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Abstract:

This essay performs that restless search, undertaken in countless iterations across the globe, for meaning in the places that are important to us. By engaging with the everyday historical forces and currents that shape localities, it examines the intimate associations and connections that exist between people and the places they inhabit. Experimenting with the use of Ross Gibson's notion of the memoryscope – an aesthetic form created to 'contain, focus and direct the forces of the past' (Gibson 2015b: vi) – as a framework to inform place-based historically informed storytelling, it offers a series of speculations on an unruly strip of the southern Australian bush, the Bunurong Coast. In doing so, the paper explores how disparate echoes of the past plucked from various sources – the archives, memories, reflections, and the landscape itself – might be cajoled to form coherent reflections on personal connections to a specific place. Speculating on local stories, objects and experiences, it examines how an aesthetic and forensic creative practice might be used to develop intimate narratives about our complex associations to places and their past.

Biographical note:

Rees Quilford is a Victorian based writer and artist. He is a PhD candidate with the non/fictionLab of the School of Media and Communication at RMIT University. His interests include creative nonfiction, interactive storytelling, short story and screenplay.

Keywords: memoryscope, place, history, intimacy

Reflections from the family weekender

A tin shed in the south-eastern corner of the Australian mainland, 38°39'06.2"S 145°35'39.8"E, midafternoon, midwinter, 13°C, WSW 8 km/h or thereabouts. Gazing over my laptop into the paddocks, I look over an undulating strip of scrubby paddocks and heaths haphazardly divided into farms, weekenders and a large coastal reserve, the Bunurong Marine Park. Sunlight and a hint of azure peeks through the clouds overhead while the fresh south-wester dries sodden paddocks and bracken fronds. The weather changes quickly here – just minutes ago squalls of salt laden rain whipped off Bass Strait to beat against the windows and walls. Now the melaleuca, banksia and menna gums sway elegantly, and the brilliant yellow bloom of the coastal wattle brightens the winter landscape. Black cockatoos screech overhead, foraging the nearby pines for cones to hurl at the gravel road. Opening my senses to this intricate physical and metaphysical ecosystem I try to be present to the abundance of organic life, movement, sounds and smells that surround me. But it is the echoes, fragments and remnants of the past that grasp my attention.

The property on which the previous passage was written, Wreck Beach Farm, was purchased by my father's parents in the early 1950s. My parents took it over nearly thirty years ago but their decision to sell has meant responsibility for its custodianship has since passed on to others. Before it sold, I tried to notice the details, enjoy the minutiae and eccentricities while I had the chance. This strip of the Bunurong Coast, and the events which took place here, are significant to me and those close to me; an example of that beguiling yet intrinsic 'sense of place' that exists in countless different incarnations – intimate and intricate associations to buildings, beaches, park benches, coffee shops, flower beds, and who knows what else. An infinitely vast assemblage of interconnected relations and co-dependencies informing emotional connections to place.

Exploring how we understand and articulate the stories of, and from, the places that are important to us has played an increasingly central role in my creative endeavours. This personal fascination has inspired my attempts to articulate, through a creative lens, my connection to, and fascination with, the Bunurong Coast. What I have also sought is a method that explicitly emphasises the complex intimacy of my relationship with this particular place and its past. Engaging with that restless search for understanding in the places that are important to us, I continually find myself grappling with my relationship to the objects, memories and provocations that can be located within a personally significant place. Reflecting on the coincidences and circumstances that have catalysed to situate me in a particular location at a particular time, I want to understand and articulate these affecting associations. In doing so, I find myself looking to the past to comprehend the present.

This creative journey is an attempt to give aesthetic expression to the act of unpicking a persistent yearning, experienced specifically in a certain place, for familiarity and security. During this process, the questions to which I keep returning are: how does one go about giving creative voice to these repeated grasps for existential context? And, how to make an intimate history of place? Exploring alternative narrative forms that might embrace the complexity innate to the special places that exist in our lives necessitates engagement with affective storytelling practices that do justice to the intimacy and regard I hold for the places (and pasts) that I am so engrossed by. What I search for are theoretical and creative constructs that embrace and reflect the complexity, mutability and the affective aspects of our associations with place and its past.

Discussing what he terms 'representation through intimacy' (Dening 1998: 42), historian Greg Dening suggests there is a 'cultural literacy that comes from knowing something happened in the past because one has touched a thing or a document that has survived' (42). It is a sentiment that neatly aligns with Ross Gibson's theoretical writings on memoryscopes, 'artworks built from traces that history has left lying around in archives, in landscapes, in objects, in people's bodies, in biographies and in family histories' (Gibson 2015b: vi). Memoryscopes, Gibson suggests, offer an aesthetic and forensic means through which to reconstruct some measure of systematic comprehension of the past.

Experimentation with Gibson's memoryscope paradigm (2015b), and the application of Dening's emphasis on forms of representation informed by intimacy (1998), has steered me towards a storytelling practice knowingly focused on the creation of intimate and intricate stories that are explicitly local in their geographic and historical context. Engaging with Gibson's writings on memoryscopes, Dening's ruminations on imaginative and poetic responses to historical evidence as well as place-based epistemologies, this paper undertakes an exegetic examination of experimentation with the application of these constructs and approaches to my personal creative practice. In doing so, this paper explores imaginative, speculative, but also tactile, methods of making. At its essence, it examines how Gibson's notion of memoryscoping can be utilised to inform affective place-based and historically informed storytelling.

