the return to the periphery, that enables articulation. This being outside. This return to my self. This is how - or, where - the process of re-presenting a place, takes place. Ricoeur (2004, p. 24) writes of marks of habit, and the way habits make the past, present: 'what is acquired is incorporated into the living present, unmarked, unremarked as past.' Seamon (2002) also

writes of how the habitual ways we engage with the world underline the way place is written on the body. Returning is a retracing of routes. An arriving and a coming back. A departure and a going back. We always create meaning in relation to somebeing else. Being in a place and being away from it are essential to creating a sense of a place. We are always arriving. And departing. We are in the middle of the two. In between. There in the past and there in the future, here, now.

Self

In my work, the I shifts. It's always shifting because I'm always shifting, becoming someone or somewhere, moving from I to you and back again. Sometimes I'm I and sometimes I'm you, just as we all are, all of the time. Sometimes when I'm I, I'm actually someone else. This is how I experience the world, as an assemblage of shifting perspectives. Meaning is always negotiated, contested. In one experience there are multitudes of experiences. In multitudes of events there is one event. You and I are the same, after all. We're also different. I'm trying to find a way of writing that reflects the way I make sense of things. A way that embodies multiple perspectives, simultaneously. A way that emphasises significant events and maps them into a whole. A way that weaves people and places into myself. I'm breaking down the notion of the separate self. I'm breaking down linear narratives. I'm speaking in many voices. Simultaneously, this is my voice.

If we take the turn to place seriously, then what emerges is the possibility of thinking of subjectivity - and of thought and experience - as essentially a function of place or locale. Thus we should not think of the relation between human beings and their world as a relation in which human beings impose meaning onto an otherwise objective, physical structure. Understanding the possibility of human being - or meaning - is just a matter of understanding how place as such is possible. Understanding human being and understanding place are one and the same (Malpas, 1998, p. 36).

By returning to the places that are significant to me and to my family, I return to my self. In the mountains and the rivers, I recognise myself. Being there, I think different thoughts. Thoughts that belong there, to the river. When I speak by the river, I speak in the river's voice. By being somewhere, I'm altered. I, in turn, alter. Donohoe (2014) notes that:

Place is the foundation of subjectivity in the sense that the subject is always placed, is always in the world, and its being in the world is part of the very structure of subjectivity. The subject, however, is at the same time always with others in the world, so place is always intersubjective. Place is part of the structure of intersubjectivity (Donohoe, 2014, p. xiv).

We are all co-creating meaning, and so I always write for someone, in someplace.

The search for a sense of self-identity that is often presented in terms of a search for place, is invariably a search that is both spatial and temporal – as the recovery of time is achieved through the recovery of place, the search for place is also a search for time (Malpas, 1999, p. 178).

This is precisely what I'm doing. Attempting to perform Ceremony. Attempting to fold time in on itself by storytelling. It's a search for the past, in the present. It's an attempt to bring the past into the present, to give the present meaning, and to increase relatedness over time, through time. Basso (1996, p. 6) observes that 'place-making is a way of constructing history itself.' In the search for the past, I bring it into the present. History makes itself.

There are a whole lot of power structures that go unnoticed in storytelling, though. I don't want people making the mistake of thinking I'm the only one this story belongs to, the only one who belongs to this story. That I'm the only one who can tell it, the only one who does tell it. That's an illusion. It's being told now, as we speak. You're telling it, too. We are all, necessarily, participating. All of the time. Everywhere. We all have our own trajectories: history is not inevitable (Massey, 2005). There are multiple narratives.

Articulating in language

Words come from country, from being on country. Through me. I simply interpret. Or try to. What I'm trying to articulate requires a new way of speaking. A new language. A way of using words that does not yet exist within the words and structures of this language. A meeting of old ways and new ways. I'm trying to speak about concepts that have no scaffolding in the conceptual frameworks available in this language. I grapple. I'm creating the language as I speak it, write it. I articulate what the sky says. Even the notion of I is problematic. How can I say something when there is no I and there is no saying. It says. Country speaks itself into being. These words do not belong to me. I belong to them.

I'm estranged, in a constant state of return. I'm grappling to bring concepts into a linguistic framework that does not accommodate them. Each language is a philosophy in itself. Moreover, I'm trying to translate it into a language that has attempted to colonise these places, me. So, simultaneously, I deconstruct and reconstruct the words. I watch for the signs of colonisation in me. Sometimes I see them, sometimes I don't. But observing country helps me to see. Because country sees. So, writing is also a way of decolonising.

I wonder more and more how it is that country speaks. Speaks itself. Of what it calls itself, if it calls itself anything. I wonder at its multitudes of expression. I listen to the wind.

