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Doctor of Philosophy

**'Situating Place-Practice: Critical Reflections
on Sustainability, Conservation, Education
and Craft'.**



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This thesis is dedicated to –

My Grandparents 'Nan and Gramp' and to powerful mysterious
Dartmoor.

The town of Bellingen on the mid-north coast of NSW, Australia
and the mud of this place and the many silenced stories it holds.

The world's gardeners, farmers, conservationists and workers of
the land.

**I would like to acknowledge the following for their support
and contributions towards this research thesis –**

My family – Sandy, Bede and Raffe Brennan.

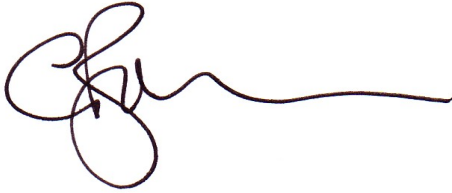
Bellingen Urban Landcare Incorporated and all the people and organisations that have contributed to its projects over the years.

Supervisors – Dr David Wright, Dr John Cameron and unofficial supervisor Dr Richard Hil.

Editors – Alex Balnaves & Lorraine Shannon.

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

Charles William Sheridan Brennan

A handwritten signature in dark ink, featuring a large, stylized 'C' and 'S' followed by a long, horizontal, wavy line.

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Abstract

Since the early 1960s the notions of conservation and sustainability have figured prominently as a broad set of concerns and ideals and in various discursive domains and practices. These have found expression in sustainability (environmental) education and the craft of conservation work on the ground and in communities, and more broadly. Although conservation and sustainability mean different things to different people, depending on their field of interest or practice, this generalised notion continues to occupy a pivotal place in overarching political and ethical discourses.

This thesis argues that given the ascendancy of sustainability discourse in global affairs, the challenge now for academics, activists and practitioners is one of putting ideals and ideas about sustainability into practice. A useful aid to the achievement of such an outcome is to engage in critical reflection relating to the experiences of practitioners who have been, and are, attempting in their day-to-day work to implement ideas about sustainability. There is however, I argue, a profound disjuncture between what Fry describes as a 'significant but troubling body of (theoretical) work' and the lived experience of practitioners. It is this disjuncture that the thesis seeks to explore through the mediums of autoethnographic analysis, critical reflection and place theory. Importantly in the context of this thesis, the notion of 'place practice' is employed as a central organising theory around which my analysis and arguments are woven.

The thesis draws on and seeks to illuminate the author's place-practice as a node of, and a means for entry into, the broader complex network of issues, challenges, discourses and practices in sustainability (environmental) education and conservation craft. Place-practice is acknowledged as complex, ambiguous and characterised by varying degrees of consciousness: a repertoire of practice (Schon) comprised of experiences, embodied skills, memories, socially constructed stories, as well as personal and collective emotions and motivations. Through an exploration of such complexities the thesis questions simplistic notions of sustainability that reduce the

environment to an idealised, essentialised state outside of human experience. Rather, it is argued that our engagement with sustainability is deeply enmeshed in a range of personal, social and cultural constructions about the world and our place in it. In this more complex expression of sustainability the emotional and psychological are seen to be as important as the literal and material in developing effective and sustainable place practice.

Building on the work of Willis, Sebald and Somerville the thesis critically reflects upon a series of encounters drawn from a lifetime of professional, practical, personal and academic experience; from readings of texts and authors, conversations, field-notes, photographs and assorted personal and professional memories. The subject matter of these encounters progresses from professional experiences of teaching, learning and research, to practices of farming, gardening, land conservation, social ecology and ecopsychology.

These assembled place-practice encounters are subjected to a process of critical scrutiny through addressing some of the complexities of these experiences and through the use of a framework of personal and academic engagement with place. This analytical process allows dominant and latent themes to be identified and brought to the surface. This re-storying builds through the thesis using an iterative, reflexive process leading towards conclusions that elucidate new understandings of place-practice. The overarching argument of the thesis is that place-practice should be situated more centrally in dialogues over conservation and sustainability. This offers an opportunity for this vitally important field to be refreshed, to open itself to critical reflection and ultimately to acknowledge and learn from experience.

Framing Quotations

How do we learn our way out? How do we learn our way towards a sustainable society? (Milbrath, 1989)

I wish to say to the people of good will, to the workers, to the poets, that the whole future has been expressed in this line by Rimbaud: only with a burning patience can we conquer the splendid city which will give light, justice and dignity to all mankind. (Neruda, 1971)

Become the change you want to see. (Attributed to Mohandas K Gandhi by his Grandson Arun Gandhi). (B' Hahn, 2001)

Well known Zen phrase: The instant you speak about a thing you miss the mark. (Capra, 1975, p. 42)

Filling the conscious mind with ideal conceptions is a characteristic of western theosophy, but not the confrontation with the shadow and the world of darkness. One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious. (Jung, 1945, p. 335)

Today I want to write my way into and out of this history, and this is why I write my version of autoethnography. (Denzin, 2006, p. 426)

Prologue

There is a deep, quiet joy held in the moment of understanding. This arises when there is congruence between what is felt and sensed and then explained to one's self or to others. The experience is of resolution, of treasure found, or a puzzle solved, or something inexplicably beautiful made. At that moment the story and storied are, or seem to be, the same. Being in the world and becoming self become clearer. The direction(s) and purposes of action, or inaction, are for that moment relatively evident. Ceaseless efforts of caring and carrying out our everyday practices gain renewed meaning. However, this is a temporary release from 'waiting in the chaotic place of unknowing' (Somerville, 2007) which I argue is the place, if we are honest with ourselves, that we find ourselves most of the time. This is particularly so for the critically reflective practitioner engaged in iterative processes of observation, questioning, imagining and comparing, reading and discussing and of course, enacting and reflecting. The deep, quiet joy derived from a moment's understanding is a rarity for the critically reflective practitioner because this is a process of deconstruction of stories and the making of an assembly of fragments.

These fragments (Read, 2003, p.12) that comprise our lived lives are of feelings, images, impulses, memories, stories, experiences, routines, language, ideas, ideals, power arrangements and places. These fragments, often forgotten, repressed, ambiguous, conditioned, imposed, contradictory and/or confused, form a mysterious social, psychological and material ecology. However, to act in the world, or to know what not to do, requires a degree of integrated ethical orientation no matter how mysterious and fragmented our constitutions and understandings of self in the world. For this reason the deconstructive, de-storying and fragmentation of critically reflective processes need to be co-terminous with creative, imaginative, aesthetically courageous processes of re-imagining and re-storying with the explicit aim of taking action and putting into practice. Problematisation without suggesting solutions is unhelpful in this process. This becomes a struggle to gain a degree of authority over these fragments of life and to (re)author a life-story. This is no

easy feat, but is essential in the process of becoming conscious of, and improving, practices of personal and professional life.

For the practitioner, solutions are paramount as the basis of action. Action, though, is never in isolation — each is a small part of patterned practice. Learning from practice, to improve practice, however, requires that it be brought to the fore. This privileging of facets of practice — ethical, social, professional and practical — is far from easy. Perhaps to the western mind, practice seems rather complex, ordinary and perhaps too intimate.

Discovered in the car wreck that ended the life of Albert Camus in 1960 was his unfinished work *The First Man*. According to his daughter, Catherine Camus, the novel comprising vignettes of his childhood and youth, was not published until much later in 1994 because it was felt to be too emotional, personally honest and at odds with the sensitivities of the then prevailing intellectual community. In this pre-published state of honest emotion, unvetted by editing processes, free of authorial distancing strategy and without concern for opinions of peers he writes, 'my life and writing were shaped by a few images of my childhood' (Camus 1994). This simple but powerfully revealing statement is of real interest; firstly, because it seems that something so essential can only be revealed by one of the greatest philosophers of the twentieth century, literally, by accident. Secondly, this idea that our lives are shaped by a few, early life experiences rings so true to me.

In the mystery of my life of fragments I return to two clear, perhaps contrasting, images that run throughout my life, and right through to the problem that this thesis addresses. These images that are at once story, community, place and memory are held not in some distant time and place but here in my body, in my thoughts, in the places and practices of my personal and professional life.

The first image is as follows —

I am nine or ten standing watching and helping my 'Gramp' on the farm. He is rebuilding a hedge and replacing a new timber post to hang a gate from. I am his 'helper' which means mostly that I ask occasional questions about what is being done and hold and pass tools to Gramp as he works. It's something he has done countless times before and with sweat dripping from his forehead and muscles pulling, pushing, lifting and dropping and so on, the work goes ahead stage by stage. When it doesn't there's a swear word or two, a reappraisal of a problem and off we go again. A huge hole is dug; the wooden post is heaved in and tamped into place. To join the post and hedge, stones are methodically positioned stone-on-stone but each off-set and inclined slightly backwards. Earth is then shoveled behind the new stone wall and then oak, hawthorn and blackthorn hedge shrubs are partly cut through, bent down and laid down over and into the fresh earth. A clean up, a quick appraisal, then almost a moment of appreciation. We pick up the tools and walk back to the farmhouse on the way checking some sheep in the next field.

This image is one of a practitioner; a craftsman and his aspirant apprentice. Not much is explicitly spoken. This is a language of body, hands, feet, weather energy, materials, skills, time, exertion and creation in and of a particular place itself composed of ground, trees, weather and memory.

The second and contrasting image is —

We are sixteen or seventeen and students at an international school in Asia. It's the mid-1970s. The school has new subjects that include ecology, mysticism and the writings of Gandhi. New teachers have arrived to teach along with their new books and ideas. We are given authors to read — some with subversive intent. We are young, mobile, privileged, educated and idealistic. Books by Illich, Schumacher and Capra are passed between us. Here are the ways that the planet and humanity can be 'saved'. We tap into the hope and idealism of the times. We think something like 'hey, there are big problems in the world of poverty, of ecology, of individual meaning, but we have the answers'.

This language in this second image is more overtly verbal; of ethical ideas and ideals, words and authors; the warm glow of inspiration, lighting up a world with meaning, purpose and story. That we were international students is fitting because we were barely bound by everyday practice or place. These ethical ideas and ideals took hold, inspired and shaped my and many of my friends' lives.

These two images and sets of experiences of being practitioner and academic have alternated throughout my life; 30 of those as a professional educator, project supervisor and craftsman. Thirty continuous years of any set of experiences accumulates to form a repertoire of practice (Schon 1983) comprising fragments of senses, memories of actions taken, of conversations, of the feel of that work (Willis 2008), of stories of success and farce, as well as embodied urges to take action or to rest.

However, here a problem concerning conservation and sustainability practice starts to become apparent and this relates to the heart of this thesis. On the one hand stories, ideas and ideals, the second image of students engaging with 1970's literature, predominate both personally within me but also more broadly as moral, political and ethical discourses. On the other hand practice/experience, i.e. the first image of the farm work, seems strangely under-articulated. This original image of quiet farmwork with my Grandfather has now grown into a set of images, stories and memories of experiences of practising and teaching sustainability and conservation through farming, various forms of gardening, Permaculture work and conservation restoration projects.

These accumulated experiences and images are not untypical of everyday place practices carried out by people in almost all places around the globe, yet accounts able to convey the feel, and speak the language, of this kind of work are few and far between. Polanyi (1958) and Schon (1983) argue that this under-articulation of practice is in part due to the tacit or intuitive nature of this work whereas other authors argue that practice in general constitutes a

form of cultural blind spot in the western world and is generally undervalued as source of learning (Raelin, 2007).

This is a problem of two parts; firstly, practice is under-articulated in comparison to ubiquitous stories/narratives/discourses of conservation and sustainability, yet, secondly these stories of conservation and sustainability, that so inspired me in the 1970s, seem to have remained largely unchanged in those 35 years. Since then periodic waves of conservation concern (Dowie, 1996; Guha, 2000) have continued to shape my life both individually but also as a member of a community of practice (Wenger 1998). These waves of concern have revolved around the themes of loss of biodiversity, ecological systems, habitat and species; of overpopulation, pollution, resource depletion and over-development; of nuclear destruction; of introduced species (pests and weeds); of water and soil quality; of global warming and climate change and so on. Each wave of sustainability and conservation concern, culminating in the present problem of climate change, is very real — causing deep distress.

Despite this deep desire to conserve ecology and to make life sustainable this is generally seen as a losing battle (i.e. Evernden, 1992; Dowie, 1996; Guha, 2000 and by implication Lovelock, 2006; Hamilton, 2010). It is a matter of some frustration that experiences of practitioners working in the conservation and sustainability field do not significantly contribute to discourses that frame, explain and shape conservation and sustainability.

This problem of under-articulation of conservation/sustainability practice is also a problem of academic discipline, epistemology and research methodology. There are examples, in Australia, of such practitioners gaining a degree of public profile. The ABC television program *Australian Story* recently featured Peter Andrews's 'Natural Sequence Farming'. In *Droughts & Flooding Rains* (6 June 2005) and his subsequent book *Back From the Brink: How Australia's landscape can be saved* (2006) several scientists proclaim their admiration and surprise at Andrews's work; a lifetime of focussed, obsessive

observation and experimentation with waterways, paddocks, grasses, weeds and livestock. Andrews turns a range of accepted farming and conservation 'truths' on their heads, challenges farming communities, local government bodies and then the scientific establishment.

Other significant practitioners in the field here in Australia, such as David Holmgren (Permaculture,) (2002), Joan Bradley (Bush regeneration) (1988) and Ken Yeomans (Keyline — soil and water health) (1973) among others, feature in *Ecological Pioneers: A Social History of Australian Ecological Thought and Action* by Stuart Hill and Martin Mulligan (2001). Tim Low (1999, 2001) also provides insight into a practice perspective around issues of introduced species particularly weeds. These are examples of practitioners gaining a degree of publicity and pushing at the edges of their respective fields. This research project attempts to take this further. In this vein it should be noted that Michael Pollan's *Second Nature: A Gardener's Education* (1996) offers an example of work that does successfully combine practice and critical insight.

This thesis grew from a Masters research project for which I conducted interviews with a range of well-educated, motivated and experienced practitioners in the conservation/sustainability field. However, the conclusion reluctantly reached from that research was that it had been naive to assume that the interviewees would be critically reflexive and literate in Social Ecology (i.e. texts such as Hillman, 1995; Hillman & Ventura, 1992; Freire, 1970; Macey, 1991; Tacey, 1995; Schama, 1995 and so on). This was not the case and the sense of my then supervisor Dr John Cameron and I was that the reflective process 'did not go far enough' in terms of problematising the social constructedness of discourses being used.

Davison (2005) found a similar disjuncture between discourse and everyday experience in research using semi-structured interviews with members of environmental groups. Few practitioners in the conservation/sustainability field have an arts/social science perspective or are literate in the texts,

processes and values of social ecology, ecopsychology, sense of place or social sciences. This is because both conversation and sustainability (environmental) education as well as on-ground works tend to be positioned within the empirical positivist domain; a focus that is literalistic and sees the aims and processes of the sustainability/conservation sector as largely self-evident.

My continuing encounters with Social Ecology as taught at the Hawkesbury Campus of the University of Western Sydney offered an epistemological research framework of practice more capable of critical reflexivity and deep learning (Biggs, 2003). Social Ecology is at once a folding together of systems theory (Emery & Trist, 1975; Wright, 1999, 2005; Bawden, 1991, 2005, 2007; Hill, 2004), critical reflection (Friere, 1970; Mezirow, 1981) and transformative learning (Boyd & Myers, 1988; Dirkx, 2000; Cranton, 2006). Within this Social Ecology experience the study of Sense of Place under the lectureship of John Cameron brought focus to participation, reciprocity, experience, emotionality and emergence of place (Cameron, 2002, 2003, 2008). Peter Willis, scholar in residence at one particular research residential, gave insight into the use of autobiography/autoethnography as a particularly appealing research methodology by which practice can be promoted and explored.

Willis's thesis *Inviting Learning: An exhibition of risk and enchantment in adult education practice* (1998) became the model and format used to 'illuminate' (p.179) the 'livedness of actual experience' (p.168) of my conservation/sustainability repertoire of practice. In his thesis Willis argues that practice can be illuminated by adopting an arts-based approach characterised by the use of imagination and expressive method (p. 163). Importantly he argues that personal writing is an exploration rather than a testing of hypothesis (p.178). This thesis differs from Willis's approach in two respects. Firstly the focus is upon place practice, particularly in terms of conservation and sustainability rather than adult education experiences, and secondly, this thesis uses an autoethnographic rather than a phenomenological approach. Essentially though, as with Willis's thesis, this research sets about illuminating practice as a means to improve practice

(p.189).

Through the illumination of practice it is intended that conservation/sustainability discourse be exposed to a degree of contemporary post-structural and deconstructive process. Fry (1994) argues that this is needed as 'environmentalism' (including conservation and sustainability) is a, 'significant but troubled body of work' (p.18). It seems that we are more comfortable with grand narratives (Lyotard, 1979; Gare, 2001) than understanding what it is to try to put conservation and sustainability ideals into place, into practice, day in and day out in specific ecologies, communities and places. According to Alvermann (2000) and Richardson (1997) autobiographical, autoethnographic and critically reflective/reflexive approaches to research allow a different kind of research to be carried out.

These research approaches offer an opportunity to apply the 'practice turn' (Raelin, 2007), that started with social work and education practice, to be applied to the field of conservation and sustainability. This is necessary because as this research has progressed it has become apparent that the stories — discourses — that shape this field are not easy to critique.

Beneath grand narratives that offer comfort (and discomfort), lives are lived and practised in and in-between fragments. I negotiate and alternate between the practical and academia as above, but also, between Europe and Australia, between city and country, between conservation/horticulture and social sciences, between ethics/reason and emotional embodied impulse. Somerville (2007) sees in-betweenness as a liminal state necessary for allowing the emergence of insight and understanding. This liminality is used as part of the thesis process but from the point of view of taking ethical action (conservation, sustainability ...) in the world this kind of postmodern confusion becomes unacceptable (Hil & Brennan, 2004). Further, from the point of view of having integrity in practice, whether pedagogic, political or spiritual this is unsatisfactory. From the perspectives of my personal and professional practices it is time to take stock, to integrate experience into the stories that

navigate my life and work.

I finish this prologue with an example of under-articulation of practice. As I sit here in the relative comfort of my office, today, as with most days, people are working as part of a conservation and community education project that I have been centrally involved in for 15 years. In 35 degrees of heat, often in full sun and energy-sapping humidity, step by step, people are carrying, cutting, weeding, planting, and watering and so on. Repeating actions over and over until difference is made. This is not work that pays much if anything. This is people putting their sustainability/conservation and social ethical stances into action. Cemetery Creek Landcare Project is in the middle of a high profile NSW regional town, on public land; it is successful in achieving its outcomes; it has involved well over \$600,000 in direct funding; 45,000 hours of work; over 1000 people. Not once in 15 years has a researcher or any person from the three tiers of Australian government asked, even in passing, what can be learned from this long-term conservation project. This vitally important point is supported by Davison & Ridder (2006) and Davison & Chapman (2006) who argue that urban environmental care groups are almost entirely undocumented in Australian 'Landcare' literature.

This is more observation than complaint. For me the experiences of carrying out conservation work, of getting involved, getting my hands dirty, engaging with people and places hold richness and joy that I hope I can at least in part convey. This, as with the practice of enacting many other such projects, are barely tapped wells of insight. The aim of this research is to find new images and stories of conservation/sustainability that are more informed by the materiality, physicality, skills and feelings of place and by everyday practice. I look forward to the quiet, momentary joy of understanding that comes when what is sensed and what is understood merge. I finish this prologue with a rhetorical question — is it possible that a place-practice approach to conservation/sustainability would be easier to enact, more effective and more enjoyable than current approaches?