Memoryscopes as a creative frame for the exploration of intimacy and complexity

Mark Twain once noted that Australia's chief novelty is its own history, writing that 'it does not read like history, but like the most beautiful lies. And all of a fresh new sort, no mouldy old stale tales' (Twain 1993: 135). A contemporary and distinctly local take on Australia as a site where the practice of history might be reimagined is provided by writer, artist and scholar, Ross Gibson. He advocates for methods that loosen and interlace the borders around historiography and imaginative speculation, exploring the opportunities offered by different media to narrate across the gaps and examine the absences that fill the disorderly archives of

postcolonial Australia. It is these negative spaces, Gibson suggests, that most often prompt creative work (Gibson 2015b: 13; 21). The alternative representations that emerge conjure

> propositions that are not history but are historically informed and might be sometimes more important than history because of the way they make manifest an urge to account for the disconnected fragments. Such historically informed speculations are vital because they vault over silence, denial and absence. And sometimes change hearts and minds. (Gibson 2015b: 23-24)

A focus on the intimate and eccentric histories of place, in my opinion, offers an intriguing frame through which to embrace the provocation to vault silences and challenge conventional assumptions.

Gibson offers 'memoryscopes' as an example of artefacts or designed experiences that embrace dynamic, tendency-governed, responsive, unfinished representations of the world, suggesting that they may offer an approach to understand and inhabit complexity. These aesthetic systems are

> built purposefully to intensify our experience and to enhance our understanding of the complex dynamics that are at play when our natural, social, technological and psychological domains commingle and alter each other in this world that is full of mutability. (Gibson 2015a: vii; 9)

Gibson posits that memoryscopes provide a method by which to respond 'to some peculiar cache of shards or remnants, each cache broken by time or wilful neglect, barely prevailing over disarray' (Gibson 2015b: 13). Memoryscopes, he suggests, offer an aesthetic and forensic means through which to reconstruct some measure of systematic comprehension of the past.

Gibson proposes that these aesthetic forms – constructed from the traces and echoes of history that can be found in the present – embody a specific mode of remembrance, an attempt to comprehend and channel the forces of the past in a way that emphasises and communicates the implicit meanings and feelings about it to the people of the present. By actively acknowledging the dynamism of the past, memoryscopes perceive historical influence as a force that relentlessly informs and influences the present. As works, memoryscopes attempt to identify and dramatise this historical dynamism aesthetically 'in ways that activate clues found in archives, artefacts, landscapes, middens and collections; clues that are primed in some way for an imaginatively forensic treatment' (Gibson 2015b: vi).

The iterative and collaborative project *Life After Wartime* (*LAW*) (Gibson, White & Richards 2003) provides a tangible example that is illustrative of the multiplicity of forms that memoryscopes can assume. Described by Gibson as 'digital systems art' (Gibson 2015b: 104), the *LAW* suite includes a screen-based interactive game, several web-based iterations, a

print collection, live performances and an immersive installation. These *LAW* works interrogate and respond to an unkempt collection of forensic crime scene photographs housed at Sydney's Justice and Police Museum. Salvaged from flood, relocation and workload duress (Gibson, White & Richards 2003) the archival assets contain very little contextual information about the crimes to which they relate. As such, the images lend themselves to speculative exchanges. The *LAW* works adopt different computational, metamorphic and design strategies to combine selected archival imagery with Gibson's prose to elicit affective and emotive sensory responses (Richards 2006: 457). One of the suite's early works, the *LAW* interactive artwork (Gibson, White & Richards 2003) released on CD-ROM, invites users to participate in poetic interactive exchanges in which their responses inform curated but constantly evolving montages and amalgamations of crime scene images, Gibson's prose and atmospheric soundscapes. Reflecting on the project Gibson writes:

> Of course, it is a subjective "truth" that I conjure with *LAW*. I promote a felt knowledge that is evoked as in fiction, never proven by conventional standards of history; but is also creditable as a testimony to some of the social, psychological and fateful forces that have animated the photographed city as the past has made the present. (Gibson 2015b: 106)

The studio practice of Elvis Richardson is another example which lends itself to analysis within the memoryscope paradigm. Treasuring the intimacies of ordinary life, Richardson collects and curates personalised found objects and imagery taken from public sources then reconstructs and recontextualises them (Richardson 2019). While not specifically focused on place, her art employs aesthetic and forensic approaches to interrogate and scrutinise themes of inequality, absence and memory. Her speculative multimedia collaboration *EPISODE 1: Dear Daddy* (Richardson 2015) provides a good example. An album of black-and-white photographs from the 1950s, purchased decades ago at a local bric-a-brac market, is the source material prompting the work. The photographs, associated notes and a soundscape by James Hayes are curated to inform speculative narratives about the album's original owner, his story and relationships. The resultant work, Richardson suggests, is 'a visual dossier fusing forensics with fiction' (Richardson 2015).

Gibson professes a fascination with 'examining aftermaths and discontinuities [and] trying to re-build systematic comprehension in response to fragments' (Gibson 2015b: 14). Suggesting that numerous artists share this interest, he offers the concept of the memoryscope as an aesthetic and forensic framework that can both enable and articulate investigative processes. Like Gibson, I believe that it is useful to try to understand the appeal and attachment many people experience for 'untethered things' (Gibson 2015b: 14). The fragmented relics of the past, the places they are found in, and the people they matter to, have captured my attention. My current storytelling endeavours – in which I attempt to document personally relevant and often overlooked tales of the Bunurong Coast – are enamoured with these things. Simultaneously aesthetic and forensic memoryscopes grapple with and funnel the forces of the past in personal and intimate ways (Gibson 2015b: vi). This emphasis on aesthetic *and*

forensic analysis has proven to be a useful guiding principle through which to approach the process of interrogating the bits and pieces that have been left behind and channel them into speculative and emotive stories.