Process as ceremony

Writing is ceremony, for me. People paint their story, over and over, into the paintings. It's not the finished painting that's the point - it's the act of painting itself. Over and over. I create patterns of meaning, but, like mandalas, they are swept away and then arranged once more. There's nothing but this.

This is what writing is to me. The act. And I'm telling my story over and over too. Like a painting, when you look at my words you can't see the story. It's inside the words, just like it's inside the paint. The image is symbolic. My poetry and prose are symbolic too. The letters and the words are the symbols. The story is inside them. Inside me. You won't ever quite get there just by reading. And I'll never quite get into the words.

It's beyond words, what I'm saying. Which is why I keep saying it again and again. Because the words in themselves are multiple traverses. It's very few things that I'm actually trying to say. It's just that I approach them over and over. Near and far.

Writing, I remember. Remembering, I write. I make meaning in relation to places, and to people, and I map this meaning in words. I keep forgetting, too. And remembering. So I keep returning over and over to the same story. The story that is me. Just as I return again and again to the same places. The places that are me.

I always write to someone, for someone. I'm always somewhere in between where I am and where someone else is. This is my way. This is where I'm most at home.

Margin, periphery, centre. This is a realigning. It works as a metaphor for a shift from one philosophical perspective to another: from an understanding of self as separate from nature and at the centre of being to an understanding of self as nature, which brings place from the periphery to the centre. Self, being, can only arise out of place. Out of home. We must leave a place to be able to see it. Home is the simultaneous loss of and return to the self.

Conclusion

There is no conclusion to this, the way I see it. No way of finishing things. Endings are beginnings. Beginnings are endings. I go learning as I go along. It turns out everything's always moving. Beings. Stories. Places. Everything returns to where it comes from. Everywhere returns to us. Always.

This project is a way of locating myself. It charts the disintegration of the romantic idea that home is a solid, enduring place I can go back to, and the struggle to let go of this idea and embrace that change is the only constant. It's a sort of mourning. A sort of healing. A way of understanding that place always shifts. That everything shifts. It's a way of accepting this and continuing to weave place into memory and identity to enable resilience of place, memory and self.

Change brings us pain and suffering but it also restores us to ourselves. Loss gives us grief. Grief gives us resilience. Resilience gives us ourselves. I belong to history, but history also belongs to me. I'm the past, but I'm also the future. I belong here, now. We belong to ourselves, to the places and the people we keep returning to. To the places and people who keep returning to us. This is what home is. This is what it is to belong.

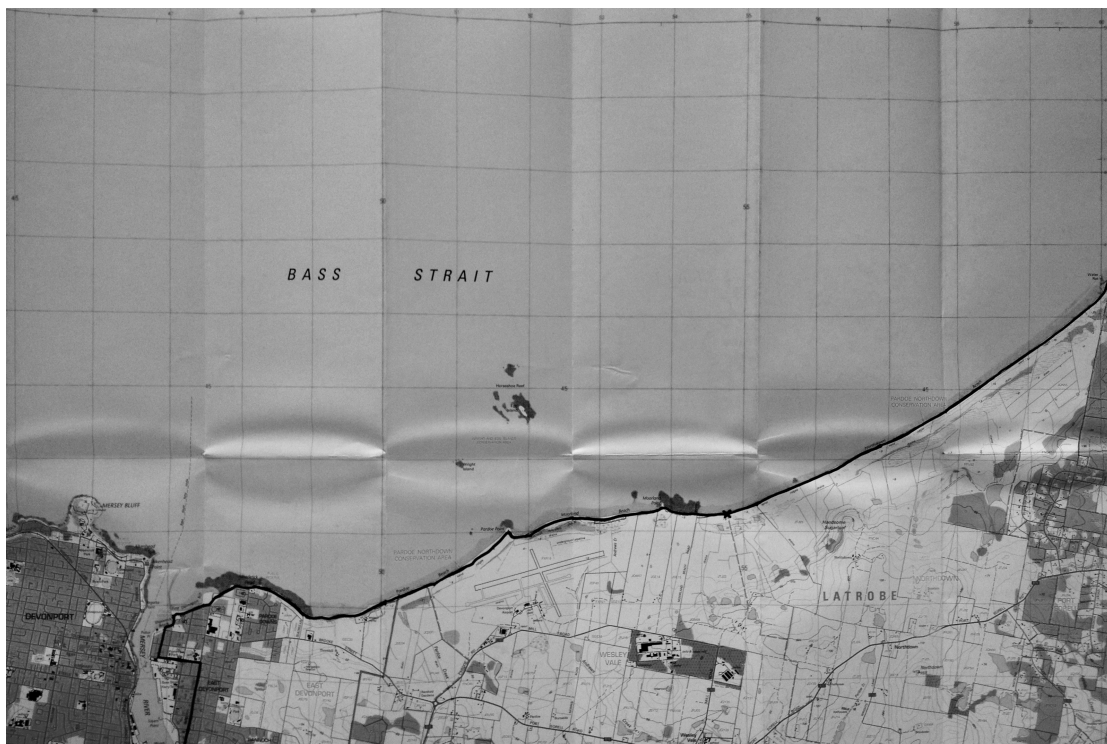
Bieger (2015, p. 34) writes that 'there is, indeed, no place like home unless we build it, word by word, sentence by sentence, storyline by storyline.