Chapter One — Introduction and Research Methodology

This thesis is a story of place and practice; themes, dilemmas, passions, and concerns and their possible solutions. Behind and beneath this are two driving forces, firstly, a driving desire for an ethical expression of respect for life through sustainability education and conservation craft, and secondly, something we all yearn for — a sense of place in the world.

1.1 Aims and objectives

The aim of this thesis is to learn from a range of personal, professional and academic experiences that relate to an understanding of sustainability, conservation education and craft. Importantly, these are experiences and practices that relate to putting sustainability and conservation ideas and ideals into action. Such experiential and practice-based learning provides both opportunity for personal, professional and academic transformation and an opportunity to critically reflect upon problems of conservation, sustainability. These problems include the fact that firstly, conservation and sustainability appear to be failing to achieve its aims (i.e. Everndon, 1992; Dowie, 1996; Gare, 2001). Secondly, discourses in the areas of sustainability and conservation are poorly defined, under-theorised and ambiguous, beset with dualisms (i.e. Plumwood, 1993) and seemingly resistant and/or oblivious to critique.

While learning from experience and practice may appear as common-sense, in reality this is far from the case. Experiential and practice-based learning requires an approach which is transdisciplinary and interpretive rather than reductionist and empirical. In seeking to build theoretical cogency this thesis develops an understanding of *place practice* as adapted from Michel de Certeau (1984, p.117) that folds together autoethnography, place theory (i.e. Cresswell, 2004; Cameron, 2008 among many others) at the same time as developing a focus upon practice, including Donald Schon's 'repertoire of practice' (1983, p.138). In particular, this thesis explores the author's place practice as a node of, and a means of entry into, the broad and complex network of issues, challenges and discourses relating to the diverse concerns

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of conservation and sustainability. This research approach is used as means to explore the ambiguity, dualism and disjuncture between practice and theory and the apparent resistance to critique that is so frequently evident in discourses of conservation, sustainability and place. In placing emphasis on the personal, particular, emotional, everyday and practiced experiences are positioned as central to learning and research. It is argued that practice has been generally undervalued in relation to the theoretical in modern western culture (Raelin, 2007, p. 496).

As this thesis unfolds three key questions are asked. Firstly, what is my repertoire of place practice? Secondly, how has this place-practice repertoire developed, changed and possibly deepened through time? Lastly, following on from these questions, what are the broader implications from this research for conservation and sustainability discourse and practice? Importantly, this exploration of the author's place practice and critique of associated discourses is undertaken as a contribution to the debate around how to best put sustainability and conservation ideas and ideals into action.

These broad aims are achieved through the the following objectives —

The first objective is to establish a methodological and conceptual framework that allows for the exploration of my repertoire of place practice. This in turn enables the application of 'practice turn' (Raelin, 2007, p. 497) into the domains of conservation and sustainability, ostensibly through an appreciation of encounters of the repertoire of practice. As with any conception of practice it is understood to be characterised experientially by varying degrees of fragmentedness, ambiguity, contradiction, embodiment, routine and strategy.

The second objective is to develop an understanding about what constitutes my place-practice repertoire through expression, writing and presentation of learning *encounters*. These encounters are drawn from a lifetime of practical conservation craft and sustainability (environmental) education experiences as well as an on-going interaction with related texts, conversations, notes,

images and relevant personal memories. The process of creating and expressing the learning encounters involves long-term and iterative processes of remembering and writing culminating in the presentation of stories, poetry and images.

The third objective is to critically reflect upon place-practice encounters. In part this objective is enfolded in the second objective; creation of place-practice encounters and critical reflection run hand-in-hand. The particular focus of this critical reflection is in terms of the encounters' significance for understanding conservation and sustainability issues. This process is intended to be live; opening up the encounters so as to allow possible underlying and hidden patterns, insights, connections, motives, themes, stories and meanings to emerge. The familiar and the taken for granted are questioned and become fractured creating tension in the exploration process. This becomes a process of 'waiting in the chaotic place of unknowing', reflection, critique and 'liminality' (Somerville, 2007). Through this process, possible obstacles or resistance to this critical reflective process can become apparent.

The fourth objective is to draw out understanding, themes and new narratives based on critical reflections upon the place-practice encounters. This 'coming to knowledge' (Willis, 1998) or transformative re-storying is on three interconnected levels: the personal, professional and academic. On a personal level, emergent learning relates to sense of place in the world and the personal ethical expression of the desire for sustainability in some form. On the professional level emergent learnings revolve around the effectiveness of conservation and sustainability education, conservation project management and the importance of craft involved in carrying out projects. Academically, emergent learnings centre on the interrogation of the disjuncture between discourse and practice leading to a process of critiquing and reframing sustainability and conservation discourse.

The fifth and final objective is to draw conclusions and make recommendations to intersecting communities of practice (Wenger 1998). In keeping with the particular focus of this thesis this is a practice and practitioner focussed re-imagining of directions for action in this complex but vitally important field.

In short, this thesis aims to illuminate and interpret the author's place practice thereby problematising tensions between practical experience and the dominant discourse/narratives of the field of conservation and sustainability. The explicit intention is to better understand how to put sustainability and conservation ideas and ideals into practice. The very future of all of our lives may well depend upon this (broader) process!

1.2 Conservation and sustainability context

At the time of writing this chapter in the Australian summer of 2010, issues around sustainability and conservation are largely positioned under the umbrella of climate change and the potentially disastrous damage that this is projected to wreak (Gore, 2006; United Nations, 2007; Garnaut, 2008; Stern, 2008; Homer-Dixon, 2006; Hamilton, 2010, among others). Climate change is seen to be a threat to poor and wealthy nations and communities alike.

In poorer nations weather pattern destabilisation and rising sea levels are expected to lead to a loss of agricultural production, increased poverty and displacement of significant human populations. Developed nations face these same threats as well as the prospect of massively increased levels of attempted migration of refugees to these relatively safe and wealthy places (Salehyan, 2005). Additionally, the projected decline of available oil reserves — Peak Oil (Hirsch, 2005) — combined with measures to restrict carbon emissions — the principal cause of human-induced climate change — are further raising questions about the negative impacts that humanity has on planet Earth and how these can be addressed.

Climate change is also projected to damage already stressed ecosystems, ecological communities and individual species through unnatural movement of

climate belts, altered oceanic currents, temperatures and sea-levels, as well as producing increasingly unpredictable weather events. Some commentators suggest that we are near or have passed the 'tipping point' of no return and the very existence of the human species on planet Earth is at stake (Lovelock 2006, Hamilton 2010).

This very serious scenario requires response through action. The expectation that such a massive social and ecological disaster may be imminent is deeply disturbing to many people. Daily, this issue features as a significant story in newspapers, radio, internet, film, television and other media. In Australia, as in the UK and US political parties are divided over how to frame policies such as the Emissions Trading Scheme. On a larger scale, attempts to take global action on climate change at the 2009 United Nations Copenhagen Climate Change Summit are seen largely to have been a failure (Vidal, Stratton, et al., 2009). Delegates were unable to agree upon common policies for action to be taken and decisions although some degree of consensus was achieved at Cancun, Mexico in 2010.

As real and disastrous as climate change is projected to be, I argue there is nothing that is radically new in the raft of social and ecological concerns that are associated with climate change. Concerns about the degradation of agricultural production, of poverty and population displacement, of marine ecosystem degradation, of ecosystem disturbance and species extinction, indeed of climate and weather — and of conservation and sustainability in general — have been current since the second wave of environmentalism that a range of authors (Dowie, 1996; Guha, 2000, among others) suggest started with the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962.

Although too young to personally experience Carson's warning of pesticide residues entering ecosystems, I vividly remember the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, nuclear power disasters at Chernobyl and Three Mile Island. I read MIT's *Limits to Growth* (Meadows et al., 1972) among other publications. I remember posters depicting rainforest destruction in the Amazon basin as

well as loss of native habitat and introduction of weed and pest species reducing biodiversity here in Australia. Only recently it has come to light that there are vast gyres of toxic plastic debris in each of the major oceans (Marks & Howden, 2008). These are just a few of the litany of social and ecological issues that have come to the fore and persisted during this close to 50-year time period. These sustainability and conservation issues are now largely symbolically positioned under the umbrella of climate change, are profoundly serious, but broadly speaking, not new. I would additionally argue that as climate change is predicated upon predictions and projections there is an appearance given and an implication, that these issues are impending — but they are not; they are, and have been, already occurring for some considerable time.

Sustainability and conservation issues as outlined above have rightfully caused deep alarm and anxiety to individuals and communities at least since the 1960s if not before. In response, individuals and communities have attempted with varying degrees of success, to put into practice, ways of addressing conservation and sustainability concerns. These responses have been many and varied but have included activism, changes to lifestyle (diet, communal living, 'dropping-out' and self-sufficiency), education, teaching, research as well as working on particular applied projects. Around the globe communities of practice have come and gone (Guha, 2000), and been re-established, all with very similar concerns, inspirations, practices, successes and frustrations. However, it appears that lessons that could be learned from these kinds of actions and practices rarely contribute to sustainability and conservation discourse. This may be due in part to pedagogic challenges posed by learning from practice, but more so because sustainability and conservation discourse seem to be resistant to questioning, critique and adaptation.

This research is set in this context of broad-scale and heightened global sustainability concern. Scientists, activists and sections of the media continually warn about the degradation of society and ecology to the point of threatening the very end of all life on earth. This is the worst story ever told

in terms of its capacity to generate existential threat and fear. In this dark context, this research attempts to learn from a set of personal, particular and place-contextual responses to these sustainability concerns. These responses are expressed as sustainability and conservation practice enmeshed in everyday personal and professional life and seen in terms of place practice. This represents a shift in focus from the relative ease (or unease) of idealistic/fatalistic grand narratives, moral imperatives and scientific epistemology to an engagement practice with its attendant complexity (Holling, 2001), messiness (Rootes, 1999; Diani, 1992, 1995) and 'wicked' problems (Rittel & Webber, 1973; Ludwig 2001). However, it is important that practice be engaged with because this is the touchstone by which sustainability and conservation discourse can be appraised.

1.3 Situating self and practice

Practice-based, autoethnographic, autobiographic, critically reflexive research methodologies form part of a significant body of work responding to what Denzin & Lincoln (1994) identify as a crisis of representation between experience and text (Alvermann, 2000). As forms of participatory action research these approaches dismiss notions of research neutrality and objectivity. Objective, distant, positivist and empirical research stances are understood as problematic in areas and approaches of research in which the researcher is seen to be enmeshed in that which is being researched. According to Alvermann (2000) the postmodern dismantling of the notion of neutrality actually demands the presence of 'I' in the text. It is for this reason that it is important to 'situate' the author to make clear the contexts in which the experiences occur (Rose, 1997).

However, in attempting to situate the self/experiences it is important to recognise analytical problems that can arise. Firstly, although it is worthwhile attempting to situate the self or author in terms of social power, as Rose points out (1997, p. 311), it is not always possible to locate or reveal the power relations that constitute our experience. The process of situating the self/experiences is an engagement with slipperiness, ambiguity and

intangibility. However, this process remains central to any research with a practice focus. A second critique of situating authorship comes from postmodern, feminist and other perspectives that see notions of 'self' as problematic. From these perspectives the self is constituted as far less solid, unitary and conscious than generally portrayed and understood in western modernist thought. The approach taken in this research sees the self as relational (Plumwood, 1993, p.154), in flux, composed of fragments (Read, 2003, p.12), images and stories (Dirkx 2001), emotionality (Zeldin, 1995; Damasio, 1995; Porter, 2003) and possessing varying degrees of self-awareness (McLeod, 1997). However, while taking these critiques into account, it also remains important to situate the author.

In situating myself as author and researcher, I could be crudely described as white, male, heterosexual, able-bodied, middle-class, middle-aged, relatively well-educated, part of a family, living in a small country town in rural Australia and employed by a regional university. However, my life is more complex than this. My everyday lived experience is spent partly in the world of practice and partly in the world of theory. I also inhabit both social and environmental disciplinary realms. These are quite different worlds to be negotiated and alternated between. Each of these areas has its own codes, assumptions, culture and epistemologies (Becher & Trowler, 2001). I also inhabit many different communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). These are of family and friends, work associations, Landcare, sustainability and community garden groups, sports, yoga and meditation groups, as well as intellectual, research and seminar groups. Life is lived, practised, in a state of in-betweeness, between multiple sets of values, roles, identities and places. I traverse Australia and Europe, city and country, global and local, as well as public and private domains. Life is complex. This thesis illustrates, explores and critically reflects upon a series of encounters drawn from this life that relate to an appreciation of place practice and its implication for understanding conservation and sustainability issues.

The memories of experiences that constitute my repertoire of practice start

with a childhood spent largely on a farm in Devon in the South West of England. From there my family and I moved to London and then overseas some years later to Singapore, and then Sydney, Australia. Devon's farms and moors have always been, and remain, central to my sense of place in the world. After several unsettled years of alternating between Australia and the UK and between farming and further education I made a living for a decade or so as a Sydney-based market gardener and landscape gardener. From there my family and I moved to the New South Wales mid-north coast town of Bellingen. This move, among other migrations and travel to and from many parts of the world offered me a privileged, globalised life-perspective full of rich cultural diversity, ecologies, landscapes and images. However, on the other hand, these moves were also experiences of personal fragmentation and reformulation of identity, reassessments of personal narratives, often involving feelings of displacement and longing.

The encounters subjected to critical processes in this thesis are thus set within the global and local contexts of my childhood on a Devon farm and surrounding places as well as a series of movements to and from my present locality, the town of Bellingen where I have lived, worked and researched for the last 19 years.

This is a significant amount of time to inhabit a place but Bellingen is not the kind of place that allows one to feel 'settled'. A historical, somewhat mythic, regional town, surrounded by rainforests, rivers and near to beaches, a significant proportion of its population are urban migrants seeking alternative and sustainable lifestyles through a suite of alternative ideas and inspirations. These include yoga, meditation, Permaculture, biodynamic agriculture, Buddhism, paganism, bush regeneration, as well as activism. In this respect this town is typical of many 'alternative' towns around the world, but it is also a particular place with its own characteristics and sometimes hidden history. A large part of this thesis is therefore a story of this place; the themes, dilemmas, passions, and concerns and their on-going search for resolution. These play a central role in this thesis but are also key characteristics of this

place.

From a place theory perspective, it would be possible to suggest that this place, as well as the farm and moors of Devon and other places experienced between, seek expression through me and through this text. In terms of my place practice, here, in Bellingen, I became involved in Permaculture design, consultation and teaching; eco-tourism, bush regeneration and ecopsychology, and importantly, a long-term Landcare project. This project, aiming to regenerate and rejuvenate Cemetery Creek, a creek that runs through the centre of town, constitutes a significant set of experiences; of deep and sustained immersion into a particular place, practice and set of ideas and ideals. Cemetery Creek is a world within a world of ancient rainforest, water, rampant weeds, wood and mud; of people, goodwill and dedication; of frustration and challenge; of story, memory, mystery and difficulty. This is a place and a set of practices that have deeply nourished me but have also forced me to reframe again and again how I think and act. This is not a place that allows settling.

Of all the fragments, feelings, stories and images that situate and constitute me, that make my life; the strongest tensions are, as indicated previously, between practice on the one hand and ideas, ideals, story and theory on the other. These interweaving strands present a tension that runs through and around my repertoire of practice (Schon, 1983). The reading of texts, authors and ideas and ideals invites new and 'imaginal' frameworks (Hillman, 1981; Dirkx, 2001) by which experience can be understood as being to do with 'knowing and reflecting linked to the heart, the seat of desires, dreams and wishes' (Willis, 2008, p. 247).

After an initial early teenage resistance to reading I realised that it allowed my mind to wander (and to wonder), to fantasise and engage with a wider world of ideas, images and stories. This passion for reading, for ideas, was stimulated by high school teachers who introduced me to authors who critiqued and helped me critique the world into which I was emerging. In time,

reading became an important strand in my professional practice particularly in teaching and research. During this time my reading ranged from formal and somewhat arid college texts, technical 'how-to' manuals, exotic novels, sustainability texts, 'new age' and spiritual writings, to social ecology and social science texts when studying, teaching and researching at university.

The tension between theory and practice continues. In my thirties I was immersed in Landcare and Permaculture projects and practices before making an entry into the academic world. Each new set of texts encountered constituted an opening, closing, reframing, problematising and re-imaging of received ideas and working assumptions. In the late 1990s, at the University of Western Sydney, I studied units focusing on sense of place, ecopsychology and critical conservation; I attended various place-based colloquia and found myself drawn into a community of people with passionate interests in these subject areas. At Southern Cross University I have researched and lectured in social sciences, ethics, communication, social welfare field education and was coordinator for the *Breaking the Silence: Re-Thinking Poverty in a Changing World* conference.

I have written and delivered conference and seminar papers on this and related themes, including *From Theory to Practice in Ecotourism* (1997), *Silenced Voices of Poverty* (2003), *Practice as Activism* at the 2004 Sense of Place Tasmania Colloquium, *Face to Face with Sense of Place: Autobiography, Sustainability & W.G. Sebald* (2007) and *Signposts of an Ethical Life* (2008) as part of the Bellingin Institute seminar series, *Deconceptualising Place* at the SCU seminar series and UWS Research Conference both in 2008. At present (2010), I divide my professional time between lecturing at Southern Cross University, teaching practical Conservation Land Management, working with Bellingin Urban Landcare Incorporated, Permaculture design, and carrying out this place- practice research.

However, it is easy to be drawn towards neat and heroic stories of self, but there are other ways to describe lived life. Neat stories can gloss over

unacknowledged messiness, complexity and ordinariness. Here life is experienced liminally, alternating between fragments and roles. Another interpretation of my life would be one of a confused migrant with a farming background who eventually settles in a small country town. He moves between a series of conservation, teaching and research jobs in sectors dominated by short-term funding and contracts. He reaches a time of life when his children have almost become adults and he finds himself at a crossroads. The fragments and encounters of his life are no longer satisfactorily held together or explained by the stories he tells himself and others. The people, places and practices are held in him; in his heart (pers. Com. Peavey, 2001). Years of repeated and everyday conservation and sustainability effort; of weeding, planting, clearing, watering, making and breaking, or explaining, teaching and motivating or conveying understandings of working in places are held in memory, body and place and are now seeking voice. The personal history of practice and experience and the stories told about them no longer seem sufficiently congruent. I have, personally and professionally, come to a 'chaotic place of unknowing' (Somerville, 2007).

Lastly, it is important to situate myself as the autoethnographic, autobiographic researcher at this personal, professional and epistemological crossroads. In describing this experience, I am drawn towards Hillman and Ventura's conception of 'kenosis' (1992, p.102) — a process of emptying out. This emptying is characterised by simultaneous senses of knowing and not knowing. Critical self-reflection enables an opening of personal life to a public institutional process. It reveals the very ordinariness and complexity of everyday life, of relatively unremarkable frustrations and successes to this largely unknown audience. This examination of lived experience and practice is the carrying out of a sometimes painful process of personal, professional and academic transformation; a process of reflection upon alignment of intention and actions taken.