Setting out to capture and articulate the relationship I have with a specific 'place' – the Bunurong Coast – and its history, I aspired to fashion nuanced and intimate expressions of one of the important associations in my life. This process was an attempt to reflect on, and better understand, something that has played a large role in defining my sense of self and how I see the world. Gibson's concept of the memoryscope has provided a useful framework for engaging with the accumulation of echoes and whispers from the past that have so enchanted and beguiled me. The following passages provide an overview of my initial creative experimentation. They analyse how the concept and characteristics of memoryscopes can provide a useful point of reference to guide journeys of remembrance.

Embracing memoryscope characteristics in speculative storytelling

Evidence of past occurrences, lives and their stories abound throughout landscapes and archives, and in people across the globe. The beautiful scrubby dunes, the wild and oft deserted beaches and the ramshackle paddocks of the Bunurong Coast teem with traces of the past. The stories and tales from this tiny scrubby strip of the coast of southern Australia provide the inspiration for my creative work.

Before the property changed hands, I had the good fortune of being able to spend an extended period of time living by myself on my family's farm and wandering nearby beaches, bush reserves and landscapes. It was during this time that I began to experiment with alternative storytelling approaches and mediums that might complement my narrative renderings. My early experiments documenting narratives from the Bunurong Coast are housed in an online collection titled *Otherwise Unrecounted* [1]. The site consists of a series of small stories and vignettes – tales of old men fossicking in the dunes, of beached whales turned pub decoration, and failed communist lifestyle retreats. Not the fodder of the grand narratives of history but stories about a particular location and the connections to, within, and beyond it. Historian Greg Dening suggests that local history is about social and geographical space, identity, ritual, ceremony and boundary making, but importantly local history is also personal and idiosyncratic in that it 'concerns and is of the substance of our lives' (Dening 1982: 74). I have found these local stories provide an avenue through which to explore personal meanings entailed in our associations to place and the past, and how these meanings can inform a personal sense of self.

Otherwise Unrecounted (Quilford 2017) is the public output showcasing my experimentation with the application of Gibson's notion of memoryscoping to my creative practice. A fusion of creative writing and visual art, the suite incorporates images, audio recordings and prose collected and composed over a four-month period in 2017. During that time, I walked the

paddocks, scrub and beaches day after day simply documenting the things that grabbed my attention. Trying to make sense of historical connections, I found myself constantly pondering what others would make of a moment spent in this place, for these are just my reflections, just a fleeting personal sketch. This place – like all places – would render itself differently to someone else, it is a site of polyvocality, 'where more than one viewpoint is present and contradictions and disjunctures abound' (Zimmermann 2008: 289). This realisation led me to revisit Gibson's notion of the memoryscope as it seemed inclined toward the act of questioning and articulating that which is multifarious and undulating. I set about identifying the principal characteristics Gibson (2015b) defines for his construct, by my reading:

> *A memoryscope is:*
>
> *aesthetic – perceptible by the senses;*
>
> *forensic – in the sense of the word's Latin origin (forensis), a discussion or examination performed in public;*
>
> *a form of remembrance;*
>
> *an artwork built from traces that history has left lying around;*
>
> *emotional and credible – communicating the meaning, emotions and feelings implicit to the past into the present;*
>
> *affective, intimate, and (in my case) personal;*
>
> *a response to gaps and absences;*
>
> *an attempt at reconstructing systematic comprehension;*
>
> *informed and/or prompted by evidence;*
>
> *speculative, imaginative, but also historically informed;*
>
> *compelling, cajoling and challenging.*

It was to these points that I continually returned when inhabiting the landscapes, archives, and memories that I was engaging with. My method of collection involved both digital and analog technologies. Most days I carried two cameras (a Polaroid OneStep 600 that I'd picked up from a junk shop and a GoPro Hero 5), two handheld audio recorders (an analog SONY Clear Voice Plus dictaphone and a digital Zoom H1 Handy Recorder), as well as a notepad and pen. Afternoons and evenings were spent in the local library or history museum researching the things that had seized my interest – be that an object, a landscape, a sound, or a thought. Edward Tufte suggests that evidence that bears on any question of complexity

typically involves multiple forms of discourse, and regardless of the mode the intellectual tasks remain constant, 'to understand and to reason about the materials at hand, and to appraise their quality, relevance, and integrity' (Tufte 2006: 9). Undoubtedly imagination is required to draw together diverse threads spanning time, space, the physical and the metaphysical to form systematic representation. I hoped that embracing a collection method that foregrounded reflection and speculation, one in which I inhabited and immersed myself in the landscape while appraising and reasoning with the evidence, would fan the flames of the imaginative process.

While acknowledging the speculative nature of all historical suppositions, Greg Dening encourages all students of history to be ethnographic, to 'describe with the carefulness and realism of a poem what can be observed of the past in the traces that remain' (Dening 1998: 42). Evidence of the past – whether found in the landscape itself, in archival records, in people's memories, or somewhere else – waits indifferently for elaboration. The work of Dening and Gibson prompts us to question, cross-examine and elaborate on the remnants of the past, so I would often revisit a specific place or object armed with a newspaper clipping or a scrap of paper that contained contextual information. Sometimes I'd read aloud, sometimes I'd just sit, think and jot the occasional reflection, note or provocation in my notebook. Revisiting my notes, photographs and recordings several months later, I set about sorting, reviewing and cataloguing. I searched for themes, patterns or just a striking detail. Around the same time, I revisited Gibson's book on memoryscopes and the list of characteristics (cited previously) that I had compiled. It was to these characteristics that I continually returned while composing a suite of vignettes relating to my time walking and inhabiting the Bunurong Coast. Each piece is a visual (photo or video), audio and prose-based composite that reflects or speculates on an object, feature or relationship that I had noticed.