And so, I begin, again. I've got a voice. I've got maps. I've got stories. They're not static. These words are disintegrating, even as I write them. But they all, always, bring me back to myself. And so, I speak. I map. I write. There's nothing but this. Here, being home, I begin.

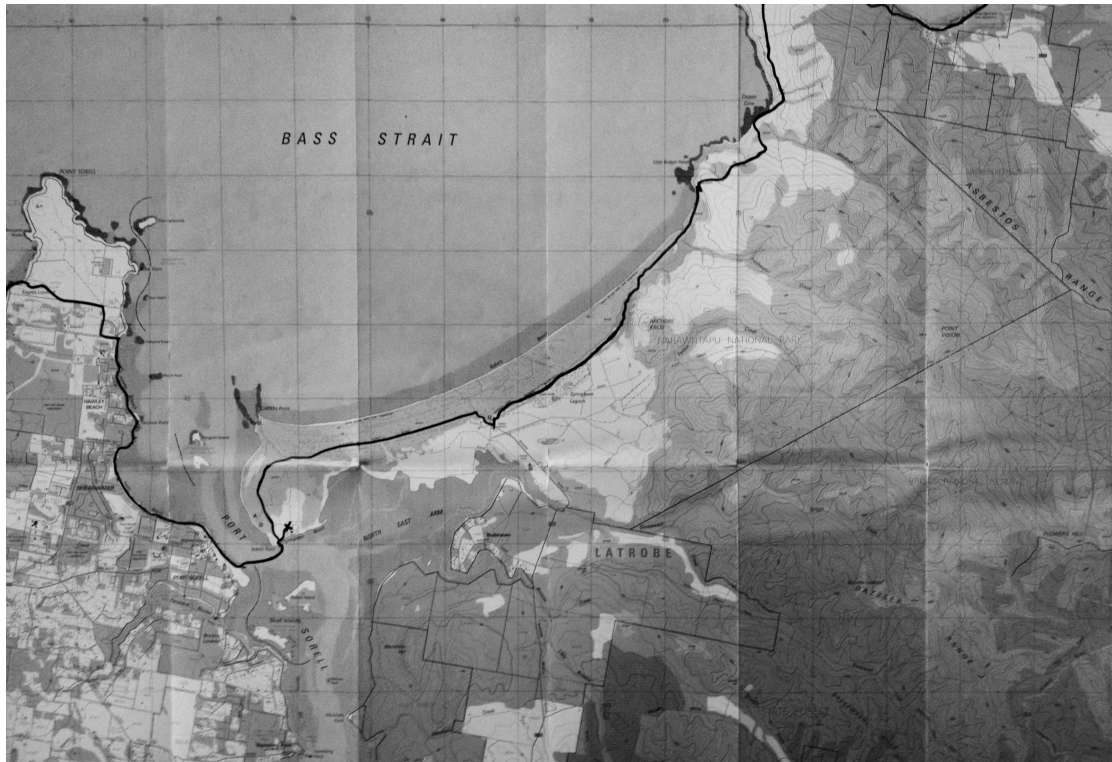
Appendix 1



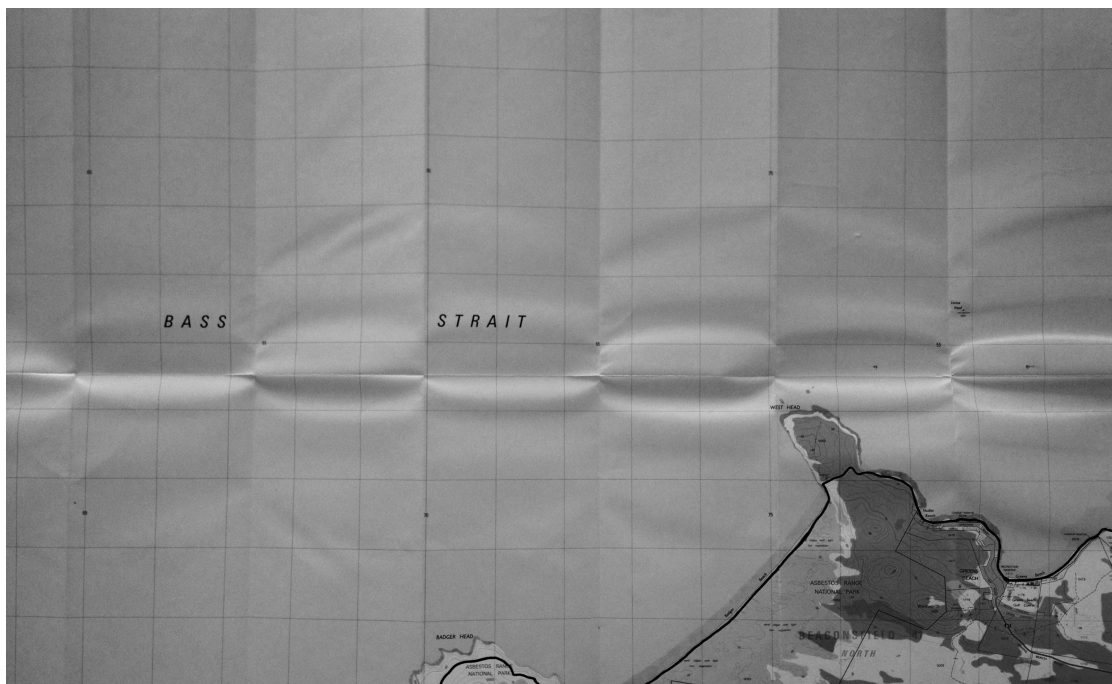
Map 1 Tracing the route on Tasmania 1:25 000 Series Map 4443 Latrobe



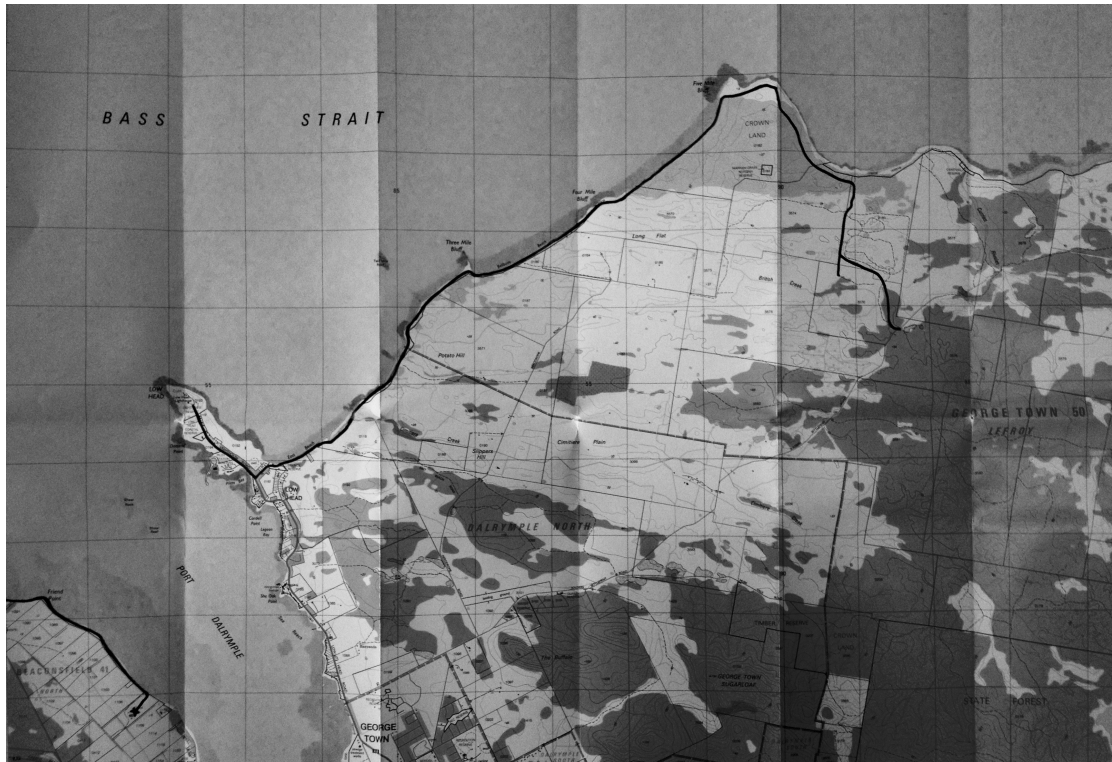
Map 2 Tracing the route on Tasmania 1:25 000 Series Map 4444 Devonport