1.4 Research methodology

This research uses an autoethnographic research methodology to explore and demonstrate how my experiences of practice and place have shaped my understanding of the ideas and ideals associated with sustainability and conservation. An autoethnographic approach offers an engagement with a series of stories and experiences, which, simply because of their range, complexity and hiddenness, are most knowable to the subject. This research methodology focuses upon the author's experience as a member of, and in relation to, a series of 'communities' (Wenger, 1998), and 'fields' (Schatzki, 1996), of practice and associated discourses, in and with place. Using Schon's notion of a repertoire of practice (1983, p.138) the author's place practice is explored as a series of encounters as detailed below.

Autoethnographic research is a form of autobiographical research that draws understandings from relationships, situatedness and the context of a person's life experiences (Reed-Danahay, 1997; Alvermann, 2000; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Holt, 2003; Duncan, 2004; Denzin, 2006; Chang, 2008; Ngunjiri, Hernandez & Chang, 2010, among others). This research approach cultivates a critical reflexivity that is fully aware of the positionality of the researcher in the field being researched. According to Willis (1998, p.187) autobiographic research, in general, foregrounds the author thereby creating an opportunity to illuminate (Willis, 1998) practice.

Duncan (2004), an academic and practitioner, explains why an autoethnographic research methodology is appropriate to deepening an understanding of practice of, in her case, media design;

To answer my research question, How do I improve my practice of hypermedia design? It became clear that what I needed to do was externalise my inner dialogue to find and develop fully the central themes and outstanding questions that were emerging. Such a study was essential to undertake before even considering how to design user evaluations more appropriately. In short, I needed a method in which

the lifeworld and internal decision making of the researcher were considered valid and noteworthy. I needed methods that encouraged systematic reflection and ensured scholarly account. I needed a means of analysing evidence that not only organised a record but also enabled discovery. What I needed was autoethnography. (p. 3)

As with Duncan (2004), I chose to use an autoethnographic research methodology following the unsuccessful use of other research approaches. As noted in the prologue, I interviewed a range of highly capable, qualified and astute colleagues for a Master's research project. However, the main research outcome was a realisation that this methodology hadn't worked particularly well because a social science, or social ecological reflexivity had been assumed on behalf of the interviewees. An autoethnographic research method allows for (but also requires) a rigorous critical reflexivity; a consciousness that the researcher is fully situated in that being researched. As I see it, this is the cultivation of a double self-awareness: firstly as Duncan (2004) argues a conscious 'surfacing' (p. 4) of tacit knowledge (Polanyi, 1967) and knowing-in-action (Schon, 1987) but also a methodological and epistemological self-awareness as researcher. It is this insider insight that was missing in the original research.

Autoethnography, according to Ngunjiri, Hernandez and Chang (2010),

'is a qualitative research method that utilises data about self and context to gain an understanding of the connectivity between self and others' (p.1).

It encompasses, or is associated with, postmodern 'blurred genres' (Jones 2005, p. 765) of narrative and autobiographic and research approaches (Alvermann 2000). According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994) these form part of the fourth and fifth 'moments' of qualitative research, namely 'research, of crises of representation and legitimation' and experimental writing and participatory research (Holt 2003, p.3). Denzin (2006) and Anderson (2006)

trace autoethnography back to analytic ethnologies of the Chicago School of sociology; to people, 'who knew how to connect biography and social structure'. This was a movement from traditional anthropological descriptions of others' cultural lives from *outside*; to descriptions of culture from *inside*. Nevertheless, autoethnographic studies are often studies of lived emotional experiences of social marginality and challenges of lived life; depression, grief, illness as well experiences of cultural marginalisation in educational institutions (Ngunjiri, Hernandez & Chang, 2010).

Autoethnographic research approaches vary in degrees of emphasis upon 'graphy' (story), 'ethno' (culture), and 'auto' (self) (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). However, the principle divergence within the field of autoethnography is between evocative and analytical autoethnography (Anderson, 2006; Denzin, 2006). This thesis tends towards evocative autoethnography. In describing evocative autoethnography Denzin invokes the works of Richardson and St Pierre (2005) and Pelias (2004) among others, 'who write from the heart' (p.422); writing that is unashamedly emotional, and that may even 'break your heart' (Behar, 1996, pp.161-177). Emotionality, brought in from Cartesian exile, allows me to remember, write and learn from a series of experiential encounters that *are* often deeply emotional; of migration, exile and homecoming, garden-making, food-growing, traveling to and from special places, of working with people and communities, and with inspiration, discontent, depression, of encounter with unresolved and unacknowledged brutal colonial process held in the landscape (but that would be telling ...).

As previously noted, I see myself at a crossroads of practice; where on the one hand I have accumulated a repertoire of practice — built up over many years of active conservation, sustainability, education, management, craft research and teaching. However, there is growing sense of unease about this repertoire that can be located in a combination of personal embodied place and craft-based knowledge but also in academic critical knowledge. The unease comes from the growing tension, to the point of disjuncture, between practices and discourse. This crisis of practice is both a source of frustration

but also of joy; frustration that practice is denied as a site of learning; joy derived from the privilege of being able to reflect upon this repertoire of place practice that has been, and is, so central to my personal, professional and academic lives.

This repertoire of practice, and attendant disjuncture and contradictions, is explored by critically examining the relevance and meaning of particular *encounters* through various stages of my lived experience. These encounters are *reflections-in-action* (Schon, 1983) of feelings, memories, images, experiences, stories, skills and routines. According to Malouf (2008) we learn from experience — actions ‘repeated a million times over’ (p. 68) — and from ‘single threshold moments’ glimpsed (p.12), the reasons for which are not fully known. Camus talks of the few key images of childhood that shaped his life (Camus, 1994). Each identified encounter is a significant engagement with an understanding, issue, image, story or feeling — fragments of practice, committed to memory, writing and/or photographs consciously/unconsciously bookmarked for future reference and reflection.

Importantly, memorised encounters are seen, rather than being things of the past, as held in the present in service of the future (Hampl, 1982). According to Weiland (2001), memories are key impressions, feelings, images and understandings that constitute the core of current identity. The process of remembering, writing and critical reflection, of ‘reframing memory’ (pers. com. Willis, 2004), is to question the personal stories and social discourses that frame or forget these memorised encounters (Haug, Crawford, et al., 1987). However, as argued previously, practice is undervalued and under-articulated in modern western culture (Raelin, 2007, p. 496). The western reader expects to be presented (entertained?) with romantic and epic narratives (Gare, 2001) but the promotion of practice as a site of learning is rarely that. Prominent practice theoretician, Pierre Bourdieu, describes this process as the promotion of the ‘idiosyncratic to the emblematic’ (1999, p. ix), whereby ordinary, everyday and routine encounters of lived life become the focus. Such an approach requires the development of sympathy for, and analytical

engagement with, the importance of everyday practice. This is not something easily done; the gradual and evocative process of remembering, writing and critical reflection of encounters has taken many years.

As autoethnographic and autobiographic research methodologies have become more common in social research they have also met with criticism (Alvermann, 2000; Sparkes, 2002; Holt, 2003; Denzin, 2006 among others). Alvermann (2000) identifies three potential pitfalls associated with autoethnographic/autobiographic research. Firstly, this genre of research can be an opportunity for narcissism, self-obsession or self-promotion. Secondly, researchers unable to bear the discomfort of 'unknowing' and complexity of experience can become subject to the allure of simple, neat and romanticised stories. Thirdly, Alvermann identifies the problem of relativism; the need for sufficient verifiability of the experiences and stories being written and researched. Holt (2003) argues that concerns about autoethnographic research methodologies are rooted in its deviance from many of the tenets of mainstream qualitative research. In his attempts to publish autoethnographic research, Holt encountered concerns from his peers similar to those outlined by Alvermann above; in his case concerns about narcissism, emotionality and generalisability. These and similar concerns about autobiographic research reinforce the importance of critical process because the reframing of personal memory, experience and practice needs to be much more than simply remembering and writing.

This research, particularly being a thesis, attempts to find or apply something new in a scholarly setting. Having already identified methodological, epistemological and practical challenges that tend to impede critical reflection in the field of conservation and sustainability, this research embraces a research methodology that has the potential to break new ground. To see autoethnographic research as indulgent or narcissistic is a misunderstanding. Such self-aware research constitutes an opening and emptying of personal self to public process; the lived experience of which is anything but self-indulgence. As Holt asks, what is so offensive about the self in research?

(2003) Concerns about autoethnographic research are best directed at outmoded, under-problematised expressions of 'self' that understand the human self as independent, self-making, conscious and choice making (Tarnas, 1991; Hillman & Ventura, 1992; Plumwood, 1993). The use of this research methodology is an epistemic position. The exploration of personal experience (Nelson, 1994; Malouf, 2008) is not narcissistic in intent but is used as a means to learn about broader place practice.

Fundamentally, this critically reflective approach goes beyond surface reflection to unearth hidden meanings and to learn from, or be transformed by, reflection upon experience. This is more than merely interrogating a text — a common understanding of critical reflection. Of particular interest is an extensive body of literature around reflective learning, critical reflection, experiential learning and transformative learning that goes back to Dewey (1933), Habermas (1971), Freire (1970), Brookfield (1990, 1995) and Mezirow (1975, 1981, 1991) that aims to liberate, transform or emancipate (Cranton, 2002, 2006) the learner. How this occurs through critical reflective learning varies according to different authors but it is generally accepted that this is not a linear process (Dirkx, 1998).

According to Clark (1993) and Dirkx (1998) this body of literature is characterised by a divide between rational and imaginal approaches (similar to autoethnography) and can be seen to comprise four streams that follow authors Freire (1971), Mezirow (1975, 1981, 1991), Daloz (1986), Daloz, Keen et al. (1996) and Boyd (1991) Boyd & Myers (1988). Freire's work, originating in Brazil emphasises *conscientisation* and *praxis* developing *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*; effectively politicising workers. The work of Mezirow and Daloz are both set in the context of adult education in the US, Mezirow emphasising meaning making as a rational process whereas Daloz tends toward a holistic, metaphor-based approach to transformative learning. Lastly, Boyd works with a depth psychology framework that draws strongly upon imagination and image. This approach is in accord with Dirkx (2000) and Nelson (1997) who see such transformative learning as being characterised by

making the unconscious conscious. According to Willis (2007) this practice of transformative learning is an emotional experience of 'becoming different' (p. 358). In this thesis this transformation combines a critical reflective approach, understood to be an ideological process of unveiling and unlocking social power arrangements (hooks, 1994), with one of image, imaginal process (Hillman, 1981) and interpretation.

A range of critical processes are applied in this research. Firstly, the very act of subjecting these encounters to public scrutiny changes their nature and meaning. Suddenly, they are, as it were, out in the open and out before a critical gaze. This is an emptying of self described by Hillman and Ventura (1992) as 'kenosis', of an emptying of doubts, knowing and unknowing. This emptying of self is also a promotion or acknowledgment even, of the personal emotional realm (Plumwood, 1993). To Bourdieu (1999) this is the promotion of the 'idiosyncratic to the emblematic. Subjected to critical gaze the meaning-making stories that glue these encounters and fragments together into personal, professional and academic narratives tend to fall away. What then becomes apparent in the absence of these narratives is that life experiences are characterised by discontinuity, contradiction, fracturedness and incoherence. In time the process of re-storying, of (re)authoring, one's life story weaves new meaning through the fragments of life and identity. This is not necessarily, or likely to be a smooth process (McLeod, 1997; White, 1995).

The second critical process used in this research is the deliberate use of unsettling strategies, and the cultivation of dissonance through, firstly, the use of images inspired by the work of W.G. Sebald, and secondly encouragement of being patient with 'unknowing' (Somerville, 2007). In this regard the works of W.G. Sebald, for example, *Rings of Saturn* (2002) and *On the Natural History of Destruction* (1999) are of interest both for the tone and intention of his writing and for his evocative use of images. Sebald's writing wanders through landscapes and landscapes of memory to unearth deeper understandings of grief, history, place, as well as migration and placelessness.

In his obituary, Homberger (2001) argues that 'Sebald invented a new literary form — part novel, part memoir, part travelogue'. He explores the cultural and psychological constraints that hide these deeper understandings by meandering obliquely but inexorably towards feeling the difficult collective emotional understandings denied by culture, history and political psychology, towards denied beauty, sadness, terror and grief. There is no attempt to mimic Sebald's unique writing style here. However, the intentionality, subject matter and images of his works are of direct relevance to this thesis.

This thesis borrows Sebald's technique of weaving grainy black and white images through the text. These personal images that acquire their meaning from the surrounding text fulfill four functions. Firstly, each image is an encounter in itself. According to Dirx (2000) and Boyd (1991) our deepest ways of knowing are based upon images that tend to run deep in memories of lived experience. The use of images is a deliberate form of evocative pedagogy (Willis, 2008). Secondly the images act as a reminder that outside the process of reframing memory these practices and places are real-life — existing irrespective of processes of academic inquiry and representation. Thirdly, the images create a dissonance between the known and the unknown; emotion and reflective process; between text and image; between the present and past; and in so doing allow an exploration beneath 'cliché' (Sebald, 1999, p. 25) and 'socially aligned repression' (p. 83). Fourthly, the images constitute a form of verification of the encounters; locating the place aspects of the encounters and conveying a sense of their atmosphere (Wylie, 2007).

The third critical process applied to the emerging encounters and themes is through dialogical engagement with relevant literature. This process interrogates the encounters in the context of dialogue and literature of academic and other communities of practice and interpretation. In bringing practice to literature and posing the thesis questions as per Chapter One the encounters and the literature are juxtaposed. Further, in making these encounters of place-practice central to the thesis process — an essay format — this repertoire of practice is placed into a process from which conclusions

must necessarily be drawn.

The fourth critical process underpinning the analysis of encounters is the actual practical nature of the subject matter. The focus of this research is not only conceptual; despite the challenges inherent in understanding such ethics, stories and experiences — these are perhaps easy compared with dealing with the particularity and power of real-world ecologies, communities and places. This is a key problem with conventional environmental education approaches to conservation/sustainability, i.e. that discourse remains untested until it is embodied and practised. This research process has been under way for over 10 years; processes of remembering, reflecting, writing, reading have been co-terminal with practice in real projects and places and dialogue within communities of practice during that time. These have been intensive applied processes of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action (Schon, 1983). Emerging from this process will be new stories for my repertoire of practice and responses to broader research questions posed. I wait at this crossroads of practice — personal, professional and academic — emptying and unknowing. The final word in this section goes to Clifford Geertz (1983) who stated that researchers need to be their 'own toughest critics'. This is my life and my research. It is my intention to be as rigorous as possible.

1.5 Anticipated themes and questions

In terms of both the methodology and the questions posed, the thesis is designed to be exploratory and disruptive as well as imaginative and creative. This is a process that entails the researcher spending a considerable amount of time and energy in Somerville's liminal 'chaotic place of unknowing' (2007). However, it is possible to anticipate some of the issues, themes and tensions that are expected to emerge through the research process. Emergent themes can be seen in terms of personal, professional and academic levels of inquiry and practice.

Underpinning this research is a personal story characterised by issues of place, ethical stance and embodiment. That there is such a personal drive behind the

desire to enact sustainability is not unusual in this sector. There is often a personal calling behind sustainability teaching, research and practice. For me this research provides an opportunity to explore how my senses of place and placelessness have shaped my sustainability practice in terms of meaning, purpose, desire and intentionality. My place connections and disconnections are in relation to particular places so it can be asked what drew me to, and what have I learned in Australia, from encounters with Bellingen and its 'alternative' culture and with Aboriginality? Similarly, what drew me to, and what have I learned from the farms and moors of childhood Devon in terms of connection to place cultivated lands and the wild moors? Clearly such issues of place identity, and belonging are nearly always intimate and powerful.

A second anticipated personal theme revolves around the role of values, ethics and integrity of practice. Much of my life has been, as I see it, shaped by the desire to put into practice an ethical stance of sustainability. The desire to understand the ethical and sustainable has captured the imagination of several generations (e.g. see Dowie, 1996). What can be learned from experiences of challenge, of attempting to enact ethical ideals of sustainability? It should also be asked are there other, less altruistic motives behind this ethical stance?

As a professional sustainability educator, project manager and craftsperson this reflexive process offers an opportunity to deepen my understanding of my work practice. Is the first task to become more familiar with my professional place-practice repertoire? What is it? Have the years, decades of focus and effort dedicated to sustainability teaching, and conservation craft been worthwhile and effective? Although it feels somewhat churlish to critique sustainability and conservation given the global context, sustainability and conservation projects have been carried out in particular places and communities around the globe for decades and we are now in a position to learn from these projects. What can be learned from the complexity, messiness and ambiguity of real-life sustainability and conservation projects in terms of how they are conceived, enacted and appraised?

In particular, this research is an opportunity to learn from contradictions and tensions inherent in such a professional practice. What can be learned from the routine and the physicality of the work carried out amidst materiality, atmosphere, stories and memories of and in places themselves? What can be learned from intimate engagement with discourses and narratives of sustainability and conservation (environment, nature, ecology ...) particularly in relation to practical projects, real communities and in particular places? Lastly, working at this coalface of the conservation and sustainability sector sometimes involves dealing with contradictory roles, objectives or concerns — for instance between conservation and growing food, or ecological restoration and a range of social justice concerns. These professional issues are explored as the thesis unfolds.

The third layer of inquiry and learning is academic and centers on the disjuncture between practice and discourse. Given that practice tends to be undervalued as a site of learning a series of questions emerge: Why is practice under-valued and under-articulated? How can practice be expressed or illuminated? What is it that embodied practice can offer to theoretical knowledge in relation to place, conservation and sustainability? It is anticipated that the exploration of sustainability and conservation practice will act as a valuable touchstone to the discourses/narratives of the field. This being the case, what fresh stories, experiences and feelings can be revealed through the use of a place-practice framework?

Clearly, many of the emergent research themes will weave between these three levels of inquiry. Basic questions run across all three levels: what is really meant by sustainability? What are we conserving and for whom? It is also worth bearing in mind that such a disruptive and emergent research methodology should also reveal unexpected themes. All these themes and questions anticipated or otherwise, ultimately lead to the question of 'what next?' in relation to these conservation, sustainability and place issues that have been so important to me personally, professionally and as a researcher.

1.6 Significance of this research

This research aims to understand the problem of disjuncture between discourse and practice in the field of conservation and sustainability. Specifically, practice seems under-articulated in comparison to ubiquitous discourses of conservation and sustainability that appear to have remained largely unchanged since Carson's seminal text *Silent Spring* (1962). A range of commentators (e.g. Lovelock, 2006; Hamilton, 2010) and official bodies (i.e. United Nations, 2007; Garnaut, 2008; Stern, 2008) are warning that climate change, and associated issues and concerns are fast approaching, or already have, passed 'tipping point'. Yet, much of the broader community seems at a loss as to how to respond to these dire warnings, despite the fact that for several decades, practitioners have been attempting to put sustainability ideas into action. These experiences, this practice, represent significant wells of untapped insight. Accordingly, this research explicitly attempts to bridge the disjuncture between theory and discourse as well as addressing other associated dualisms and dichotomies. It is a matter of some concern to me both as a practitioner and as a person deeply concerned by sustainability and conservation that experiences of practitioners working in this field do not seem to significantly contribute to the discourses that frame, explain and shape conservation and sustainability.