Considered in relation to the memoryscope examples cited at the beginning of this essay – namely Gibson, White & Richards' interactive *LAW* artwork (2003) and Elvis Richardson's *EPISODE 1: Dear Daddy* (2015) – the memoryscope experiments I have undertaken in response adopt a slightly different tack in terms of their source material. Rather than questioning an existing public collection or found objects, it instead focuses on building a personal and private archive, one actively curated for the purposes of the project. Undertaking a systematic yet intimate form of remembrance, I created and compiled my own personal archive – photographs, written reflections and videos – documenting my time and connection to the Bunurong Coast and its past. Highly attuned to a specific place, and the historical fragments that can be located within it, this method emphasises and foregrounds the intimate, emotional and personal nature of my association with the place and its past. The characteristics that Gibson has defined for memoryscopes (2015b), as well as Dening's call for a form of representation through intimacy (1998), were used as touchpoints guiding the compilation process. A speculative aesthetic treatment – which shares similarities with the creative approaches undertaken by Gibson, White & Richards (2003) and Richardson (2015) in the artworks cited above – was then applied to these materials which documented my personal associations, memories and reflections. This was done in an attempt to cajole highly

personal vestiges of the past to speak in the present. During this journey, I found the writings of Gibson and Dening to be helpful in guiding the making process as their work calls for manufactured representations of the past to be honest to the realities of the lived experience.

My experimentation with memoryscopes as a creative form leads me to conclude that the act of creating intimate aesthetic histories of place requires a dialectical form of inquiry, one involving the process of meaning making through the felt, lived, reconstructed and reinterpreted experiences of past place-specific episodes (Sullivan 2009: 50). It also requires 'respectful visiting' (Muecke 2008: 86-91) and the adoption of a reflective, personal and intimate approach to the collection of material. By walking, inhabiting and documenting the landscapes, places and occurrences that are being reimagined and speculated upon, I have embraced Dening's (1998: 42) call for a cultural literacy informed by an intimate, and tactile, engagement with the echoes, objects and fragments that remain. My process, and the works produced thus far, aspire to a sensibility described by Bettina Frankham as being

> overwritten with inscriptions from history, institutional discourse, social utility, individual memory, physical characteristics, environmental context, weather, politics, economics, emotion – and that's to name but a few of the possible strata. (Frankham 2018: 43)

I hope that my work both acknowledges and conveys some sense of the possibility of multiplicity and coexistent plurality; where 'place' is a sphere in which distinct trajectories exist and potentially thrive.

To provide some context for my work, the following passages cite a number of vignettes from the *Otherwise Unrecounted* (2017) suite (without the audio and multimedia elements). Each piece is accompanied by brief contextual analysis that aims to situate the work in relation to the place-based epistemologies that informed their composition. The analysis also includes reflection on how Gibson and Dening's work has informed or provided a touchpoint for the creation of these vignettes. These works aim to connect my memories and reflections of a specific place to the material fragments of the past that can be located within those places. (See Figure 1 below.)

A straightforward definition positions place as a meaningful location embodying equally important notions of location, locale and sense of place (Agnew 1987) but place is also often perceived as a site of meaning making (Plumwood 2008) and of self-identification (Gibson 2015c: 8). These understandings recognise the tangible materiality of particular places but also acknowledge the emotional and spiritual appeal they have. An active historical awareness and a meaningful connection to the past can play a central role in this. Whether it is where we were born, where we work, where we relax, or where we live, place plays an important and defining role in identity perceptions; it was this longing for a sense of grounding (and perhaps connection) which informed my repeated treks through the sodden paddocks of my parents' farm in the midwinter dawn. This attempt to derive ontological

meaning from the mud that soaked through my socks and seeped into the skin of my toes is borne out of what Casakin and Bernardo (2012: iii) describe as a fundamental need to ground identity in relation to place and the physical environment.