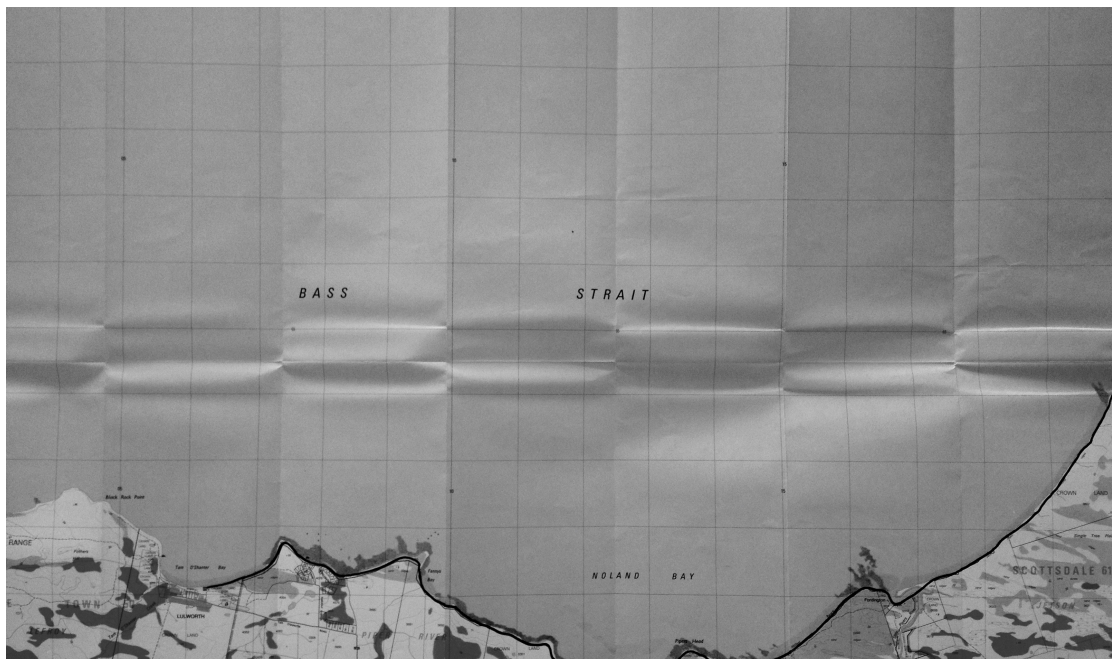
Map 3 Tracing the route on Tasmania 1:25 000 Series Map 4644 Port Sorell



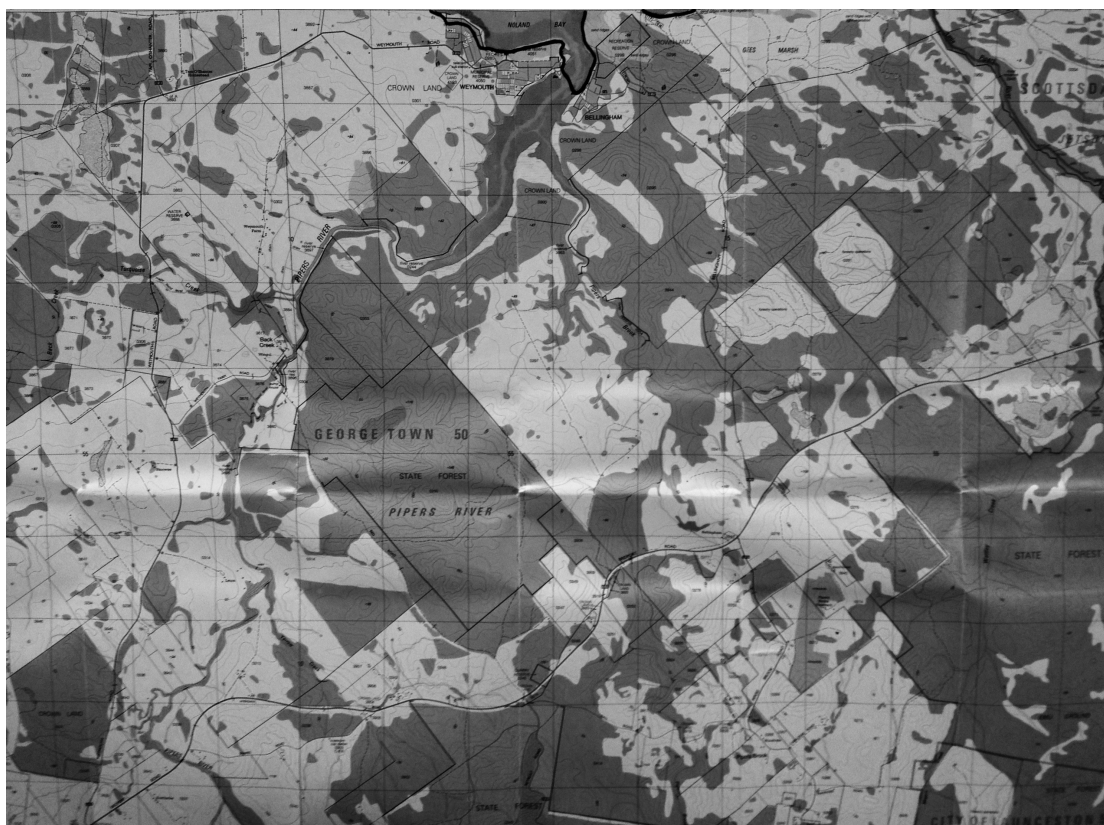
Map 4 Tracing the route on Tasmania 1:25 000 Series Map 4645 Greens Beach