This research is an application of the 'practice turn' (Raelin, 2007) to conservation and sustainability via a framework of place practice. Practice theory with its origins in feminist, Marxist and postmodern studies has spread from social work and education fields out to other disciplines 'across epistemic space' (Postill, 2009). In this light, practice is seen as a blind spot in western culture whereby ordinary, unremarkable and repeated experiences are undervalued and under-articulated. Through this approach the focus moves away from grand narratives (discourses) to the everyday, embodied, emotional and enacted. In this thesis the practice of widespread, continuous, applied, hands-on, coalface experience is promoted using Schon's conception of a repertoire of practice (1983). This repertoire is an accumulation of experiences from a wide range of applied situations in which there has been a

long-term iterative engagement with materials, processes, authors, stories, assumptions, attitudes, emotions, skills, people, life-forms and life-systems, and practices of working with places.

Place practice offers a fresh framework within which to appraise the author's experiences and to critique the broader field of sustainability and conservation. A key characteristic of place theory, in general, is that it situates the participant as an integral part of the place of their experience. This is a marked departure from standard theoretical frameworks of conservation and sustainability that suffer unproblematised Cartesian dualism that in various ways positions humans, researchers and workers effectively *outside of place*. Put simply, a place theory framework acknowledges people, communities, values, stories and above all has room to accommodate practice both as embodiment and as theoretical position. (The theoretical framework of place practice is further developed in Chapter 2).

In Australia there are examples of conservation and sustainability practice and practitioners gaining a degree of public profile. As mentioned above Andrews (2005, 2006), Holmgren (2002), Bradley (1988), Yeomans (1973) and Low (1999, 2001) are examples of practitioners gaining a degree of publicity. They are pushing at the edges of their respective fields by working at the interface between practice and theory/discourse. These are exceptions in a field that generally tends to be reflected upon within the positivist domain in which narratives remain largely unproblematised and the goals of conservation and sustainability are seen as being self-evident. The consequence of this is the disjuncture between practice and theory/discourse. This research attempts to push place practice outside this epistemological constraint, combining practice and critical insight via an autoethnographic research methodology.

Michael Pollan in *Second Nature* (1996) is a remarkable, if uncommon, example of critically reflected practice in this field. Pollan sets about learning from the experiences of an applied gardening and conservation project set in New England in the United States. However, Pollan quickly encounters a

'cognitive dissonance' (p. 2) between what he knows and what he needs to know to carry out the practical aspects of the project:

Everybody wr(ites) about how to *be* in nature, what sorts of perceptions to have, but nobody about how to *act* there. Yet the gardener, unlike the naturalist, has to, indeed *wants* to, act.

Now it is true that there are countless volumes of practical advice available for the perplexed gardener, but I felt the need for some philosophical guidance as well. Before I firebomb a woodchuck burrow, I like to have a bit of theory under my belt. Yet for the most part, Americans who write about nature and don't write about the garden — about man-made landscapes and the processes of their making. This is an odd omission for although gardening may not at first seem to hold the drama or grandeur of, say, climbing mountains, it is gardening that gives most of us our direct and intimate experience of nature — its satisfactions, fragility and power. (p. 3-4)

Pollan's 'cognitive dissonance', as he it describes in the passage above is the disjuncture that this research focuses upon. This research forms part of an emergent transdisciplinary and critical wave of rethinking in this broad field of conservation, sustainability and place studies.

1.7 Navigation of the thesis

This exploration of the author's repertoire of place practice is undertaken as a node of, and a means of entry into, a field or community of practice. It is undertaken to better understand the practices of putting conservation ideas and ideals into action. As this process deals with real-life complexity, ambiguity and uncertainty the reader is asked to bear this in mind. A deliberately cultivated sense of uncertainty is kept open for long periods to allow a deep engagement with the critical reflective process. This is seen to reflect the way practitioners really operate in the day-to-day world as a way of cultivating repertoires of practice (Schon, 1983).

At times this work is critical of conservationists and people undertaking sustainability projects and campaigns. Such criticism is undertaken from within the field and is intended as a means to strengthen processes of putting conservation and sustainability ideals and ideas into action. Notwithstanding the aim of this thesis is to turn a range of accepted 'truths' on their heads. The focus upon both place and practice is meant to be unsettling yet imaginative and aims at finding new interpretations and solutions.

The chapters are arranged as follows. After the Abstract and Prologue, Chapter 1 identifies the aims and objectives; the conservation context; the situatedness of the author; the research methodology; anticipated themes of the thesis, and advice as to how best to read the thesis. Chapter 2 develops the theoretical underpinning of *place practice* being used to frame the encounters and to counter some the dualisms, and other identified obstacles to critical reflective process.

Chapters 3-8 are structured by place-practice encounters interwoven by a critically reflexive narrative. The encounters are presented in the forms of stories, poetry and images that constitute my repertoire of place practice. These encounters are the result of many years work remembering, collecting and recollecting family documents, diaries, discussions and photographs: a process of reflection *in* and *on* action (Schon, 1983). As presented in this thesis the encounters have already been arranged from the relatively chaotic and unconscious process into chapters by chronology and theme. Slowly structure and coherence have emerged aggregating encounters into chapters.

Chapter 3 goes back to experiences of childhood and youth. In fitting with place literature these experiences set up senses of place connection and disconnection. The resulting 'divine discontent' is seen to drive much of my professional and personal life. This chapter culminates in an awkward arrival in Australia. Chapter 4 describes a decade of experience of being a gardening tradesman; of embodied learning, materiality, physicality and design. Chapter 5 draws from experiences of moving to, and an immersion into, an

'alternative' town; living out a range of practices of sustainability and conservation. The dominant theme of Chapter 6 is deep involvement in an ambitious community-based Landcare project at Cemetery Creek; of what it is to attempt to put ideas and ideals into practice in a particular place and community. Chapter 7 follows Landcare and other experiences, finding that an appreciation of ecopsychology, sense of place and the challenges posed by Cartesian dualism are vital to the field. It also focuses upon experiences of teaching, community education and 'eco-messages' and suggests that they are sometimes counter-productive. Chapter 8 takes this further; socio-economic and colonial practices are seen to be dominant factors that shape sustainability, conservation and place. Experiences emerging are seen to be moments of hope and reclamation amidst a larger picture of struggle and loss.

By bringing these place-practice encounters from under-articulation and the personal/collective unconscious to the public domain they are changed in nature. Subjected to an extensive process of exposure, critical appraisal, thematisation and extensive dialogue with literature, the encounters no longer have the feel of being so personal. In perhaps a Buddhist sense they become distant and loosened from the personal and collective narratives that previously held them together. At the end of each of Chapters 3-8 place-practice changes are summarised.

Chapter 9, the concluding chapter, addresses the research method and the underpinning methodology of place practice and draws together the emergent themes from Chapters 3-8. It then comes to a series of conclusions and recommendations about place practice in relation to conservation and sustainability.

While this practice-based research generally aims to explore and describe practice, an argument is built through the thesis. With the benefit of hindsight, the changes in the repertoire of practice can be followed, explained and learned from. Themes emerge that constitute a deepening of practice. This does not have the range of rhetoric of a climate change report, nor the iconic

vividness of a wildlife documentary, because this is the stuff of practice on the ground and in the community. This is a shift from the relative ease of rhetoric — to literally moving earth.

In keeping with the practice-based research, autobiographical, emergent and unfolding nature of the research, literature is embedded throughout the thesis. It is used in the Prologue and Chapters 1 and 2 to explain and underpin methodological and theoretical underpinning of the thesis. It is found in Chapters 3-8 as encounters with literature that contributed to my developing place practice as well as being the basis of the critical reflective process that weaves through the encounters. Finally, literature plays a central role in the concluding Chapter 9.

In summary this thesis aims to reveal, unfold and explore while writing. The aim is to avoid a document that merely justifies the past or illustrates present values and beliefs. The aim is to create a process from which something new can emerge by writing about possible patterns, motivations, insights, feelings, and connections. These are to some extent unknown, yet to be unraveled, imagined and critically reflected upon in this research and writing process. Before that, however, it is important to become clearer as to what constitutes *place practice* and why this theoretical framework is so important.



Chapter Two — Theorising Place Practice

By exploring the experiential links between sustainability, conservation and action, with a particular focus on the disjuncture between practice and discourse, this chapter seeks to build the foundations of a fresh theoretical approach — that of place practice. By focusing on place practice as a means of overcoming the dualisms and dichotomies that disconnect, distance and dominate the fields of conservation and sustainability I seek to foreground the critical importance of grounded experience in everyday encounters of personal and professional life. Current theoretical approaches, primarily with a positivist orientation, tend to deny the possibility of learning from experience and practice. This, I argue, renders conservation and sustainability discourse inured from critique, adaptation and strengthening. This chapter explains why current sustainability and conservation theorising is problematic and proceeds to elucidate a theoretical framework that embraces place practice.

2.1 Problems with sustainability and conservation discourse

Fry (1994) offers an incisive critique of many of the tenets of sustainability and conservation theorising. He suggests that in order to address the ecological crisis these tenets need to be redesigned (p. 9). Environmentalist authors, for instance, Paul Ehrlich and David Suzuki, are seen to have 'done an important job in getting the environmental crisis into the minds of millions of people' however, says Fry (p. 20), this represents a 'significant but troubling body of work'. For Fry, the challenge of the ecological crisis is to problematise 'popular and populist' environmentalism (p. 20). Specifically, he considers this body of work as:

- 1) Generative of profiles of problems that so often create disablement through fear or fatalism.
- 2) Rest(ing) on positivist picturing that carries a great deal of authority and negates uncertainty — 'facts' are loaded with the claim of scientific and deterministic truth when they are often

projections, fictions, or abstractions, lifted from their relational conditions. A corrective faith in science and more 'nature aware' mind set of modernity is retained while at the same time there is also an appeal to romantic and idealistic solutions, this often via an attachment to an unreconstituted spirituality. More crudely one can say much of this writing is scientistic whilst being culturally crude.

- 3) Relying upon gestural rhetoric while slogans and grand goals so often stand in for a detailing of the means of action. (p. 20)

Fry further critiques this body of work as being 'under-informed by contemporary post-structural and deconstructive theory' (p.18). Put simply, the language and stories, the discourse, of this body of work, are themselves insufficiently problematised. Although Fry was writing in 1994, I argue that this critique remains as valid as ever in relation to contemporary conservation and sustainability discourse.

Importantly, this critical stance is not aimed at the intentionality or deeply held concerns that characterise and motivate conservation and sustainability endeavors but at the discourses that dominate the field. The critique developed here comes from within the field; the aim of which is to find ways to more effectively put conservation and sustainability ideas and ideals into action. This problematising of discourse is not a denial of the materiality of the world before and outside of discourse (Spretnak, 1997). However, discourses of the field are powerful and 'troubling' (op. cit). Myerson in *Ecology and the End of Postmodernity* (2001) argues, somewhat provocatively, that 'ecology' (sustainability, conservation, environmentalism) constitutes a grand narrative, a force and a re-assertion of modernist thought displacing, and confining to history radical postmodern possibilities and 'small narratives'. Ecology thus becomes a dominant discourse to the point of creating an 'Ecopathology of Everyday Life' (p. 52) in which any and every small daily event reverberates with the menace of the next apocalyptic ecological catastrophe. The end-of-all-life-on-Earth as imminent, as stated previously, is the worst story ever

told. It says that everything that we dearly cherish may well end, unnaturally, soon and be self-inflicted by humanity. Myerson's provocative writing highlights the power that narratives/discourses of 'ecology' (environmentalism, sustainability, conservation, among other terms — see below) carry. Furthermore, the small everyday narratives of life experience/practice are rendered powerless and meaningless in the face of the dominance of this discourse. For the practitioner in the field this is deeply frustrating since not only is everyday life coloured, shaped and even controlled, but the process of critical reflection upon professional practice (Schon, 1983, 1987) becomes difficult to the point of being almost impossible.

This disjuncture between discourse and practice in the field of conservation and sustainability acts to emasculate reflective process. It must be asked: how do we learn from practice? Further, how does practice get improved? This is of broader concern because, as a range of commentators argue (see for example: Everndon, 1992; Dowie, 1996; Gare, 2001), present approaches to conservation and sustainability can be seen to be not working as concerns over global ecological issues appear to escalate. It is important to be clear about why conservation and sustainability discourse are immune to critique and consequently reflection upon experience/practice is so difficult. Four problems are outlined below.

Critique has been difficult because such discourses have been historically associated with campaigning backed up by a call to science. This background of moral positioning (see also Davison & Chapman, 2006) based upon science sees conservation and sustainability discourses as reflecting the imperative to immediately respond to perceived crises; moral outrage that such crises are occurring; but firmly within 'scientistic' positivist territory (Fry, 1994, p.18). The assertion of a collective adversarial position grounded in a moral imperative, has made these discourses very powerful indeed. Potential critiques are easily brushed off — 'there is no time', 'there is no higher moral position', '(anyway) it's the truth!' as well as 'you are against conservation/sustainability/ecology'. This adversarial, campaign-based

approach is understandable considering the historical marginality of sustainability and conservation concerns, but it does act to make reflection and critique profoundly challenging. This is the kind of experience that prompted Cameron to look to place studies as a new theoretical and perceptual framework (2008, p. 283). Like Cameron, Fry is highly suspicious of 'slogans and grand goals', 'scientific and deterministic truth' and 'gestural rhetoric', 'often stand(ing) in for a detailing of the means of action' (Fry, 1994, p. 20).

A second significant obstacle to reflection/critique in/of this field is that it suffers at the hands of largely unrecognised and unproblematised Cartesian dualism. As Fry argues, this field is critical of, yet retains, a 'mindset of modernity' (p. 20) which is replete with Cartesian dualisms. In *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (1993), Plumwood sees these dualisms as 'hyperseparation' (p. 72, p.117) of mind from body, public from private, rationality from emotionality, patriarchy from 'other' and of course humanity from everything else. Evernden in *The Social Construction of Nature* (1992) calls this Cartesian division a 'dangerous fiction' (p. 99, p.103). In one sense this *is* a fiction; these dualisms are actually not the case. Mind/body, public/private, rationality/emotion and humanity and the rest of the world form an interactive, overlapping, flowing, pulsing and looping ecology. But in another sense Cartesian dualism is no fiction; it is an immensely powerful, barely conscious, psychological template.

In *A Psyche the Size of the Earth* (1995), Ecopsychologist James Hillman argues that modernity and the western mind are at the mercy of the 'cut' (in Roszak et al., 1995, p. xxiii) of dualism. Hillman's 'cut' (1995) and Plumwood's 'hyperseparation' (1993) are a denial of the embodied, the emotional, and the personal in human experience as well as all other species, ecosystems and places. This is the creation of relationships whereby what is 'cut' is the importance (existence even) of the Other — body, emotion, the personal and all other life forms and forces. This Cartesian arrangement is an elevation of an attitude over everything that is emotional and embodied. According to

Plumwood (1993, p.157), Cartesian dualism is the language, conceptualisation and relationality of colonialism. It is a sanctioning of particular kinds of knowledge — themselves the processes and products of colonialism. This is, by definition, beyond a mere conceptual problem, or an interesting academic conundrum. As with working with a Zen Koan this is a challenge that cannot be grasped through intellectual process alone but must necessarily also involve intuition, body, senses, images, feelings, sense of place and a Zen-like suspicion towards language.

A third issue that restricts critical reflection in the field is that of the apparent interchangeability of different and rarely defined terms. So far in this section alone, the terms 'conservation', 'sustainability', 'environmentalism', 'ecology' have been used. Each is a widely used, powerful, evocative term, often used without meaningful attempt at definition. Each has its own flavour, contested meanings, implications and baggage. The terms 'sustainability' and 'conservation' are loaded with assumptions rarely explored or examined in the field. Questions can be asked; *sustain* what, for whom and how? *Conserve* what, for whom and how? Similar problems are associated with the terms 'environment', 'nature' and 'landscape'. As previously mentioned, any talk of 'environment' risks falling into Cartesian problems of casting humanity as above, outside or other than 'nature' (Plumwood, 1993). But by the same token, 'nature' carries a range of meanings and baggage. According to Everndon (1992), the "nature" that we hasten to defend' (p. xi) is also an 'ambiguous term used as justification for a variety of social causes' (p. 6) 'especially keeping status quo' (p. 9), and to 'justify a range of activities' (p. 15). In *Landscape and Memory*, Schama (1995) vividly shows the justificatory use of 'nature' for political and ideological reasons, the most disturbing of which was the use of the forest myth in Nazi Germany (p. 81). Evernden's argument continues, 'nature (is seen) as the norm' and 'that pollution of nature is moral as well as literal' (pp. 5-6); casting 'humans as unnatural outsiders' (p. 21). This line of argument is perhaps most famously expressed by McKibben in *The End of Nature* (1989) whereby nature is that not touched by humans. Clearly this is not a useful framework for the exploration of

conservation and sustainability practice/enactment as it disengages from the complex world of lived experience.

To this whistle-stop tour of baggage-laden, often interchangeable, rarely defined terms in this field ('conservation', 'sustainability', 'environmentalism', 'ecology', 'environment, and 'nature'...) can be added 'landscape'. Cresswell in *Landscape and the Obliteration of Practice* (2003) argues that using the term 'landscape' is difficult as it has 'baggage' that is burdened by history and inclined towards being seen as fixed, visual, material and authoritative (pp. 269-271). Far from being 'science' this set of apparently freely interchangeable terms constitutes a semantic, historical, ideological, and ecopsychological labyrinth. Again, Fry's critique is useful. Claims are 'of scientific and deterministic truth when they are often projections, fictions, or abstractions, lifted from their relational conditions' (1994, p. 20). Rarely are these terms thoroughly defined or situated.

The latter is perhaps explained, in part, by the fourth challenge facing attempts to critique the tenets of this field. The dominant narratives that constitute discourses in the fields of conservation, sustainability and so forth are for many people, deeply cherished stories. Such stories of conservation and sustainability (nature, ecology, environment, landscape, wilderness and so on) often tend to be characterised by idealism, romanticisation, and perhaps 'unreconstituted spirituality' (Fry, 1994, p. 20). These stories, with their roots in history, and probably the deepest recesses of the psyche are sources of security and hope, sense-making and personal identity. But, paradoxically, these stories tend to go hand-in-hand with 'fatalism' (Fry, 1994), combining the eschatological and the redemptive. Additionally, stories of environment, landscape and wilderness can play a significant role in the articulation of patriotic values (Shama 1995). To question or critique any aspect of such deeply cherished stories is to court anything from mystification through to reactive dismissal. The 'fear and fatalism' (Fry, 1994, p. 20) of the worst story ever told (i.e. see Hamilton, 2010; Flannery, 2008) requires romanticisation as counter-balance. These stories are profoundly significant sources of hope in

times of fear.

In summary, four significant problems to critique and reflection of/in the field of conservation and sustainability have been identified. These are the dominance of discourse based upon campaigning history and scientific claim; the problem of unrecognised Cartesian dualism; poorly defined and interchangeable terminology and lastly, that these stories are deeply cherished for psychological, spiritual and sometimes patriotic reasons. Consequently, the discourse of sustainability and conservation (and associated fields) tends to remain inured to critique, adaptation and strengthening. Critical reflection on practices that have occurred for at least 30-40 years is difficult in this context, meaning that experience of such projects and practices are largely untapped wells of insight. Importantly, such experience is pivotal in terms of engaging more productively with serious conservation and sustainability issues currently afflicting countless people, peoples, species, ecosystems and places in every part of the world. It is vital, given the grave importance of conservation, sustainability and associated concerns to be open to, and have confidence in critical reflective process. To this end, and within this thesis, a fresh theoretical framework of place practice is proposed. With the establishment of this framework, the experiences and practice of enactment of such vital ideas and ideals can be better understood.