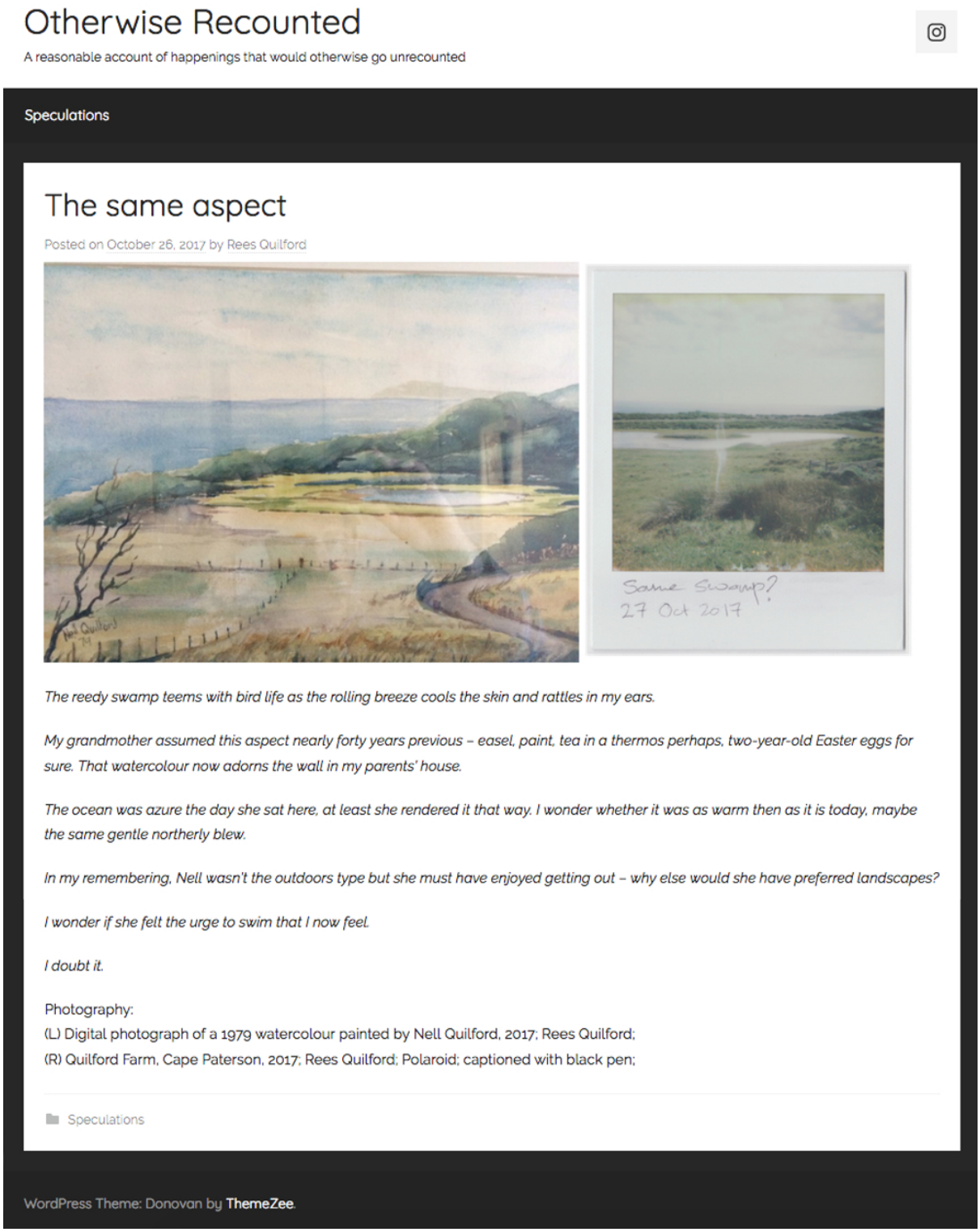

Figure 1: From 'The same aspect' memoryscope experiment from *Otherwise Unrecounted*, see: http://otherwiseunrecounted.destinationq.com.au/the-same-aspect/

Graham Davison writes of a 'wistfulness for a life near enough to remember, too distant ever to be regained' (Davison 1994: 340), while Miranda Johnson speculates on an urge for survival beyond death, 'that something about each one of us, whether deeply personal or even mundane, will leave an imprint that future generations will respond to, care for, and hopefully cherish' (Johnson 2015: 95-96). The *Otherwise Unrecounted* (Quilford 2017) piece 'The same aspect' (see Figure 1 above) responds to this desire for intergenerational connection and continuity expressed via a shared affiliation for a particular place. My grandmother, Nell, was an avid amateur painter – watercolours were her medium. Her paintings grace the homes of my family and friends, as well as numerous cultural institutions throughout the town she lived in. The landscapes of the Bunurong Coast – although that is not the place name she would have used – and the family farm are the subject of many of her works. 'The same aspect' is a response to a painting now mounted in my parents' home: a watercolour rendering by Nell of one of the soaks on their farm. My piece combines reflective prose with digital and analog photography to foreground a past and present rendering of the aspect from which my grandmother would have painted. I actively sought that spot and took some time to pause, ponder and reflect on her aesthetic interpretation of that particular spot, created nearly forty years prior. That painting and the photograph I took of it (selected as it also includes an inadvertent self-portrait of me captured in the reflection on the glass) are evidence of an intergenerational affiliation for a particular place, a connection that persists into the present-day.

Considering 'The same aspect' in relation to the attributes Gibson has defined for the memoryscope, I have come to see my piece as an emotional form of remembrance which, responding to the absence of a loved one, attempts to build some form of systematic comprehension of feelings implicit to the past and reconcile those emotions with the present. The forensic nature implicit in the creation of this memoryscope helped to elicit and evoke affective connections to the past. The act of subjecting aesthetic renderings of these private associations to public scrutiny provokes and cajoles these intimate connections out into the open (for both the artist and the audience). In doing so, it provides the opportunity to connect my memories to a specific place at a specific time. In this regard, the notion of the memoryscope has provided me a lens through which to undertake a journey of introspective meaning making as well as a tangible means to give aesthetic expression to that journey. (See Figure 2 below.)

A longing for a strong sense of place, or association to a particular locality, is an urge shared across cultures and history. Within this conceptualization, space and place are basic components of the lived world uniting both individuals and communities in common experience (Tuan 2001: 3). But how does the polyvocal experience of a particular place manifest in the experience of the individual, how does it differ from person to person, from one generation to another? Consider, for instance, the life of Jim McDonnell, a man who spent more than thirty years sequestered in a ramshackle hut – no car, no mains water, no mains power – nestled into the beautiful scrubby dunes of the Bunurong Coast. Here is a man

who opted for an unconventional existence in a remote place. A person whose life was dominated by the rise and fall of the tide, by the direction of the wind, and by salt laden air.