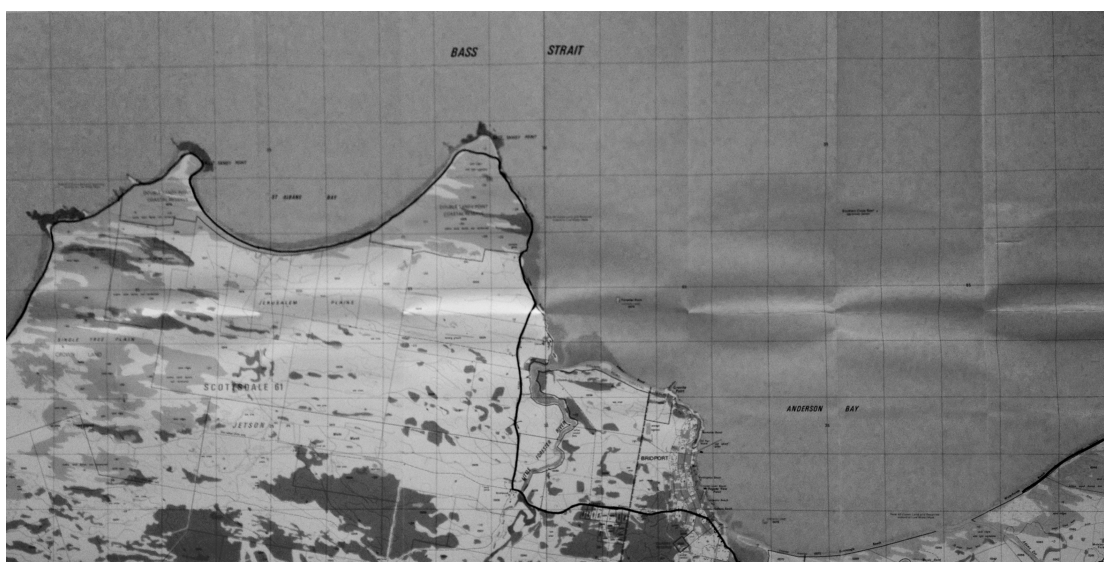
Map 5 Tracing the route on Tasmania 1:25 000 Series Map 4845 Low Head



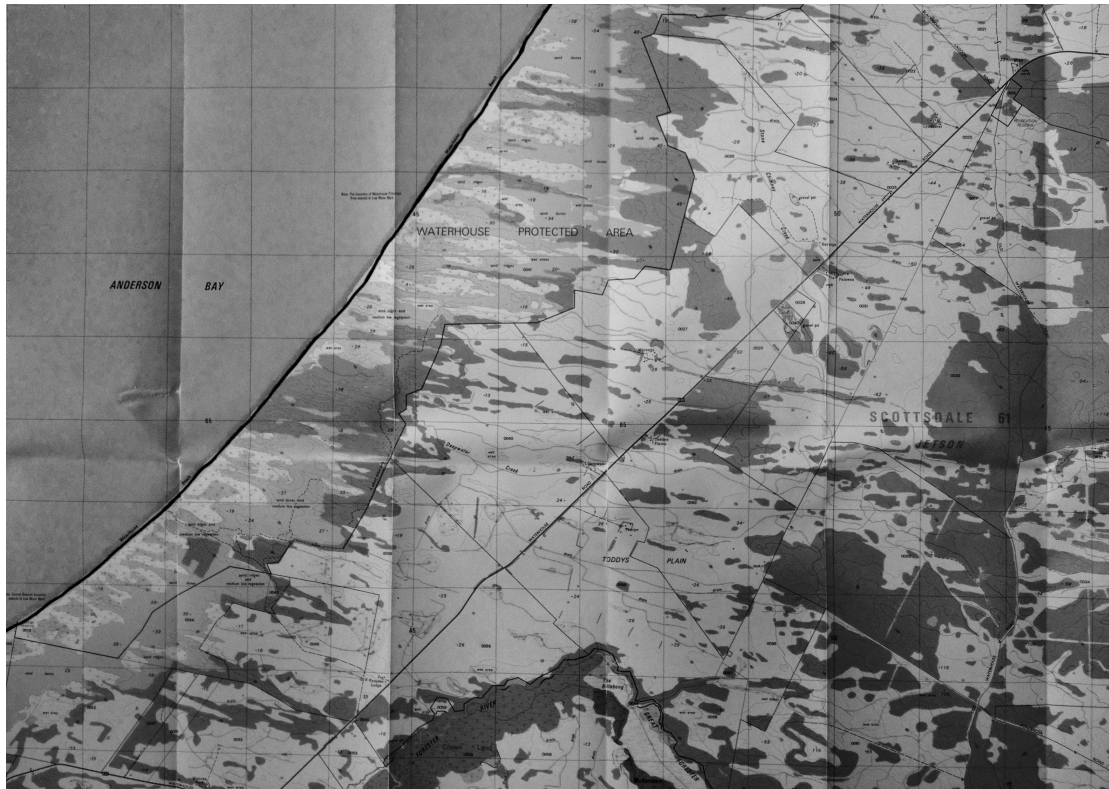
Map 6 Tracing the route on Tasmania 1:25 000 Series Map 5046 Tam O'Shanter