2.2 Place practice

An emphasis on place practice combines an opportunity for emergent learning (Somerville, 2007) as well as being a site for critical reflective process (Gruenwald, 2003; Cresswell, 2003; Cameron, 2008). It should be noted that the Aboriginal term 'country' (Swain, 1993; Rose, 1996, among others) is also powerful, flexible and inclusive and is returned to during the thesis. The adoption of a methodology that emphasises, frames and promotes both *place* and *practice* is an attempt to disrupt and negate problems that bedevil this field. This theoretical framework is set deliberately against the grain. It attempts to resist the lure of dominant discourse and the divisiveness of Cartesian dualism while being aware of labyrinthine semantics and the duality

of romance/fatalism. The emphasis is upon overcoming these blockages and disconnections, again, in the service of learning from *place practice* — of putting conservation and sustainability ideas and ideals into action in particular places and communities.

An initial understanding of place practice is taken from Michel de Certeau (1984) and Tim Cresswell (2003). In *Landscape and the Obliteration of Practice* (2004), Cresswell uses de Certeau's metaphorical example drawn from *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) of the difference in epistemological approach between looking down from a high-rise building (in Manhattan) to the streets below and being on the ground participating and negotiating place and space. Looking down from above is seen as a form of control of chaos (Cresswell, 2004, p. 273) 'misunderstanding' and 'obliteration of practice' (de Certeau, 1984, p. 93). Cresswell continues this line of argument, citing the works of Jackson (1984) and Matless (1998):

In Matless's moral geography of landscape, landscapes are inhabited, appropriately or otherwise, by people doing things. Like Jackson's landscape these are not just at a distance but are used and lived in. Practice is not obliterated here. Rather landscape is the site of 'the dialectical tensions of eyes, and bodies, the visceral and the cerebral, pleasure and citizenships, ecstasy and organisation' (1998, p. 63) ... along with this return of the practicing and mobile body has come a new interest in the everyday and unexceptional. The focus on vision tends to have led cultural geographers towards, dare I say it, elite landscapes.

The challenge for cultural geographers of landscape is to produce geographies that are lived, embodied, practiced; landscapes which are never finished or complete, not easily framed or read. These geographies should be as much about the everyday and unexceptional as they are about the grand and distinguished...(p. 280)

In this excerpt from Creswell (2003) 'landscape' and 'geography' can be read as 'place', a subject on which he writes extensively (Creswell, 2004, 2009). What is important here is Creswell's emphasis upon practice — inhabitation, doing, senses, body, emotion, and routine. The picture he paints is of a traditional cultural geography (of place) that tends to be fixed, visual, and elitist that 'obliterates' and 'misunderstands' 'practiced place' (de Certeau, 1984, p.117) of the everyday, the embodied and the complex. From the work of Creswell, drawing upon de Certeau, emerges the possibility of seeing place practice freshly.

The theoretical framework of place practice brings together place theory and practice theory. Each is a response to positivism and reductionism. Drawing upon Creswell (2003) and Cameron (2008) an account of place theory is outlined below. This is followed by an outline of the 'practice turn' (Raelin, 2007, p. 497) that emerged from critical theory, performative, post-Marxist and Feminist studies (Creswell, 2004, p. 275). Put simply *place* and *practice* combine to create a lens through which taking action, everyday practice in, with, and enfolding particular places, can be explored. Using these theoretical frameworks this research process aims to illuminate and learn from these two cultural blind spots. The position taken in the thesis is made clear through this chapter. This sets up the exploration of my place practice, as a node of, and as point of entry in to, a broader set of practices of putting sustainability and conservation into action.

2.3 Outline of place theory

Cameron (2008) argues that place theory offers a framework that is holistic and multidisciplinary, promoting exploration of, and learning from, felt and reflected experience, particularly in relation to matters of place, landscape and ecological conservation. To this can be added Somerville (2007) who suggests that place theory offers the potential for overcoming Cartesian dualism and associated 'binary dualisms' (p. 5) that so bedevil this field. Cameron recounts that his attraction to place theory was, in part, an attempt to go beyond the adversarialism he experienced while working for a prominent Australian

conservation organisation (2008, p. 283). As mentioned previously, adversarialism is one of the problems that restrict reflective process in this field. Cameron went on to lecture in the 'Sense of Place' studies at Hawkesbury Campus at the University of Western Sydney as well as organising colloquia on Sense of Place.

Cameron (2008) traces the history and development of place studies in Australia, as well as his own 'practices of place' (p. 283) back to the inspiration of a handful of seminal place writers and theoreticians. These include the works of Americans Relph (1976), Tuan (1974), Thomashow (1995) and Snyder (1995); European phenomenologists, Merleau-Ponty (1962) and Heidegger (1962), and Australian place writers Rolls (1981), Tacey (1995), Hay (2002), Griffiths (1996), and Read (2000), among others. The 'Sense of Place' component of the 'Hawkesbury Experience' (a term used by Bawden (2005), Russell & Ison (2005)), also enfolded other important influences such as *ecopsychology* and *Depth Ecology* (Shepard, 1982; Roszak, 1992; Roszak, Gomes et al., 1995; Aizenstat, 1995; Hillman, 1995 and Hillman & Ventura, 1992); *phenomenology* (e.g. Bortoft, 1996); *Deep Ecology* (Leopold, 1949; Naess, 1973) and *place writing* (see Tredinnick, 2003). Other prominent considerations were of *country* (Rose, 1996; Cameron, 2002) and the *more-than-human* world (Abram, 1996). The latter prominent, and to me exciting because these conceptions imply, and began to reflect deep agency of place and life in general. The resulting theoretical framework encouraged the exploration of felt relationships of self and place. This Hawkesbury Experience of Sense of Place opened up new and fresh ways of exploring my conservation and sustainability experiences.

However, as Cameron (2008) and Cresswell (2004) both clearly document, this form place study inspired by phenomenological, experiential and place-writing has come to be strongly critiqued. This critique comes largely from the field of cultural geography, influenced by Marxist, feminist and post-structuralist studies (Cresswell, 2009, p. 5). Place theory is critiqued as being naïve; as 'somewhat unproblematised' and 'lend(ing) support for nationalism

and communal insularity' (Hay, 2006, p.13; Cresswell, 2009 p. 3); as 'reactionary and sexist' (Massey, 1994); and possessing a 'false consciousness' in relation to power and exploitation (Plumwood, 2008). The inclusiveness of place, one of the key strengths of place-based study, is critiqued as exclusionary to socially marginalised others (Cresswell, 2004). As some of the main attractions of place, fixedness and 'authenticity' are seen as unhelpful and nostalgic markers in a world of increased mobility (Harvey, 1996; Lippard, 1997) where 'betweenness' (Entriken, 1991; Thrift, 1994), 'nonplaces' (Auge, 1995) and being 'placeless' or 'displaced' (Relph, 1976; Hay, 2006, p.14) often accord with peoples' actual lived experience. These critiques bring attention to seeing place in terms of sites of 'oppression' (hooks, 1990; Rose, 1993), 'consumption' (of other places) (Sack, 1992; Plumwood, 2008) and of ethical uncertainty (Smith, 2001). Clearly, the potential freshness and experiential insight of Sense of Place as experienced at Hawkesbury is tempered by these considerations of mobility, narrative and social power.

A range of commentators describe the strands and tensions in place theory. Hay (2006, p.14) sees a 'fault line' opening up between place-as-ground versus place-as-body. Place-as-ground sees place as 'hard', with 'territorial mooring' (Gillis, 2004, p.147), 'permanence' and as a site of 'collective memory' (Harvey, 1996). Place-as-body sees place as freed from ground, making the 'body the primary site' interpreting it in 'terms of flux, change' and 'event' (Escobar, 2001; Massey, 1994 cited in Hay, 2006, p.14) and social constructedness (Harvey, 1993, p. 5). Cameron (2008) sees other tensions. These are between insight into place 'responsiveness' and requirements of social justice and narrative structure on the other (2008, p. 300). Gruenewald (2003) attempts to resolve these tensions through *critical place pedagogy* in which balance is sought between *inhabitation* (deepening of place relationship) and *decolonisation* (being aware of power relationships and social justice concerns).

As previously stated, a major part of the foundation of place study is

phenomenological. However, the critical and social perspectives that are often wary of early place studies tend to see place experience as storied (Somerville 2007). According to Malpas (1999) place experience/practice is inseparable from 'the capacity for linguistic and narrative articulation' (p.153). This questioning of the phenomenological encounter of place is also shared by Wylie (2007) whereby place-experiences are seen as framed, expressed and actually experienced through emotion, memory and story (p.172). This drift away from phenomenology is of concern to philosopher David Seamon (in Cameron, 2008) who laments stories of place that:

... conceal as much as they reveal. They impose a narrative structure of character, development, and continuity that might not actually be there ... reveal(ing) more about the writer's enthusiasm for being a nature writer than it does about the place itself. (p. 299)

Seamon suggests that, among other problems, stories of place experience can be too neat thereby missing discontinuities and impressions that may not be conducive to storying. For this reason, this thesis follows Margaret Sommerville's postmodern emergent (2007) epistemological and research framework, which, through an emphasis on both *place* and *practice*, is able to convey, frame and create place relationships and stories along with their attendant messiness and complexity. This merging of place and practice signifies the joining of two foci of study -- each of which have the potential to disrupt dominant and alluring narratives/discourses.

The position taken here, in relation to the contested field of place study, sees place relationship and experience through practices strongly mediated by story, emotion and memory. This view combines Gruenewald's *critical place pedagogy* (2003) with its focus on inhabitation and decolonisation; Sommerville's *postmodern emergent* (2007); Malpas's (1999) and Wylie's (2007) emphases upon story and atmosphere, and lastly Harvey's (1996) focus upon cultural memory.

Having outlined the field of place theory, it is now important to clarify what is meant by practice.

2.4 The meaning of practice

As with place, the term practice is a highly useful theoretical lens but also contested. Practice refers to that enacted — actions — embodied, learned, repeated, often tacit (Polanyi, 1958), and involving varying degrees of consciousness, intentionality, strategy and skill. Cameron (2008) refers to his 'practices of place' of teaching and research, but also bush-walking, gardening, Landcare conservation work, meditation (2008, p. 283) as well as stone sculpture (2003, p. 33), all with deepening place relationship in mind. I read Cameron's use of 'practices of place' as a considered and committed combination and interweaving of professional, ethical, personal and spiritual practices; the interweaving of these realms of practice being common in the field of conservation and sustainability. Cameron also refers to practice as 'practicality' — of putting place theories, ideas and ideals into grounded, embodied, physical, material expression (2003). Through gardening and bush regeneration, he comes to the realisation that 'this (sense of place) is a different model for societal change than urging people and companies into environmentally sound practices through fear, moral argument or pictures of eco-topia' (2003, p. 37). This is an important point. Here understanding, action and stance emerge from 'practices of place' informed by everyday ever-repeating actions of materials, physicality in, and of, place. This is quite different to working with adversarialism and grand narratives; rather this is working with materials, body, energy and place.

Although not explicitly stated Cameron's approach to 'practices of place' is deeply imbued with ethical/moral intention. Indeed, this can be said of much of the field of place study that embraces sustainability, conservation, environmentalism, ecology, nature study/writing and so on. The importance of putting ideals/ethics/morals into action is famously summed up in the quotation attributed to Mahatma Gandhi: 'be the change you want to see in the world' (B'Hahn, 2001). This is the ethical imperative of doing; that is

putting into action and practice what you profess to believe in. This idea of integrity, or integration of values and action, is part of Gandhian philosophy that according to Guha (2000) courses through the waves of environmentalism (Dowie, 1996). This emphasis on the desire to act in a moral/ethical manner does not necessarily mean that this is deeply developed in terms of articulating or resolving ethical positions and dilemmas. Nevertheless conservation, sustainability and so on are very often attempts to practice the ethical.

Beyond practical and ethical meaning practice is important in social theory. According to Raelin in *The Epistemology of Practice* (2007) the 'practice turn' (p. 497) emerged from critical theory, performative, post-Marxist and Feminist studies (Creswell, 2004, p. 275), as well as from post-structural writers such as Bourdieu (1977), de Certeau (1984), Foucault (1979), Ortner (1984) and Giddens (1979, 1984). According to Postill (2009), 'practice theory' comprises a range of theory and writing that 'regards the body as the nexus of people's practical engagement with the world' (Ryan, 1970 in Postill, 2009). The practice perspective represents a decentering of objectivist and empiricist forms of knowledge in line with postmodern and post-structural epistemologies whereby modernist meta-narratives and singular notions of truth are dismissed. Grand narratives are challenged by what people do in their ordinary lives — their practice. People's practices are seen to lie in the middle way between methodological individualism and methodological holism (Ryan (1970) in Postill, 2009). People's lives are shaped strongly, often unconsciously, by social structures but not to the extent of being totally deterministic. Bourdieu's *habitus* (1977), Giddens's *Structuration Theory* (1984, p. 376), de Certeau's *tactics* and *strategies* (1984) and Foucault's *discipline* (1977) are various strands of what Postill (2009) sees as the first wave of practice theory.

A second wave of practice theory, including the works of Schatzki (1996), Schatzki et al. (2001), Reckwitz (2002) and Warde (2005) tend to place greater emphasis upon historical particularity and social process and the

creation of 'fields of cultural practice' (Schatzki et al., 2001; Warde, 2005). These can be seen as being either 'dispersive' (that is, describing, questioning etc.) or 'integrative' (that is, cooking, nursing, gardening etc.) (Schatzki et al., 2001; Warde, 2005). Dispersive refers to activities that unravel the fabric of experience, whereas integrative practices are those whereby activities are brought to a particular purpose. Schatzki (1996) suggests that Wittgensteinian self-referential language 'games' tend to be played within these integrative fields of practice. This notion of language games can be applied to the myriad communities (Wenger 1998) and fields of practice involved in putting sustainability and conservation ideas and ideals into action. Finally, Reckwitz (2002) sees practice in terms of 'bodily and mental routines' which for various reasons can break down leading to crises of practice. This is, in a sense, where I find myself now; at a crossroads of appraisal of my practice.

The fourth aspect of practice (following practical, ethical and social theoretical) can be understood in terms of the development of a 'repertoire of practice' (Schon 1983). A repertoire of practice is a set of skills, knowledge, experiences, stories, images and memories used in carrying out a practice — as a professional, artist, craftsman and so on. A practitioner in any field slowly accumulates and then draws upon such a repertoire of practice. Repertoires of practice are fragments/encounters of feelings, memories, images, experiences, stories (including reading, formal tuition and discussion), skills and routines. However, as most practitioners will testify, these repertoires of practice are generally far from clear, coherent, consciously accessible and neither is it likely that they have ever been comprehensively reflected upon. So, any repertoire of practice is a complex of fragments/encounters that are also likely to be partially forgotten, intuitive, contradictory and ambiguous.

Drawing on Dewey's (1933) theories of experiential learning, Schon (1983, 1987) sees the practitioner developing a repertoire through a learning process characterised by loops of action and reflection (Argyris & Schon, 1974). Such a repertoire of practice is developed through processes of *reflection-in-action* and *reflection-on-action* (Schon, 1983). Reflection-on-action occurs when

there is time and space outside the action being reflected upon. However, reflection-*in*-action as part of practice repertoire occurs at a more spontaneous and intuitive level similar to Polanyi's 'feeling for action' (1958). The design of this thesis revolves strongly around Schon's notions of reflected practice and repertoire of practice.

In summary, four aspects of practice have been outlined; practical, ethical, social theoretical and in terms of a repertoire. These cohere to form a focus upon the everyday and the enacted in life. This is a focus that can be seen as a cultural blind spot in the western mind and to remember, write and critique practice, in this case place practice, is a disruptive process. The foci of place and practice are combined to disrupt dominant discourses, and other dualisms and problems that restrict the reflective process in the field of conservation and sustainability and related concerns. The exploration of the author's repertoire of practice becomes the focus in chapters 3-8. This emphasises the professional aspect of this thesis but also importantly acts as a container of, and a structure for, the otherwise disruptive, critical process being undertaken.

How, then, can place practice be summarised? Place practice is lived life in relationship with and enfolding particular places. This is the embodied, everyday routine, as well as the practical, ethical, social and professional. It is also the material; energetic and organic. And here the framework as established so far is, I argue, still wanting in two aspects. In a sense the theories of place and practice as conveyed so far lack a certain tension. There is still a neatness, rationality and disembodiment that risk leaving me, the author, and you the reader, on the wrong side of the Cartesian divide. As a lead into the exploration of place-practice encounters of Chapters 3–8, two more points are made.

2.5 The feel of place practice

Firstly, practiced life for most people entails struggle. In *Walden or, Life in the Woods*, Henry Thoreau famously stated that 'the mass of men (sic) lead lives

of quiet desperation' (Thoreau, 1854). Thoreau, after studying at Harvard, stayed at the property Walden that belonged to his friend Emerson. Following stints at being a teacher he began to write on civil disobedience and nature philosophy among other subjects. In *Walden* he laments the conformity of ordinary people to an ever-expanding economic system that also took them away from the pleasures of nature (Broderick, 1961). Putting aside, (for now anyway) the romanticisation of nature by a person largely insulated from physical working life, and also whether 'desperation' is perhaps too strong a word, Thoreau makes a good point. On the ground, in de Certeau's metaphoric city, lives are often of struggle; of identity and belonging; of risk and safety; of making a living; of carrying out almost endless caring jobs (Ehrenreich, 2003); of growing up and aging; of ethical confusion; and for most people, especially those who work the land, the struggle of physical toil. This does not mean that life is not without satisfaction or joy but the struggle, Thoreau's 'quiet desperation', is a significant factor in lived life for the mass of men (and women). To focus on practice is to recognise and acknowledge that life does entail struggle.

The second tension, or edge, that needs emphasising is an appreciation of the considerable power of place, particularly of living organic processes. Going back, again, to de Certeau's image of the city which entails people moving about and negotiating place, the question can be asked 'what if we were to turn the whole thing inside out?' What if the city was a forest or farm in which agency was also attributed to the other-than-human? If the problems of Cartesian dualism(s) are to be taken seriously, then the agency of the other-than-human world must also be taken seriously and inclusively in this conceptual framework. Plumwood (1993), Everndon (1992), Hillman (1995) among others describe how the rest-of-the-world is not seen as possessing agency but is unconsciously cast as something mechanical — even dead. It is vital to remember that place — organic processes, life, living systems, the more-than-human — are all deeply agentic (Lovelock, 1979; Maturana & Varela, 1980; Capra, 1996; Margulis, 1998). As a farmer, gardener or conservationist working, via craft, with the materials of place, this is so

apparent. Place practice here deliberately not only refers to that done by human practitioners but also that done by places themselves.

These points combine; emerging is an image of the struggle of practice and the power of place. This is the lens to be applied to the encounters of my place-practice repertoire in the following Chapters 3-8.



Chapter Three — Sowing Seeds of a Divine Discontent

An understanding of my repertoire of place practice necessarily starts with experiences of childhood and youth. Chapter 3 draws from images and encounters of deep connection to the places of childhood Devon in England; experiences of migration and disconnection; an idealistic 1970's education, and finally, an awkward arrival in Australia.

The encounters described in this chapter are wide-ranging both in terms of time span and breadth of topics. The aim of this chapter is twofold. Firstly, it establishes the personal background and motivation for my fascination with, and relationship to, matters relating to values and practices of place, nature, craft and wildness. Secondly, from the point of view of the thesis, many of the foundational themes of my repertoire of place practice are laid down. These and other themes build as the thesis unfolds.