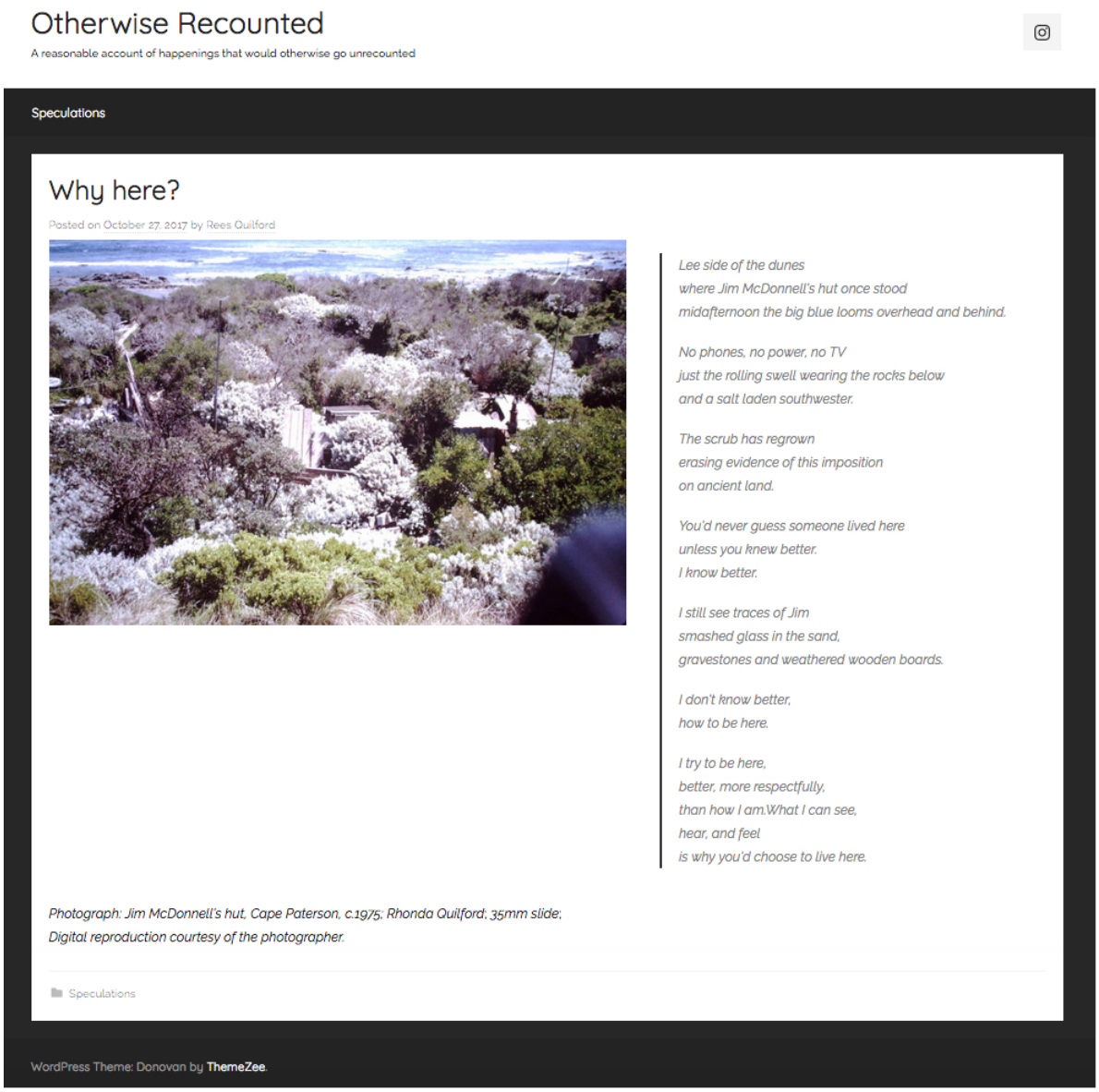

Figure 2: 'Why here?' memoryscope experiment from *Otherwise Unrecounted*, see: http://otherwiseunrecounted.destinationq.com.au/why-here/

Jim passed more than fifty years ago but mentions and asides pointing to his existence can be found in the archives – military service and employment records, newspaper articles, birth and death reports. More moving and affective though are the numerous traces of him that remain in the landscape he inhabited for all those years. Shards of brown glass – their once jagged edges now worn smooth – from the bottles he smashed to ward off curious beach walkers still litter the sand dunes. If you are inclined to search the clifftop thoroughly enough you might locate the gravestone of his dog Pluto or the overgrown skip-line he used to haul coal mined from the beachside seams. Traces and whispers of him also still exist in people's

memories. Recollections of Jim lugging kerosene tins from town by bicycle. Tales of him walking the beaches at dawn searching for timber to salvage.

Jo Guldi suggests that focusing a historical lens upon a place provides the opportunity to examine the impact of physical, visual and constructed environments on social experience (Guldi 2016: 68). This focus posits landscape as a historical record that can be analysed to understand 'changing modes of embodied interaction in spaces' (Guldi 2016: 68). Jim's understanding of these fluid embodied exchanges – how he comprehended his relationship with the sand dunes, paddocks and rock platforms that surrounded him – would be very different to the connections and experiences of the people who happen across this place today. The same is true of how my experience of, and sense of belonging to, the places and sites along the Bunurong Coast differs from those experienced by others. This polyvocality which spans all kinds of variants – time, space, gender, ethnicity, etc, etc – was something that I would constantly grapple with in relation to my experience inhabiting the place as an individual by myself. Jim passed in an era in which the accepted attitudes to place, and custodianship of it, varied vastly from those which hold sway today but much of his experience was also solitary like mine. How does one account for the connections that we, white, Anglo-European visitors spanning different generations and attitudes, experience when visiting this small parcel of south-eastern Australia? How does one go about reconciling inhabitation of a landscape filled with glimpses of Indigenous occupation and the postmemory [2] of colonial invasion (Somerville 1999: 128)? Furthermore, how does one go about resolving the different awareness, or lack thereof, of that same occupation experienced by other individuals?