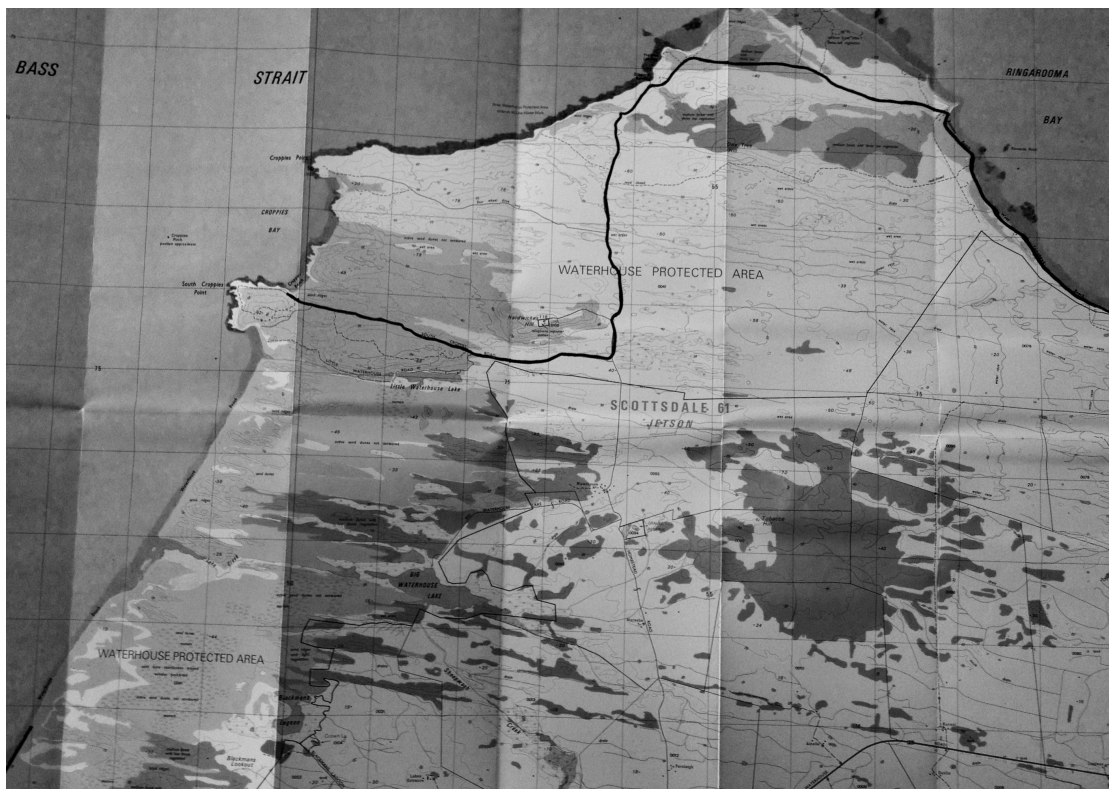
Map 7 Tracing the route on Tasmania 1:25 000 Series Map 5045 Weymouth