This chapter argues after Cave (2001), Hillman (1996), Auden (1941) and others that at the heart of many people's central life interest lies a problem, or challenge, to the point of trauma even, which drives this life interest. This can be an obsession but conversely it can also be a source of deep joy. In my case, this life interest involves a series of migrations at sensitive times of life that are both an opportunity and an almost never-ending source of grief that create a 'divine discontent' (Cave, 2001).

3.1 Belonging: Childhood, farm and moors

My earliest memories are of the farm and the moors. The following writings are personal and deeply cherished. '*The first place I remember*' is the starting point of these encounters. It's the starting point of my experience of, and connection to, the farm and place practice in general. '*Harvest*' laments sometimes missing the annual climax of my Grandparents' mixed farm in Devon. 'Nan and Gramp' were endlessly occupied with farm work, but from time-to-time we headed up to the moors that overlooked the cultivated farms below. High above is '*Dartmoor*', dark, cold and mysterious. These early

encounters are expressed as poetry and image.



The first place I remember

*I remember the farm 'Easterntown'.
The place I first get to know
with friends and family.
With few other sources of entertainment
We create 'camps' in the woods*

*My small child steps covering big hills
Dusty lanes in summer
Mud and shit in the winter*

*Rolling hills of hedges and gates
Endlessly watching fields and animals
The same jobs done again and again*

*Visiting the fields each evening
Scything the weeds
Walking down by the River Torridge*

Picking Hazelnuts

Skimming stones.



Harvest

I always want to be down in Devon and on the farm for the haymaking harvest

It upsets me no end to miss it

All the action, community purpose,

Virtuous hard work on almost endless summer days.

The machinery; 'Kia' orange cordial to quench thirst

My soft-calloused hands

Me wanting to be a worker

Not a city boy

Stacking hay bales

We never ever want to leave the farm

We often cry when we do



Dartmoor

*Looking over these idyllic rolling hills
Looming over them dark and grey
Is the other place I love to go to*

*Nan and Gramp drive us there
We scramble up the slopes
Through the heather, sheep shit and stones
Sheep and ponies
Cold air stinging my lungs*

*Into the grey heights
Damp clouds flying past
Climbing now the boulders
The granite tors
To the tip of the once volcanoes*

To get to the highest point and stand or sit against the wind and cold

*And look down on that moor
Not a place of comfort or safety
But of cold rock and water
Of army bombing ranges
Wild grass, witches and a prison.*

*Sitting on top of a tor
Savoring the cold wind
The clearness
The nothingness
Feeling warm*



It really was a special experience to have spent a significant part of my childhood growing up on the farm in Devon. This was an experience of archetypal English countryside reminiscent of scenes from, for instance, Bates's *Darling Buds of May* (1958) or Wright's popular English television series, *All Creatures Great and Small*, featuring the vet James Herriot (1978-1995). Surrounded by animals, hedgerows, kitchen gardens, villages,

buildings and a family of farmers and their activities was an ideal place for a young boy to grow up. There was an abundance of activities, busyness and purpose, but also space and freedom to just be, in this setting of unique, picturesque English 'countryside' of rolling hills, patch-worked fields, villages, hedges, woods and moors.

The farm and its gardens with the moors not far away were, or are, my childhood place. This was, and remains, a deep, deep connection because it was the place I first encountered the other-than-human — alone. Through having the space and freedom to wonder and wander I put my roots down and somehow realised, on an emotional level, that there was an 'out there' or 'other'. This was a lesson never forgotten and a place connection made, once established, seems to want to always be there.

According to Thomashow:

It is no wonder that so many environmentalists find such depth and richness in exploring these years. Nature writing is replete with reminiscences of childhood: environmental educators carefully watch children in order to understand how they form a relationship with the natural world. This is fertile ground for the exploration of ecological identity, the way to open a window onto memory. (1995, p.11)

Thomashow continues citing environmental educator Sobel's (1993) research on place-making:

The roots of the adult sense of place are established in middle-childhood. Rachael Carson's sense of wonder of early childhood gets transmuted in middle childhood to a sense of exploration. Children leave the security of home and set out like Alice in Wonderland and Columbus and Robinson Crusoe to discover the new world. ... This new home in the wild and the journeys of discovering are the basis for bonding with the natural world. (1995, p.11)

Thomashow is supported by Berry (1999, p.13) in suggesting that such special childhood places become 'touchstone memories' (p.10). For Berry, his childhood memory of a particular, and for some reason special, meadow is the place he uses as reference for a lifetime of environmental thought and writing.

It goes without saying that childhood experience is fundamentally influential to the formation of every individual's personality and contributes to whether or not deep place connections are made. Everndon (1992), quoting Bachelard (1994, p.112), argues that children can think of self only, meaning that the wild 'other' has to be internalised into self. Along similar lines Shepherd in *Nature and Madness* (1982) writes that both literally and metaphorically there are stages of development — 'epigenesis' — in which 'surroundings are internalised' (p. 7). These touchstone memories of farm and moors are deeply sensory, physical and embodied (Somerville, 1999) so any stories about these experiences I have constructed or adopted *later*. In a roundabout way this is supported by Everndon citing Cobb's (1990) study of autobiography. She suggests that 'solitude in childhood awakens sensory response to the world because this is a pre-semantic experience into uninterrupted otherness' (p.112). This aloneness or loneliness came with space and freedom to wander, wonder, sense and engage with trees, farm animals, woods, hedges, hidden places as well as the ubiquitous mud and manure *before* being socialised into becoming separated (Plumwood 1993) from the other-than-human.

In extrapolating from this experience, among others, it would be quite easy for me to next slip into romanticised stories of clotted cream, Devonshire teas, ruddy-cheeked farmers working together harvesting on long summer evenings and so on. These images and stories do form important elements of my memories of these experiences and it would be easy to sentimentalise them in line with popular and accepted stories of Devon life. I do feel compelled to ask why accounts of country life, and of working on the land are so commonly romanticised, especially in England. Schama (1995) and Adams (1996) among many others describe the romanticisation of 'Nature' especially of lowland

Britain as cultural places of escape, myth and identity for the British urban majority. For Schama, in *Landscape and Memory*, British woodlands and landscapes represent(ed) Arcadian ideals of, 'sylvan liberties', resistance, vigorous economy and the origins of democracy (p.135 -174). Adams (1996), in *Future Nature*, his account of the history and possible future of British conservation, points out that the 'countryside', with its attendant mythology is as much as anything a cultural construct, almost a fantasy, of city dwellers keen to literally or imaginatively get away from cities and the undesired things they represent (p. 70).

If I jolt myself away from exilic sentimentality I can access other, different, less comfortable memories of childhood, farm and moor. Behind all the activity and purpose lay other childhood experiences. These were of seemingly endless rain, damp, mud and manure as well as feeling bored, left out, or of being without what we imagined the city kids had; of what they could perhaps afford to buy or do. Anyone with direct experience of day-to-day farming understands that farm work is constant and physically demanding (and generally not romantic) so there were many times when all the adults on the farm were busy. Alone or with my brother, sister or a friend the only thing to do would be to wander off exploring either literally around the fields, woods, river, and buildings or into our imaginations. A range of authors, including Thomashow (1995), Marguilis (1998), Everndon (1992) Snyder (1990) and Shepard (1982), recognise the significance of experiences of aloneness, or being lonely, in non-urban or wild places, as a kind of prerequisite for cultivating a sense of becoming connected to place and the other-than-human world.

While living on the farm in Devon, especially on rainy days, I remember sitting, '*Daydreaming ...*'

Daydreaming...

When the drizzling rain sets in there is plenty of time on the farm.

When it first starts we play outside and let the drizzle settle on to our faces and on the outside of clothes, jackets and coats. As the drizzle intensifies we then play in the shelter of the farm buildings, barns, tractor sheds, or the latest 'camp' built somewhere in the woods. Safe and snug against the rain.

But more drizzle means that everything gets damp right through and a cold chill sends us inside the farmhouse.

Sitting at a window that forms an alcove cut into the thick cob walls I can see outside, watching the activity of the wet farm workers, machinery and animals. The rain washing down through the farmyard, washing cow shit with it.

Sitting inside, I daydream ... of conserving wildlife ...

3.2 Reading, meaning and the postmodern/green generation

Soon my family moved - first, to suburban London and then to expatriate Singapore. I attended Singapore International School, which then became a United World College, part of an alliance of schools dedicated to the ideal of 'greater international understanding'; it attracted scholarship students from around the world. From ages 15-17, I was exposed to idealistic mid-1970's texts and authors, such as *Limits to Growth* (Meadows et al., 1972), *Small is Beautiful* (Schumacher, 1973) and the ideas of Mahatma Gandhi (Mukherjee, 1983). That exposure to these ideas occurred in the context of Singaporean government censorship made this experience powerful indeed. '*Ideas & Censorship*' is the account of this encounter. At a school's camp, '*Ecology and books at the jungle camp*', describes how I was introduced to the highly influential text *The Tao of Physics* (Capra, 1975).

Limits to Growth (Meadows et al., 1972). A serious sleek book that uses systems thinking, feedback loops and new computer technology to examine the problems of poverty, and exponential population growth against ever-increasing levels of pollution and depletion of finite non-renewable resources. Its neo-Malthusian conclusions show that at some stage society will collapse unless profound changes are put into place. But the real appeal of this book is that despite its dire predictions it remains idealistic, showing genuine concern for what it calls the 'totality of the world problematique' (Meadows et al.,

1972, p. 193; Peccei, 1977), a combination of environmental degradation and poverty.

Small is Beautiful (Schumacher, 1973) addresses a similar set of problems suggesting an alternative 'economics as if people mattered'. In particular, Schumacher's chapter 'Buddhist Economics' (p. 44) looks to an example of Burmese values of Buddhist 'right livelihood' whereby work can be seen as potentially contributing to man's 'higher faculties' (p. 44). He also argues for 'intermediate technology' that applies technology to low-capital small-scale production (p. 143). Schumacher's book offers a moral voice with practical economic and environmental solutions.

The Gandhi Reader (Mukherjee, 1983 — the closest text to whatever I read back in 1979). I find the philosophy and actions of Mahatma Gandhi profoundly influential. Quotations such as 'my life is my message' combine with visions and practices of non-violent civil disobedience, rural community living, meditation, fearless pursuit of 'truth' and taking a stand on issues of racism, exploitation and colonisation.

I also read Future Shock (Toffler, 1972), Deschooling Society (Illich, 1971) and more. In this place of censorship, that for instance banned the film One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, there is a bodily thrill in encountering these ideas.

Ecology and books at the jungle camp

We sit on a small ferry and set off for a weeklong trip to the school's jungle camp in Southern Malaysia. We are a close-knit group of expatriate school, social and sporting friends. We sit on the roof of the boat's cabin and motor away leaving the busy, hyper-developing Singapore City behind us.

Diesel fumes and noise from the ferry drift across the grey rainy causeway that separates Singapore from Malaysia. Our teachers are low-key and friendly; their students too

engrossed in each other to be much trouble. I think we realise that we are lucky to be who we were.

We arrive on the coast in Jahore and walk 30 minutes through kampongs to the school camp set into coastal rainforest. Here we study ecology in the rainforest. We count species in quadrants and take samples back to the science classroom to analyse. We are also set an orienteering exercise but despite being given maps and compasses most of us get lost and only emerge from the rainforest as dusk falls - tired and badly bitten by sand flies.

Mosquitoes swarm; the jungle buzzes, chirps, croaks and the air cools a little. Students who have already returned from the orienteering exercise are sitting under the glow of a kerosene lamp listening to a science teacher expounding ideas from Fritjof Capra's new book the Tao of Physics (1975).

Our teacher explains Capra's exploration of the parallels between Eastern spirituality and mysticism and the revelations of subatomic physics, in particular the theory of relativity. Hinduism, Taoism and Buddhism merge with the findings of Niels Bohr, Julius Oppenheimer and Werner Heisenberg and others whereby the very foundations of matter, atoms, are found to be transient, ambiguous, and dependent upon the stance taken by the observer. He explains the further the subatomic world is penetrated, the more the world reveals itself as a system of inseparable interacting and ever-moving components. Capra also weaves in Carlos Castaneda (1968) and Zen Buddhism.

We sit and listen in awe as our world is transformed into pulses, particles and Eastern spirituality. Our curiosity and idealism lit up the night in the rainforest.

I was caught, simply through being in particular places and times, in the leading edge of the wave of 1970's ideas and ideals. Encountering radical and illuminating books and the ideas they contained, particularly in the context of censorship in Singapore, highlighted the potential for freedom to be found in ideas, imagination and dialogue. Reading was about being part of a community, of searching for freedom but it was also something exotic — not from the local place but something bigger and overarching. It felt like being at

the forefront of a wider and emergent global set of understandings.

The texts encountered at that time, Schumacher (1973), Meadows et al (1972), Tofler (1972), Illich (1973), Capra (1975), as well as now forgotten Mahatma Gandhi texts were a generational critique of the dominant meta-narratives of economic and scientific 'progress' (Lyotard, 1984). I was a member of a highly educated, privileged and geographically mobile young generation looking for meaning and purpose. Hillman (1989) would suggest that the 'thematic motif' of the time had fallen away, revealing and highlighting impending personal, social, and ecological crises. Czechoslovakian playwright turned politician Vaclav Havel, in *The Search for Meaning in a Global Civilization* (1995), suggests that the postmodern/green era was marked by modernity's greatest achievement — the landing of mankind upon the moon in 1969. This event offered humanity the new perspective of 'seeing Earth from space with his own eyes' (p. 233). The significance of this is twofold; first, that planet Earth could be seen as a whole and appreciated literally holistically, but secondly, and ironically, the limits of science, economics and progress then became clear. Suddenly a generation was asking — why allow 'progress' to destroy our planetary home?

A close group of friends formed around these texts, concerns, ideas and ideals but I am about to move again, this time to Australia, and this place and this set of friendships came to a close. Fittingly, just before leaving we find a 'Refugee boat' near the school camp.

Refugee Boat

A Vietnamese refugee boat had washed up on the beach near the school camp in the rainforest. We wonder what had happened to the refugees. Had they had been beaten, robbed or even killed? We sit on the deck of the wrecked abandoned boat at night as the fluorescence in the waves washed over and around us.

Always ahead of us was the time when we would be elsewhere and separated.

3.3 Fracture and fluidity

A few months later I was in Sydney and finding it hard to adjust. I got into the habit of sitting on a sandstone rock some way down in 'the bush' away from the house. 'On a Rock' I experienced the *Tao of Physics*. This is expressed as poetry. I then headed back to the UK to finish my high school studies. A year later I returned again this time to Sydney to study economics, politics and Earth science at Macquarie University. The latter was a revelation bringing the planet increasingly alive, but on my walks home from university I was struck by the 'Suburban Dissonance' of new buildings on Sydney's ancient landscape.

On a Rock

*I walk down through the garden in Sydney
Scent of Lemon tree (!?)
Down past the tree ferns (!?)
Sandstone boulders stepping down into the bush
Pink-barked Angophoras with daft shapes*

*Life is crazy but it's nice down here
Away from it
I think of Fritjof Capra's buzzing world
Pulsing particles and meditation practice*

*Relax and let go
Breathe - let it go
Breathe - the rocks are not solid; the trees are pulsing, flowing
The Tao — I am pulsing and flowing
I am nothing and everything
And the Kookaburras entertain me
Fighting, competing, eating, mating, playing games*

And letting go — again

Breathe — hmm

Breathe — let the thinking go

I am all — all is I

And the breeze — becomes a wind

Angophoras — bending now in the rain

For a moment I think I should be sensible

But there's a storm and I want to feel it

I let it go

Through me

All is pulsing,

All fluid

Wet on my face



Living Planet

I'm sitting with friends on the lawn at university, under and between rows of what are probably 15-year-old Eucalyptus trees. I'm still not comfortable with the dry, bright sunlit days of a Sydney winter — it feels like it should be grey, damp and softer. But I keep this to myself. It's lunchtime and a few of us are debating whether or not to go to lectures, or play pool, or go to the bar, or go home. There is not too much enthusiasm for any of these options.

I decide to go to the Earth sciences and plate tectonics lecture anyway. I feel confident and competent in the subject of geography, but this is different. It's so radical. Starting with Alfred Wegener's heretical ideas of 'continental drift' that he developed in the 1930s, Planet Earth is seen as a pliable, mosaic of sliding lenses over a molten core of magma. Tectonic plates grow, move and subduct under other plates. The history of life on earth is ancient and it evolves, rides and manages to survive polar reversals, extinction events, meteor impacts and collisions between continents.

Continents are linked together through geological histories, rock strata, fossils and family classifications of plants, animals. I gain an appreciation for the Gondwanan ecological heritage of the new place I find myself in through these cutting-edge ideas of dynamic planet Earth (see White, 1993).

Suburban Dissonance

Early on at university I catch the bus back to our new family home in a new subdivision in Sydney. But I get off at the wrong stop. Walking home I notice the new houses, gardens and roads run along the ridges. Between and beyond these I glimpse grey-blue valleys of sandstone boulders and sparse vegetation falling away and down to places of Aboriginal history I am also glimpsing through texts (Gilbert, 1973) at university.

Walking along these suburban ridges dominated by new houses, roads and gardens the uneasiness is apparently not just mine. Later I ask university friends the names of some trees nearby. Someone says 'gumtrees' another 'Banksias'. They don't seem to know much more

than me — the newcomer to this place. Not woven in.

As I sat meditating on a rock my mind-view fused ecological and spiritual insights of Gandhi, Schumacher, Capra and others. This embryonic mediation practice was no doubt the best I could do to accommodate personal experience and generational philosophies of fracture and fluidity. As with almost any significant migration I was left reeling, disorientated and confused. I sat on a sandstone rock surrounded by tree ferns and twisted pink-barked Angophora trees and made my breath the centre of my world. It was one of the few things I could be sure of in this new and strange place — Sydney, Australia.

The disruptions experienced in this time of my life also disrupted absorption and acceptance of mainstream ideas. Lynn Margulis, in *Symbiotic Planet* (1998), writes that there is a corollary between being 'against orthodoxy' in the teen years and of one's long-term perception of the world (pp.17-42). In retrospect, I see that I was drawn towards ideas that allowed me to internalise and construct a personal metaphysic that could support my fractured and fluid place in the world. The world was not as it seemed on the surface. Wegner's plate tectonics theory captivated me, as did Capra's *Tao of Physics* (1975). My environment became one of shifting tectonic plates over the Earth's liquid core and on a micro and personal scale my world was one of impermanent vibrating and whirling particles and pulses of energy. One that could only be understood by 'participating rather than observing' (p.145) and through the use of, for instance, Haikus, Koans and paradox to break through conditioned perceptions (p. 45). This sense of living on dynamic planet Earth matched my dynamic experience of living on and moving around the surface of the Earth. I was not static and so the/my world could not be.

The disorientation experienced in migration puts the person affected at odds with almost everything. My childhood farm memories found very little to relate to, particularly in the new suburbs of Sydney. I think I was partially aware that this was a different place to any I had experienced before. After two

years attending Macquarie University I left before I finished my degree. My passion to learn was frustrated by the shift in education to the political right. My interests and beliefs collided with conservative corporate Sydney. I felt myself 'Slipping Through'.