It is some of these contradictions that another of the *Otherwise Unrecounted* (Quilford 2017) pieces, 'Why here?' (see Figure 2 above), grapples with. The vignette combines a digitalised version of an old analog slide of Jim McDonnell's hut photographed by my aunt in 1975 with clipped prose-based speculation on Jim's (and my) motivations for choosing a life of solitude and seclusion, as well as reflection on the internal dilemmas my visitation and inhabitation of this place raised for me personally. Returning to the notion of individual and communal understandings of place, it seems intuitive that these feelings are informed by history, locality and a 'sense of place'. However, collective perceptions must inevitably differ wildly from the individual experience. Spending time on the secluded strip of scrub on the lee side of the Wreck Beach dunes that Jim McDonnell once called home validated this inclination for me. I couldn't help but acknowledge how vastly different my experience of, and relationship to, that particular place was to his. 'Why here?' is a speculative attempt to examine the complexity and subjectivity intertwined in each individual's experience of, and perspective on, place. Embracing Gibson's invitation to respond to the historical traces and echoes from the past – in this case, the physical and ruminative reminders of a long gone inhabitant – it speculates on shared and individual life choices, perceptions of, as well as affiliations to, place.

Despite seemingly possessing a familiarity and accessibility, place is a difficult concept to define (Cresswell 2015: 6). This ontological indeterminacy is further exacerbated by the

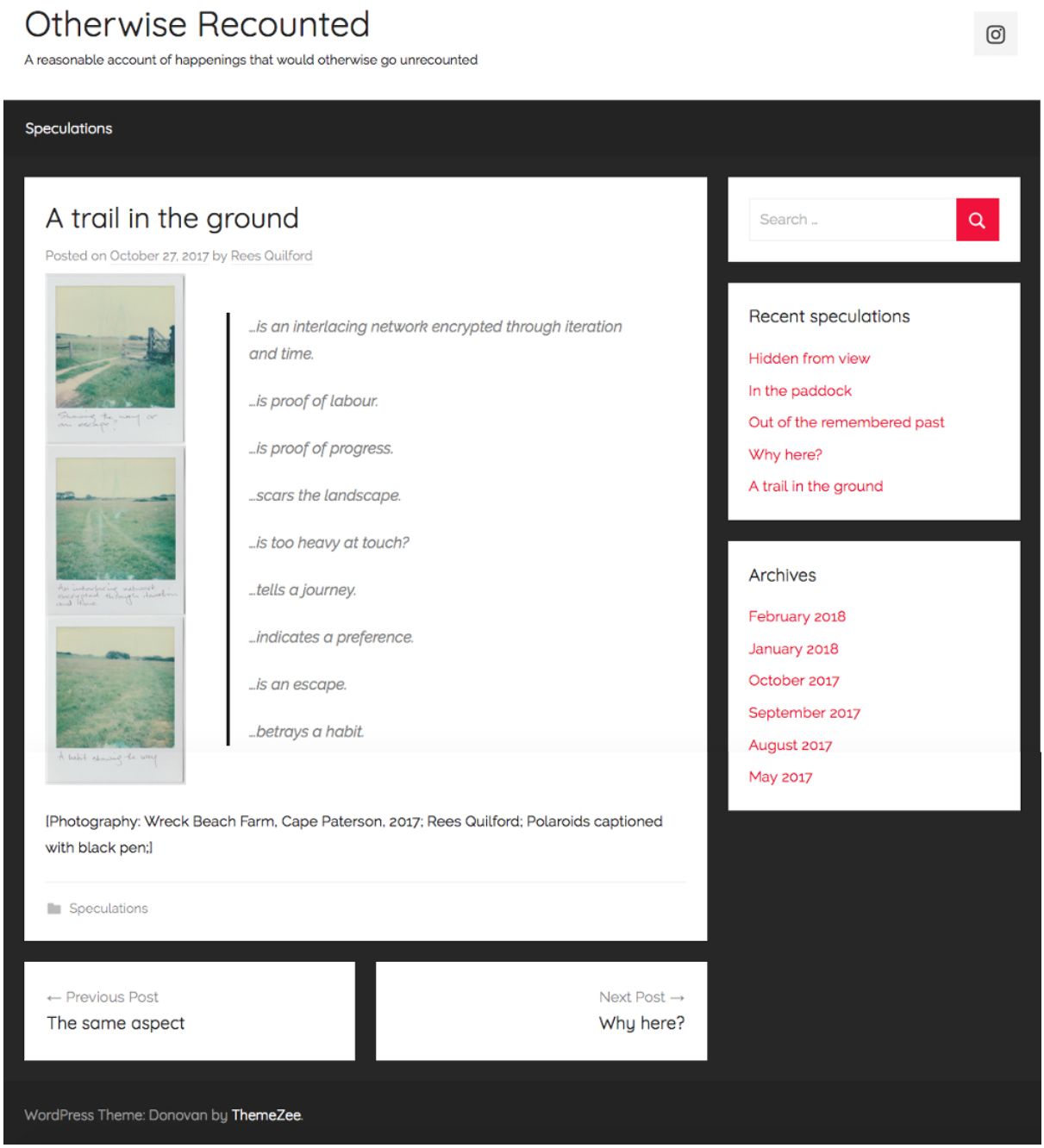

Figure 3: 'A trail in the ground' memoryscope experiment from Otherwise Unrecounted, see: http://otherwiseunrecounted.destinationq.com.au/a-trail-in-the-ground/

fragmentation and disruption of globalisation (Tuan 2001) and the increasing hybridisation of digital and physical space (Houghton, Foth & Miller 2015: 8). Val Plumwood (2008) suggests that simplistic conceptualisations of the notion of place, often evoked as 'local place', whereby place is innately regionalised and already subdivided, often leads to romanticised and unsophisticated views of what place is – a delimited locale with its own

internal logic that bears no relation to the outside world. I've often taken the places that I inhabit and their importance to me for granted. There have been countless occasions when I have failed to take the time to pause and reflect on the details – things such as the intricate wildlife trails that breach the barbed wire fences surrounding my family's property, or the simple act of watching the autumn sun settle over a sodden heath teeming with life. On the numerous occasions that I've dismissed or ignored the significance of these intersections I have inadvertently fallen into the trap of conceptualising place – in this case Wreck Beach Farm – as a singular, representational and closed entity (Massey 1994). But when you take the time to properly ponder and reflect on the bewildering entanglement embodied in a given location, the more slippery the notion of place appears.