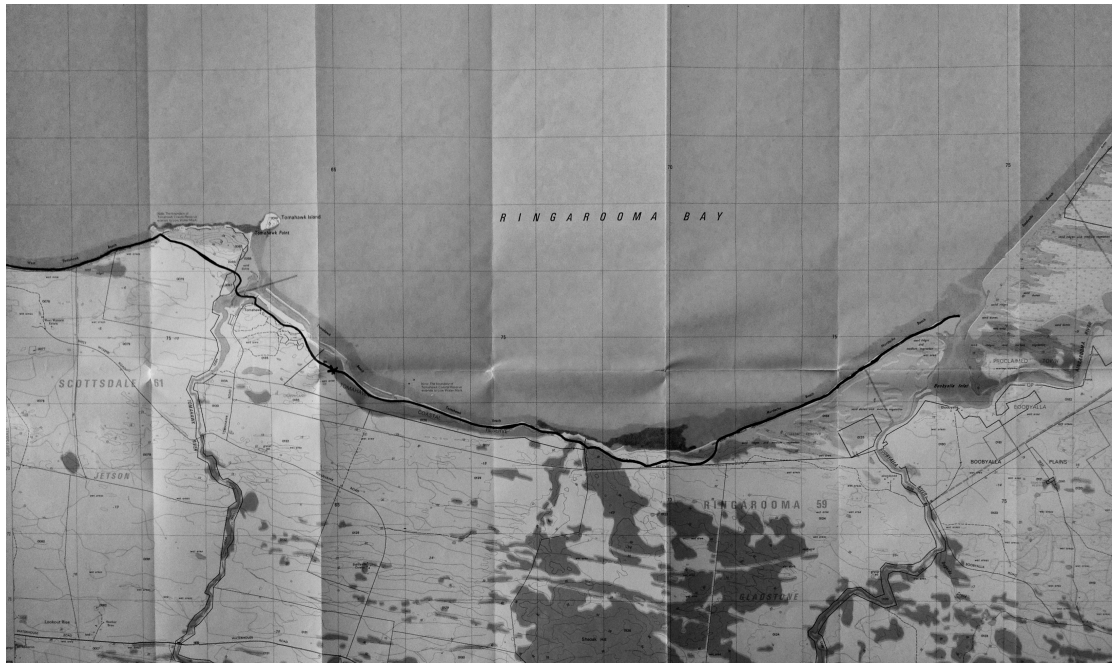
Map 8 Tracing the route on Tasmania 1:25 000 Series Map 5246 Bridport



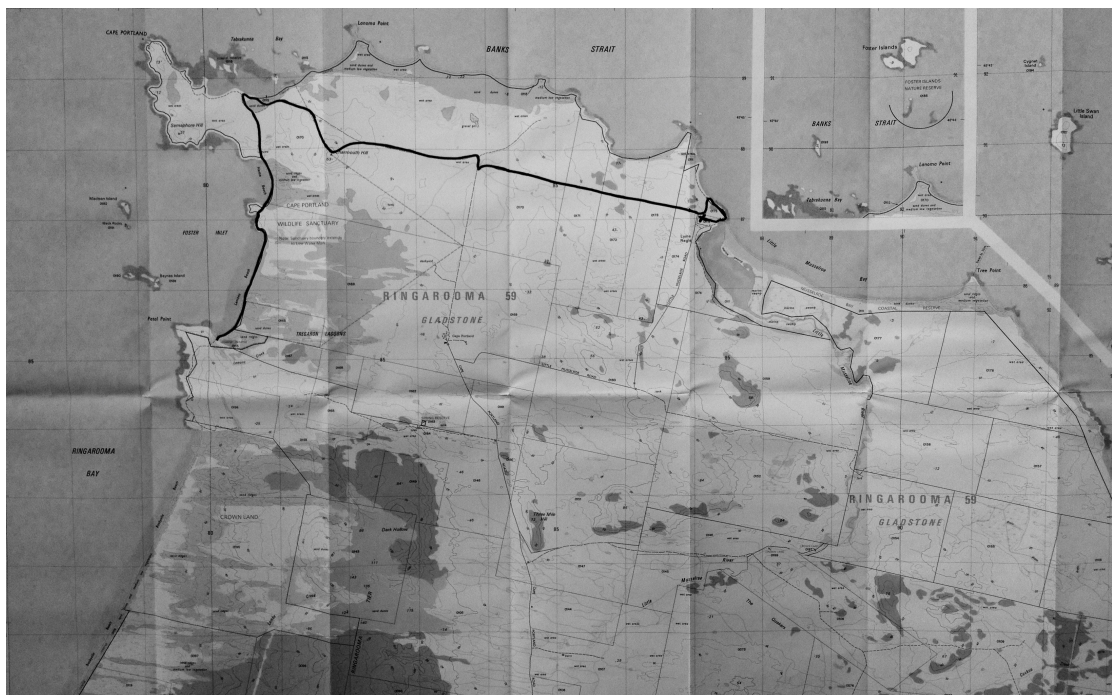
Map 9 Tracing the route on Tasmania 1:25 000 Series Map 5446 Oxberry



Map 10 Tracing the route on Tasmania 1:25 000 Series Map 5447 Waterhouse



Map 11 Tracing the route on Tasmania 1:25 000 Series Map 5647 Tomahawk



Map 12 Tracing the route on Tasmania 1:25 000 Series Map 5848 Lyme Regis

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