Slipping Through

I step off the conveyor-belt of others' expectations. Of convention and social norm. I am slipping down through something. I had the same feeling when I first came to Sydney; of finding myself unable to be a part of school, or suburbia. It's strange, light and disconnected. People go about their daily routines and lives and I watch as if from outside.

In a way I am envious of their acceptance of the world as they find it, but I am also incredulous at, and contemptuous of, their passivity.

Reading texts such as *Capitalism, Socialism and the Environment* (Stretton, 1976), and *Why You Should be a Socialist* (Foot, 1977) led me to a series of insights, visceral as much as conceptual, powerfully shaping how I could and couldn't live in the world.



3.4 Grounding and meaning

Among all this postmodernist doubting, searching and sampling of ideas the search was on to find value frameworks to replace a widespread sense of disillusionment. In one sense, the literature of the 1970s was full of optimism and idealism (Pepper, 1984), but this was not necessarily a good guide to purpose or action. Many of us wanted stories to believe in and practices that we could put into place in times marked by doubt and danger. Then suddenly, 1970's optimism was out-muscled by the leading edge of 1980's neo-conservatism, featuring Milton Friedman and Margaret Thatcher among others. Disjunctures between theory and practice and between mind and body became too big to bear and I and many of my cohort dropped out of university.

But we continued to read and explore. We soon came across a book that inspired earnest '*Conservation Conversations*' that gave my life a new sense of purpose. '*My New Niche*' — I wanted to do something 'real' so I became a labourer on a building site.

Conservation Conversations

A group of us live in a small, ugly flat. Mostly we spent time smoking, drinking, and listening to music, studying and negotiating relationships with each other and everything else. To us everything around us lacks integrity, legitimacy. Its crap and we know it. North Ryde is one great building site of shopping centres and corporate buildings.

*One of us is reading Gerald Durrell's *The Stationary Ark* (1976). We head down to Lane Cove Park and down to the river that runs through it. We swim then put our towels out and lay down. We rave about saving threatened species, the topic of the book, and this becomes one of the few things worth doing with our futures. Durrell's style is chatty, light-hearted post-war English. But under this courses the message that conservation is not only important but very 'do-able' in a practical sense. Durrell set up a 'new kind of zoo' in Jersey*

in which the emphasis was not upon caged exotic spectacles but rather the creation of territories to allow a breeding program for endangered species.

The water flows past. We swim again in all its murky dubiousness and lie in the sun. Thinking ahead, and for once with purpose, with expectation and orientation. Identities forming. Believing in something at last.

A New Niche

Sitting on a bus I see some landscape gardeners rolling out turf and watering it in. It takes a little while but I realise that this is what I want to do. I want to generally do things in the sun, to use my muscles doing real practical things. I cannot stand the idea of entering the corporate world. I reply to an advertisement for a labouring position and before I know it I am working for a Psychology Professor from Macquarie University who is also building a house. Privately, I call him 'Sigmund'.

Each weekday morning commuters, workers, businessmen and women and students leave behind tradesmen, partners, children, places, bush and gardens and the rest of the ordinary dormitory suburbs. And each morning I cycle about 20-30 minutes against this commuter traffic to get to this place — my new niche. I carry out tasks of shoveling or wheel-barrowing something somewhere or digging ditches. I am carefree, getting fit and tanned, while doing something real and earning cash!

One day 'Sigmund' suggests that I am a 'young man empty of purpose'. I think this a well-known phrase but can't find it anywhere.

Texts, critiques and ideals are all very well, but they added to the personal and collective sense of disillusionment and cynicism. However, coming across and discussing Durrell (1976) was something different. Here was a book about doing — doing something — rather than being in some kind of suspended disembodied state. The greatest satisfaction, though, came from the joy of carrying out physical work. In digging ditches for the Professor I had returned to something I found to be real. I both literally and metaphorically grounded myself. I was pushing against something real, not cerebral, intellectual or an ethical dilemma; something apart from all the stories, theories and dialogue in

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which I had become immersed. Simple actions taken: embodied and visceral urges leading to, and returning to, practice and a sense of *craft* that entails doing (Crawford, 2009), kinesthetic learning and the mastery of, and being mastered by, materials and skills (Dowling, 2011).

3.5 Sense of displacement: a divine discontent

But it's not as simple as that. Migration can create a sense of loss that does not end; that rolls on through life (Sebald 1996). The following encounters are a large jump in time and revolve around attempts to make sense of the long-term effects of these migrations. '*I feel nothing*' is an uncomfortable initial encounter with Sense of Place study. Further immersion into this field, '*Sense of Place assignment*', brings a closer understanding of traumatic aspects of migration. Thirdly, '*Nick Cave article*' shows how difficult experiences can give life purpose and meaning.

I feel nothing

I'm in my mid-thirties and at the University of Western Sydney at a 'sense of place' workshop run by Dr John Cameron, who is later to become a supervisor for this thesis.

It's a summer residential — my first one. This is an intense, challenging and fantastic learning experience. But now I have a problem.

We are outside the buildings on a grassed area underneath some eucalypts — 'gum trees' as everyone here calls them. John has asked us (maybe 40 students) to get comfortable, find a place to relax, quieten our minds and settle into 'place' for maybe 15-20 minutes. It's sunny, warm — a bit too warm. Gum leaves exude their scent; birds are mostly quiet in the heat of the day.

I breathe, sit and try to relax into the experience.

Afterwards, we are asked to describe what was felt. People say things like
'I felt so at one with my environment'

'I felt so supported by the trees'

'I felt the trees, grass, ground and me all dissolve into one ...'

'I felt thanks for Gaia, for Mother Earth ...'

I didn't want to spoil the party or stand out so I said nothing, but what I thought was —

'This is so contrived'

'They are all acting; performing'

'Where is the depth to this? Why no critique?'

What I felt was — nothing — or discomfort.

Later I talked about this at the university bar with an American student who said they had the same experience of not feeling enough.



Sense of Place assignment

To gather data and ideas for a Sense of Place assignment, I am camping by myself at Hat Head National Park on the mid-north-coast of NSW. The open, coastal landscape is mostly of Coastal Banksias and Paperbarks behind some extensive sand dunes. The spring weather is mild, bright, breezy and sunny during the day and clear and cold at night. The surf roars and crashes continuously under a full moon.

I approach my time here by going about life's basic functions of 'carrying water and

chopping wood' with Zen-ish mindfulness and reverence; watching the stars, moon, and campfire and reading Bruce Chatwin's Songlines (1987). I walk along the beautiful coast observing, photographing, thinking and reflecting and relaxing. Reflecting upon Chatwin's Aboriginal 'songlines', nomadism and migration. This part of the NSW coast feels light and frivolous, the breeze blows away the seriousness and heaviness found further inland.

I am happy to be alone, but by the second night I am in the mood for a chat. My campsite neighbours are a German couple; Ingo a geographer in Australia for a conference, and Marion a trainee journalist. We share beers and chat sitting around a fire, stopping every so often to look for shooting stars or to spotlight fruit bats, possums, and mysterious silhouettes. They are very taken by the idea of 'sense of place'.

Ingo puts forward his ideas, based on study and reading. At one point he mentions something a psychologist had said to them. Marian interjects in German, obviously it's something personal. After reassuring her, he continues. The psychologist had told them that, in the hierarchy of trauma-causing events, the sudden dislocation caused by moving from one place to another ranks very high.

Marian's pained, teary face now reflects this.

Not knowing each other well the conversation goes no further. But in an odd way I am happy despite the sadness of our conversation. Maybe my experiences of migration, and the associated strange almost never-ending feelings of being lost are not mine alone. We finish our beers and eat dark chocolate under the stars.

Nick Cave's divine discontent

I find Nick Cave's article Love is the Drug, (Good Weekend, June 2001) flicking through the Saturday newspapers. I know Nick Cave through his music, which I find exciting, but also depressed. He writes:

'My artistic life has centred around an attempt to articulate an almost palpable sense of loss that laid claim to my life.'

Cave identifies this loss as originating from the death of his father during his childhood. He continues quoting Auden (1941), 'The so-called traumatic experience is not an accident, but the opportunity for which the child has been patiently waiting — had it not occurred, it would have found another — in order that its life becomes a serious matter'.

Writing a university research presentation, I identify with Cave's writing and sentiments. It occurs to me that my 'palpable sense of loss' is not of any one individual person but a whole place, or series of places and all that was associated with them, several times in my life.

I write: 'In moving from place to place all that you have learned to accept as 'normal' is suddenly replaced by another series of arrangements that are also 'normal'. Smells, winds, clouds, birdsongs, trees, jokes, TV shows, political debates, fashions, and language. This is deeply disconcerting. People generally use these things to give them security, but not me.'

The sadness of sudden migration from one place to another distant place, not to be confused with say traveling on holiday or for a business placement, is generally deeply traumatic. It is sad and disorientating, but in a way that is ongoing because, unlike in the loss felt with death, the other place, that being missed, still exists. This is closer to the experience of losing a lover. Cave's article on love, loss, longing and expression sees the traumatic event, in Auden's words, making 'life become a serious matter'. Cave invokes Portuguese, Spanish and Brazilian forces of 'saudade' and 'duende' as the embarkation upon journey from darkness to light. Hillman (1996) argues that this kind of experience 'lights the fire' of the soul to become what it wants to become (pp. 3-40). In Flamenco art, duende is a dark creative ancestral force of the earth (Lorca, 1933); saudade a deep longing for lost ones and places (See, 2008). These forge, in Cave's words, 'Divine discontent'. This discontent, a deep, deep desire to go from light to dark, to feel something; to no longer slip through everything, becomes the drive and motivation to create meaning.

I can now see that these experiences were vital in sowing seeds of an

intensified relationship to place. However, any retrospective talk in terms of 'soul journey' runs the danger of making smooth something that patently was not so at the time — and is still sometimes not. This was particularly so when arriving in Australia. Years later the discussion of trauma of sudden and significant migration dovetailed neatly with *Songlines* (Chatwin, 1987). One of the Chatwin's central messages is that humans are naturally travelers, but these journeys are usually seasonal, cyclic and nomadic in nature and throughout almost all history conducted at a walking pace. Moreover, the travel was along Songlines to sing the land into being (p.121). This, an act of intimacy, is very different to suddenly jumping to another almost unrelated place. Interestingly Chatwin, who was British, often uses quirky European characters to work his way into the landscape, a landscape that, citing D. H. Lawrence, does not reveal itself easily (p. 252). In exile I heard the call of my native Dartmoor back in the UK, but not of the landscape around the Sydney suburbs. This place was very different (Tredinnick, 2003, p. 41), very other, very powerful, wild, old and weird (Tredinnick, 2003, p. 51).

3.6 Place-Practice Changes

The foundations of my place practice, laid in early life, are a potent enfolded combination of desire for ethical expression, search for sense of place and embodied expression. My life was made 'a serious matter' (Auden, 1941; Cave, 2001) by a series of migrations at sensitive stages of life. A central life theme emerges, or is forged, part painful, private exilic struggle, and part a divine discontent (Cave, 2001) to the point of obsession, and joy around matters of place and landscape. Heightened sensitivity to, and interest in, matters of place and placelessness see me yearning (saudade (See, 2008)), sentimentally for remembered English countryside; farm, gardens and moors. It takes a jump of many years and encounter with the study of sense of place to realise that these sensitivities are not mine alone and that displacement is not an uncommon experience. This critical reflective process also prompts me to remember that these touchstone memories (Berry, 1999) of place often came through solitude, (Cobb, 1992) and loneliness. This was how, for many people, place is encountered as agentic — powerful, alive and wild; for me

from Dartmoor in Devon to the twisted Angophoras of Sydney bushland.

A second place-practice strand emerges through being in a certain time and place (and through being mobile). I was drawn to a generational critique of the meta-narratives of economic and scientific progress (Havel, 1995) and associated personal, social and ecological damage. This 1970's zeitgeist, inspired by a specific set of ideas and ideals, included Carson (1962), Schumacher (1973), Illich (1971), Capra (1975) and Meadows et al (1972). Much of this literature was an examination of non-western value frameworks, often of Eastern philosophy (Capra, 1975; Schumacher, 1973; Mukherjee, 1983), and particularly Gandhi (Guha, 2000). Capra (1975) and Earth sciences at Macquarie University inspired me to see the universe in terms of fracture, fluidity, pulses and particles. This was an appropriate metaphysic that accommodated my fractured and fluid life.

The third place-practice strand sees the power of embodied impulse. My values, sense of placelessness and embodied instincts led me to 'drop out', returning to the craft of outdoor work. This may have reflected meaning and purpose found through reading Durrell's (1976) account of practical do-able conservation but it was probably more deeply a primal, embodied urge to do something physical. An embodied urge to literally do something other than be suspended in a world of reading, worrying, thinking, and ethical deliberation. The awkward, newly arrived migrant digs, in awkward suburbia, into Australian ancient, very foreign, ground.

Chapter Four — Learning Gardening Craft

Chapter 4 draws from images and encounters of a decade of learning gardening craft. During this time my repertoire of place practice moved from the influences of childhood and youth to finding expression in early adult working life. This was initially inspired by a brief return to the UK which led to being a gardener and tradesman in Sydney. These experiences, often practical, were interspersed by the continued exploration of, and a desire for, different value frameworks, imagined and expressed through reading and visiting new places.

The encounters described in this chapter are largely concerned with experiences of everyday immersion in a series of gardening and horticultural jobs. These encounters were of inspiration and creativity but also of what it is to go beyond romantic notions of working the land. This is learning to become a tradesman carrying out work, craft and practice, day-in and day-out. Emerging from reflection upon these encounters are insights into literacy of place; what Orr (1992) refers to as 'environmental literacy'. Towards the end of this chapter the encounters shift from learning and making place to desire for a new kind of place.

This chapter argues, after Orr (1992), Pollan (1996) and Argyris and Schon (1974) that place literacy learnt through immersion in practical work, has two facets. Firstly, there is a place literacy derived from reading, narrative and discourse, and secondly, a literacy that is embodied, enacted and enfolded in place. These overlap to some extent but of the two literacies, discourse is far more prevalent. The second, derived from long-term practice, is the domain of people such as farmers and gardeners.

4.1 Gardening as meaning

The experience of migration often constitutes a profound process of fragmentation and reformulation of self. Pulled and pushed between exciting engagements with new people, culture, place and ecology, and 'saudade'

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(Cave, 2001; See, 2008); the longing for familiar things, places and people constituted a process whereby what was really important to me became more apparent. Writing in the 1930s, Spanish philosopher Jose Ortega Y Gasset, used the metaphor of shipwreck to convey and evoke the existential livedness of life:

To live is to feel oneself lost — he who accepts this has already begun to find himself, to be on firm ground. Instinctively, as do the shipwrecked, he will look round for something to which to cling, and that tragic, ruthless glance, absolutely sincere, because it is a question of his salvation, will cause him to bring order into the chaos of his life. These are the only genuine ideas; the ideas of the shipwrecked. All the rest is rhetoric, posturing, farce. (1932, p.134)

The shipwreck of my migrations was an interweaving of grief, place, exile and memory (Sebald, 1996, 2002). From 1979 to 1983, and the relatively vulnerable ages of 17 to 22 I lived in three continents, four countries and countless houses eventually settling in Sydney although it never really felt like 'home'. Schlesinger (2004) suggests that exilic experiences create a sense of liminality — ambiguous, open and indeterminate. While it is not that unusual for members of the postmodern generation (mobile, educated and green) to be concerned with matters of place and placelessness, such an experience of migration and displacement does tend to make 'life a serious matter' (Auden, 1941).

In this state of loss and dislocation what was important to me became increasingly clear. As suddenly as the time it took to fly and drive I, and we, were back in the UK to visit family and friends; soaking up the gardens and countryside. *'Allotments & Bees'* tells of the deep enjoyment of working in the gardens that summer in England; of continuing to learn the craft of gardening, and particularly of growing food.

Allotments and Bees

The allotment gardens

*Row upon row of fruiting and flowering strawberries,
raspberries, blackcurrants, white currants, red
currants*

*Potatoes, cabbages, asparagus
Forgiving, un-mulched, deep glacial soil
Moderate, cool weather, low rainfall*

*Created and kept through the ordered fertility of
fully committed routines
A strict work ethic in order to become
self-sufficient in food.*

*Bees from hives, dangerous, busy, noisy
and sweet apple blossoms
Ripe delicious tomatoes in glass houses.*

My connection to the craft of gardening and farming became stronger. That this revolved around growing food made sense because instinctively and intuitively this was about a sense of survival; a return to the basics and fundamentals of life in my unanchored life. This also constituted a transportation of that which I valued in the old land to the new. Ethical, political and practical values soon combined finding expression in 'Market Gardening in Suburbia'.

Market Gardening in Suburbia

In a yet-to-be-redeveloped hidden valley in suburban Sydney we are sharecropping for an oldish alcoholic bloke, Don, who wants to grow hydroponic cherry tomatoes and herbs in commercial glass houses. He puts up the money and organises the business, seeds, land, glasshouses and sales and we plant, weed, water, fertilise and spray the crops.

We pick great buckets of cherry tomatoes each day from a couple of semi-wild plants in one of the glass houses. We get up early and work long days and, often, through weekends. 'Crops do not stop at weekends', Don says. As well as cherry tomatoes, we plant out cabbages, sorrel, Lebanese cucumbers and a variety of herbs. There is a glasshouse just for his personal collection of rare herbs and perennial vegetables. In addition, there is another glasshouse for the commercial cultivation of a wide variety of types of basil — green, purple, 'sacred', small-leaved, eau de cologne, peppermint, liquorice, menthol and others.

Between the glasshouses we run a mob of chickens that we have liberated from a local battery farm for \$1 each. Close-by we set up tents and make a campfire to cook over.

Almost every day we labour in the glasshouses and adjoining fields. We are doing something productive, virtuous, real, and of our own choice. In the evenings we drink 'righteous beers' looking over the acres of crops and seedlings we are raising and cropping. We are taking part in an age-old craft of food growing.

The romance of this anti-corporate adventure begins to wear a bit thin after nearly a year when, firstly, we are obliged to carry out regular spraying with fungicides, herbicides and pesticides, and, secondly, when we find that we often can't sell the crops that we have grown.

We donate a truckload of cabbages to the Salvation Army for Christmas and leave Don, the boss, to woo the next batch of naïve workers — happy to work for nearly nothing.



Gardening and farming created in me a certain special feeling. No doubt this is the same for many, many people. It is the feeling of mastery of skills, tools, materials and processes echoing with the tradition of an essential human craft (Illich, 1973; Leiss, 1988; Chang, 2003; Pollan, 1997; Sennett, 2008; Crawford, 2009). As stated in Chapter 3, my early and foundational place connection was with the farms, gardens and moors of Devon. This was a deep relationship with place but also importantly with *craft*. It's hard not to be inspired by English summer gardens and there I continued to learn this craft in that place of deep soils, moderate climate and a heritage of wartime food-growing allotments. Largely, this constituted the understanding of, and commitment to, routines of skilled activities; continuous observation, care and effort; giving, feeding, guarding, planting, breeding, growing, killing and harvesting.

4.2 Learning place literacies

Growing a few crops may be a rich experience but rarely is it a reliable way to make a living. Soon I was learning and applying this craft '*Being Paid to Make Gardens!*'. Over the next decade I set about immersing myself in, and earning a

living from landscape design, construction and maintenance. A key part of making a living from the craft of gardening was '*Designing and Quoting*'.



Being Paid to Make Gardens!

Ah! This — one of the loves of my life. Being paid to make, create, design, feel and express beauty in the form of gardens and gardening. I'm being paid to do what I love to do!