The unrealistic and sometimes deliberately misleading conceptualisations which communicate places as unchanging stable entities seems to ignore their innate complexity. As Doreen Massey (1994) suggested, in a moment when 'globalisation' was becoming a defining concept, what we need is an adequately progressive sense of place that allows for global and local sensibilities but also acknowledges feelings of 'geographical difference, of uniqueness, even of rootedness if people want that, without being reactionary' (Massey 1994: 151). Another *Otherwise Unrecounted* piece, 'A trail in the ground' (2017) (see Figure 3 above) is my attempt to capture the innate complexity of a place which is significant to me personally. It does this through a focus on the multiple and contradictory meanings that can be read into a seemingly mundane feature – in this case trails worn into the ground.

Consisting of three polaroid photographs hand annotated in situ and a series of retrospectively drafted prose-based provocations, the piece aims to explore the fluidity of place and the features within it. In doing so, it acknowledges a constantly changing site, one that is always being reimagined, interrogated and retold. It is also another example of an attempt to explore my intergenerational connection to place, in this instance manifest through habit and the traces that my family's agricultural practices have left on the land itself.

Read in relation to Gibson's memoryscope paradigm, 'A trail in the ground' (2017) attempts to cajole and challenge assumptions about things often ignored, overlooked, and taken for granted. Informed by evidence but also responding to the multifarious gaps manifest within that material, it attempts to present a viewpoint that embraces a fluid and complex understanding of place – a site that is constantly being reimagined and understood in the way it is processed, retold and practiced. The scenes depicted in the polaroids (and the place they document) are contested assemblages rather than fixed and stable entities. The creative framework provided by Gibson's memoryscope has enabled me to convey this place in a more nuanced and intricate light, a site of polyvocality, where multiple viewpoints, readings and incongruities prosper.

Final remarks on how memoryscopes can be used to tell intimate histories of place

What has become apparent to me through the process of compiling *Otherwise Unrecounted* (Quilford 2017) is that place-based historical narratives can be expressed alongside a set of ideas and viewpoints that embrace relationality, heterogeneity and complexity. Analysing understandings of place, and the historical forces that have shaped them, then provides the potential to generate insights about individual and collective understandings, as Massey proposes '[p]erhaps we could imagine space as a simultaneity of stories-so-far' (Massey 2005: 9). In a world full of elusiveness and complexity, finding a way to adequately describe these stories-so-far – reimagining particular places and curious occurrences, stories like Jim McDonnell's life in the coastal dunes – is a difficult task. Compare, for example, the broken shards of brown glass left by Jim in the Wreck Beach sand dunes with the samphire succulents that line the nearby creek and provided a valuable source of dietary diversity to generations of the Boon Wurrung, the traditional custodians of this place. Two seemingly unrelated entities located within the same ecosystem which, when associated, can lead to a multitude of speculations – narratives referencing or exploring a diverse spectrum of themes, anything from history or postcolonialism through to biology, organics or notions of sentience. The initial creative experimentation documented in this essay suggests that Gibson's notion of the memoryscope (2015b), when combined with Dening's idea of representation through intimacy (1998), can provide an apt and useful approach through which to articulate and speculate on connections and interdependencies embodied in particular places.

This essay, and the creative work I have begun to develop, documents my first attempts at telling intimate, affective and personal stories of the Bunurong Coast. I have found the characteristics inherent to Gibson's notion of the memoryscope (2015b) to be a useful touchpoint in guiding this creative and theoretical inquiry. Through an amalgamation of prose, images and multimedia I have attempted to embrace and embody the complexity and flux inherent to the places and objects referenced. In its current iteration, my hope is that the work documented in *Otherwise Unrecounted* (Quilford 2017) has begun to embrace and reflect the relational multidimensional complexity of a specific place and its past. It is work that aims to capture the minute details of everyday life in a particular place in a way that embodies the intimacy with which the world is experienced. In this process I have found that Gibson's memoryscope notion (2015b) can facilitate alternative forms of remembrance, artworks differentiated from local history, historical storytelling, and creative nonfiction. While traditional historical practices aspire to offer a record of the past, memoryscopes are unabashedly subjective, reflective and imaginative ruminations informed by the traces that remain from the past. They offer a speculative window – through time and space – into past moments, places or events, but crucially this opening invites an imaginative response from the audience.

Notes

[1] *Otherwise Unrecounted* (Quilford 2017) can be found online: http://otherwiseunrecounted.destinationq.com.au/

[2] Literary scholar Professor Marianne Hirsch defines postmemory in relation to the transmission of memories of violence across generations, describing the relationship that subsequent generations experience to the personal, collective and cultural trauma of those who came before. These experiences 'remembered' as a result of the stories, images and behaviours that informed their upbringing, have been transmitted to them so affectively and profoundly as to seem to constitute memories in their own right. In this regard, postmemory's connection to the past can be seen as being mediated not by remembrance but instead by imaginative investment and creation. See *The Generation of Postmemory* (Hirsch 2008) for further information.

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