The creation of the curve of a path or weeding and pruning to reveal the sculptured form of an old tree. Being given a neglected place and asked to make it magical, shaped, coloured, cared for and brought alive. To be allowed to express my physicality, carrying bricks, sand, soil, rocks, timber, stone, from place to place. Remove the old stuff, the unwanted stuff, and bring in the new. Combine them, recombine them and remake with nails, screws, cement, concrete, glue, soil, mulch, timber and of course plants. Crafting these living installations.

I'm happy to have found a way of engaging with society and livelihood in a way that I find ethically acceptable, real, grounding, physically expressive and maybe in some way, again, subversive.

I work with teams of people, often old university friends, collectively filling the almost abandoned daytime niche of suburban environment. There is a sense

of mastery of the physical, and of 'making' rather than passively entering more conservative professions.

I graduate from labourer to foreman to being self-employed. Knowledge is continuously gleaned, of plants, landscape processes, ecology, aesthetics, materials, tools, crafts, names and phrases, techniques and contacts. I soak up whatever I can. I set myself a target of at least knowing one new plant per week. Whenever I say that I can, or will make something that is new to me, I research it, visualising the stages and process over and over until it works in my mind.

Over the years, though, the effects of the sheer physicality of this work become increasingly apparent. Day after day of carrying in and carrying out from sites. Eating, drinking and muscles protesting. Skin burnt from sun, wind or rain. Skin cut, grazed, blistered, dirty, dusty or muddy. So physical! Many of my old university friends move on to other work, but I cannot. I continue playing with aesthetics, construction and living materials; the processes of living, growing, reproducing and of making places that resonated with energy, beauty and care.

Sometimes my pride and enjoyment in this way of making a living is tempered by worries. Will I make any money on this job? Will the client like the work? When will he or she pay? Will I have any work next week? Can I pay the bills, pay for my family, keep the 'Ute' going, and replace tools? Sometimes I ask myself 'am I just dressing up the dormitories of the rich and privileged'?

But I, and we, make hundreds of gardens, and mostly love doing it.



Designing and Quoting

An integral part of all this is the design, consultation and subsequent quote. An instant immersion into place: you have maybe 15-30 minutes to assess the site, the clients and imagine what can be done.

Find the place

Check out neighboring properties

Meet the clients

Find out what they think they want — do they know what they are talking about?

Meet the place — what happens here? Water, sunlight, climate, ecology, previous garden plantings ...

What is the feel of the place?

What would I do if this were my place?

Imagine/visualise what is possible

Negotiate with clients — do they have different points of view?

Agree on a course of action or some outcomes.

Work out how this/these can be done

Work out how long it should take with what materials, tools and equipment.

Estimate how much it will cost me and add some

Present the quote.

This is reading place. Visualising the possible. Imagining the desired. Playing with the material of place. Playing God. Gambling with unknowns. Backing your own judgments. Making place.

An essential aspect of a place-practice repertoire is the continued learning of place literacy. Through processes of 'reflection-in-action', while undertaking tasks, and 'reflection-on-action', after encounters had taken place (Schon, 1983), my literacy slowly developed. For instance, although there is wide variety of plants in any given garden, forest or landscape, there are usually only a few key species that really need to be learned. I learned that plants, both as individual species and as members of communities, were signposts that indicated climate, soil type, and history of a garden as well as the tastes of the owners. Author and gardener Michael Pollan (1996) asks why there is so much writing about nature and wilderness but so little about working with nature in the form of gardening (p. 5, p.194). A major premise of his writing (1996, 2001) is that gardening is the place and process of both *acting and being acted upon by Nature*.

One reason for this dearth of action-based (gardening) writing is that it is often not easy to put this experience into words. Pollan sets about learning from the experiences of an applied garden project in New England, in the United States. He finds that there is a 'cognitive dissonance' (p. 2) between what he knows and what he needs to know to carry out that practical project. It is challenging to attempt to express such practical, routine and embodied experiences and emergent themes into an academic disciplinary context. Consequently, as I identify the themes that emerge from the encounters in this chapter there is a sense that I am writing within the wrong genre of writing; that these experiences belong in trade manuals or in the realm of science writing. However, it is important to take these experiences out and beyond these disciplinary confines. Argyris and Schon (1974) see a distinction between 'espoused knowledge' and 'theories-in-use'. I argue that there is a

range of place literacies that can be divided into those that are social and communicated and those that are embodied, personal, tacit and unspoken.

The first of these place literacies is the mastery of stories and symbols of place. This is learning to convey understandings and, to some extent, playing the role of an authority or expert. Put simply, this is talking the talk of gardening, conservation design, aesthetics, values or whatever needs to be talked about in that setting. Pollan (1996) describes how material and ecological aspects of learning to take action in his gardening project are interwoven with the symbolic and storied. He describes, for instance, how American fascination with lawns is a socially prescribed convention about 'Americanness', 'like-mindedness', democracy and even Christian Puritanism (pp. 65-67). Pollan echoes Schama (1995) stating that nature and culture cannot be separated.

From a conservation perspective, this aspect of place literacy, often called 'environmental literacy', emerged in the 1970s from presenters and authors including Suzuki, (1979, 1999), Bellamy (1975 onwards), Erlich (1968, 1972) and others, such as Meadows et al. (1972) as encountered in Chapter 3. According to Orr (1992), calls for environmental literacy of that period were in response to growing popular concerns about population growth, global biodiversity loss (particularly rainforests), depletion of renewable resources as well as threats posed by pollution and waste (Orr, 1992, p.1). These were exhortations for a general environmental and ecological education and awareness and were popularly acclaimed by many of my generation, including myself. To work in this broad field--whether it be working in ornamental gardening, food production, or conservation-- requires literacy in terms of stories, ideas and texts; however this is the first of two literacies.

The second place literacy, one that tends to be more difficult to communicate, is embodied (Somerville, 2007), tacit (Polanyi, 1967), sensual, often private and emotional. These are sets of knowledge developed by people like gardeners and farmers over long periods of time. They are often intuitive and

rarely verbalised or even fully conscious. In his 1992 E. F. Schumacher Lecture, *Environmental Literacy: Education as if the Earth Mattered*, Orr argues for an environmental literacy very much along these lines. Drawing upon Polanyi (1958) and Leopold (1949) he argues that literacy should embrace emotionality, personal knowledge, and the senses, as well as being experience-based and responsive to the wider community of life. Citing Snyder (1990), Orr argues that it is actually the well educated who do the most damage to the world and who are most in need of this particular form of environmental literacy. He further argues that western educational tradition, culture and institutions are historically divorced from practical learning, tend to be elitist and top-down, privilege individualism over collective responsibility, and are themselves responsible for the knowledge of domination, including the domination of nature (pp. 2-5).

Despite being found in a range of other disciplinary fields including education, medicine, social work, and counseling, this kind of critically reflective, experience-based literacy, as advocated by Orr, seems to be under-acknowledged and under-valued in practical place work (including sustainability, conservation and environmental education and craft). This is in part because such knowledge is largely embodied and tacit (Polanyi, 1967), unspoken and intuitive. This embodiment is apparent from observing people who work on farms, gardens and building sites. Their experiences are reflected in the way they hold their bodies. As with almost all jobs, this kind of work is comprised of a series of repeated physical actions. Carrying a bag of cement is just about the same each time, as is moving a spadeful of sand or soil. Similarly, when working with living materials, each experience of cutting a branch, each experience of pressing a handful of potting mix down around a new seedling, and each experience of pushing a spade into soil is similar — and remembered. Through this ever-developing literacy, bodies unconsciously know what to expect, what to feel and how to work with these materials, energies, processes and places.

These two place literacies, firstly of symbols and stories and secondly, of

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embodied knowledge sometimes complement and overlap, but in western culture they are also often in tension to the point of disjuncture.

4.3 Taking action: Making fields of care

The skills and literacies involved in designing and creating landscapes are vital, but I can confidently state from experience that it's on-going care that requires the greatest time and effort in place practice. 'Caring for Places' requires that actions be taken on a regular basis and ultimately, it's what makes or breaks a project.

Caring for Places

We work as team driving around Sydney maintaining a series of commercial landscapes. This has all the physicality and care of landscaping but with little of the initial creative design and construction input. A large team effort, mechanical and chemical, hot, thirsty, Coca Cola, meat pies and Mars Bars. Driving from place to place, working, eating and drinking.

Each time the place is to be left better than before; a sense of progress towards an ideal (landscape). We deal with other peoples' rubbish, car parts, syringes, found purses, builders' waste. Multiple engines are operated to cut, edge, clean and transport. Returning again later, satisfied that the place is being cared for, or irritated that our caring efforts are not being appreciated.

If we come across a place that hasn't been looked after we know it's going to be far more difficult than it needs to be. There is an ideal timing or frequency for this kind of work.

Leaving the place again — in the truck, proud, lawns neat, trees pruned, mulch weeded, rubbish removed, paths swept, tools cleaned and returned ready for the next job. Home to a cup of tea or beer.

Once consultation, research, visualisation and planning reached a certain stage then it was time to take action. This was anything from pruning, to weeding, to planting or building structures. Csikszentmihali (1991) talks of

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entering the 'flow' of action. This is an important observation about what it is to take action. When in the 'flow' of action the mind becomes focussed, less cerebral and more embodied. Schon (1983), as mentioned earlier, was an accomplished musician (Ramage & Shipp, 2009) and no doubt this helped him understand the practitioners feel for this 'flow'. In the enactment of skills and craft, no matter how accomplished the practitioner's repertoire, there is a fine line between creation and destruction, and success and failure. In making gardens it was sometimes necessary to unmake before attempting to create the desired outcome. Old structures were pulled apart, Bobcats ripped out great chunks of soil while trees were pruned or removed. The making of the new depended upon the destruction of the old. The flow of action of the practitioner required that the vision be held with confidence while clients often worried and/or grieved.

It didn't take long, though, to realise that a good garden was just the same as a good park or farm in that maintenance — that is consistent, frequent, timely, appropriate interaction — was the key component. This required that the place be observed keenly, and in detail. Actions then taken were generally small and subtle, but continuous. In fact, maintenance is as important, if not more important, than design and construction. Even the worst lawns or the shabbiest shrubs can be made to look good with enough care.

As gardens are living systems, this maintenance or follow-up work has to be about caring for life and living systems. Evernden (1985, 1992), cites the work of phenomenologist Martin Heidegger and existentialist philosopher William Barrett to develop a notion of *field of care* or *field of concern* (Evernden, 1985, p. 64) and *field of self* (Evernden, 1992, p.101):

... one does not experience the boundary of the self as the epidermis of the body but rather a gradient of involvement in the world. But instead of considering the extension of the self into the worlds as akin to the making of body image or phenomenal body, here we are talking about field of care or concern. (1985, p. 64)

This field of care, concern and/or self is familiar to any place worker. Because caring for places requires an unwavering commitment to care for living beings both geographically and through time, there is sense that one's self, and field of care, extends to incorporate all that is and all those that are being cared for.

Upon returning to projects I often experienced a deep pride in seeing the results of craft carried out. I would suggest this is re-entering the field of care previously created and perhaps personally benefiting from it. On other occasions I was disappointed to find that the clients had not cared for a place as well or as much as I would have liked. My favourite clients were themselves gardeners who fully appreciated the changes made to their gardens and raked, pruned, watered, brushed and enjoyed them after I left.

4.4 Learning from place: Materiality and physicality

This kind of work also develops and requires respect and appreciation for the materials of place. Two encounters come to mind. Firstly, 'Wildflower Field' is the chance encounter with an overgrown field reversing years of farming work. Secondly, I remember working on a landscaping site along side a 'Stone Mason' watching him slowly transform a pile of rocks into a wall.

Wildflower Field

*Back in Devon, on long summer's evenings, evenings with no time limits,
I put on my running kit and just go.*

*Run and run. I am fit from playing sport.
Set off slow, get warmed up, pick up to a fast jog and keep it there.
Pushing on,
Waiting for the rhythm
Push on
Waiting for the buzz*

Push on

Just breathing and letting go

Gliding over through fields, hedges, gates, villages, lanes

I come across an abandoned field

It's a good place to stop to catch my breath.

Weeds and wildflowers spread across the previously cultivated pasture. The areas where weeds first grew are now growing woody weeds, shrubs, and trees even.

I love the purposeful chaos of this. I love the place claiming itself back. The woods are creeping, bursting, springing out from the previously confined hedgerows.



Stone Mason

Working day after day making gardens

Each job is different

But we know what to do most of the time

Working quietly — talking only when needed

This job though is very different

It's on an island so we ferry in all materials, tools and ourselves each day.

Because of this we get there mid-morning.

Each day Max, a stone mason, is already having morning tea when we arrive. He works on after we leave.

An older guy, he says even less than us.

This is his trade, his craft — has been forever.

Heavy muscles and gnarled hands

But astute and delicate when judging, shaping and placing rock

A rock is eyed-up

Squinting through cigarette smoke

Picked up

Struck with a rock hammer at just the right angle

Cemented into place, leveled, cleaned

And onto the next, and the next ...

Quiet, rhythm of making a stone wall

Cigarette still in mouth

A practice perspective to understanding working with place soon turns to place as teacher. This is engagement with 'materiality' (Fry, 1994, p. 94) and 'physicality'. Somerville (2007) and Gruenwald (2008) argue for *place pedagogy*, by which experiences of place are recognised as deeply important educational experiences and consequently identified and learned from. As a tradesman, learning from place is an educational process upon which depends the very success of individual projects as well as long-term ability to make a living.

When working with place and practicing craft, you can't just do what you want. Pollan (1996) in his self-reflective project of learning from gardening, states that gardening is a balance between acting and being acted upon (p.145). Furthermore, he points out that gardening requires both confidence in actions taken, but also, ultimately, exercise of grace in the face of the forces of any place. In imagination, design and planning almost anything is

possible, but execution of actions on and with materiality of place is a process of negotiation. In consumerism-driven gardening, as well as conservation theory, there is an implicit fantasy of human agency over the passive other. A garden is to be remade into a version of the latest fashion theme. In conservation the Earth is posited as fragile to be rescued. These are fantasies, because these are not conceptions that can be sustained through experiences of materiality and physicality of place. As previously argued, places are deeply agentic.

There seems to be little in academic literature that really conveys or evokes this sense of materiality and physicality of place. The feel of practice, as argued throughout this thesis, is under-articulated. People who carry out this work, face-to-face, with hands, each day, are generally hidden and silent; or patronisingly sentimentalised. Ondaatje's *The Skin of a Lion* (1988) is a text that does successfully describe a strong sense of materiality and physicality. In great detail he describes movements of body, limbs, muscles; the sense of touch, the weight of carrying materials as well as the exposure to weather from outdoor work. His writing is thick with description of wind, materials of work, dust and weight (pp. 30-31); the motion of things, bodies, weather (p. 41); description of light (p. 77), running water (p. 94), 'the cut of the shovel into clay ... digging into slippery darkness' (p.105), and lastly, the use of tools and body positions (p.108). This writing is not to be found in genres of garden design, conservation or nature writing.

Practical experience, and countless memories of this, tells me that earth, sand, clay and stone are heavy; that wood is tough, and grass and weeds are tough and resilient. Moreover, the sun is often hot and hostile, and when it rains you have a choice to either clomp around in slippery mud or call an end to the workday. When it comes to taking action on and with the material of place it doesn't take long to realise that these materials of place are in dialogue with muscles, hands, feet and bodies. Bodies being acted upon are often worn out, tired and sore at the end of each day. This is Fry's (1994) 'materiality' of place. It demands a strong physicality of the people carrying

out physical work that is so well captured by Ondaatje (1988).

Because place work (for instance gardening, farming or conservation and bush regeneration work), is so guided by considerations of materiality and physicality of place, a craft approach is required. The successful execution of craft requires an understanding of what can be done — an appreciation of what materials and place will allow. The stone mason builds a wall quickly and quietly, but only in the way that the stone, the weather, his tools, and his energy and skills allow. Work even enhanced by machinery, motors, hydraulics, chemicals and the power of hyper-capitalism is still a matter of negotiation — of craft.

Despite the exertions of workers, now nearly always enhanced by the power of machinery and chemicals, actions are often relatively ineffectual in the long term. On the few occasions where projects were abandoned just after the earthmoving phase it didn't take long for the changes and damages to be washed smooth by rain, and re-colonised by grasses, weeds and other pioneer species. Even in the case of projects that had been well designed and successfully completed the components of the place that had been altered or removed to create the modified landscape would eventually reassert themselves. Dead leaves, dust, soil, seeds and spores would blow or wash back in. Weeds returned and flourished and plants that had been pruned would re-grow or be replaced by something similar.

The materials that constitute any given place are in tension, waiting to quickly recombine given the opportunity. In the wildflower field where I rested while running in Devon the wildflowers and woods could be seen returning. The act of running rendered the world fluid, and as I flew free through the fields I could see place freeing itself. The resilient hedgerows were in tension waiting for the opportunity to become woodlands. In time the field and hedgerows would be reclaimed again by the landowner and farmed again. The hedgerows would be trimmed back, the wildflowers would be subdued again, but they would be back. Waiting: I knew this. I can see this in each place that I work in

or visit. This theme is further explored through James Lovelock's (1979) Gaia theory in Chapter 5.

4.5 Desire for another kind of place

Inspired by a new friend, Ray, I started visiting the 'alternative' town of Bellingen on the Mid-North NSW Coast. Moving there would at the time have been referred to as 'dropping out' or becoming self-sufficient; contemporary thinking would see this as a sea-change or 'down-shifting' (Hamilton, 2004). In common with many people I was attracted to ideas of community, self-sufficiency, ecological care as well as a simpler lifestyle. A proportion of this generation acted upon this desire moving from places such as Sydney, Melbourne, London, Paris, LA and similar urban centers to new rural, idealistic lives.

Ray was drawn by the Red Cedar, a tree species that symbolised ancient Gondwanan rainforest heritage; from the timber-getter culture of the settlers as well as being a symbol of renewal of rainforest and environmental education in general — '*Red Cedars and the Alternative Vision*'. Soon a visit to '*Old Growth Rainforest*' introduced me to a new world.

Red Cedars and the Alternative Vision

I wait in the classroom at Horticulture School. I have been working in the industry for a few years and have returned to part-time study. Other students seem to be quite young — I am older. By week two I no longer expect to find a study-buddy or soul mate here. But then in walks a rather smooth-looking older guy, and my friend-to-be, Ray. Almost immediately the class conversation shifts from retaining walls, propagation, plant culture to a community called 'Findhorn', conservation of rare species and the pros and cons of different methods of composting.

Environmental Education is his passion and living, but with Ray environmental education is about 'alternative' culture, forms of knowledge, ways of being, places, and types of energy. Implicit in these is the inevitability that change for the good is on its way and just a matter of

time. These slightly vague promises seem to be represented by two symbols. The first is a particular town Bellingen, and the second is the Australian Red Cedar tree.

On the way to go bush-walking in the Blue Mountains, to the west of Sydney, we drive through an avenue of big old trees in the town of Richmond. Through and under the arching Plane and Peppercorn trees. (Many years later these became the landmarks I would look for when driving to the University of Western Sydney and the world of Social Ecology). Not much further along the road Ray becomes very excited.

'There! Look! Aren't they brilliant! There's two of them and they are deciduous in winter and have red new growth in the spring and that's how the loggers knew where they were from a distance. They were 'red gold' to timber-getter, who often wasted them because the rivers flooded and sent the logs too far out to sea, and they can't be grown commercially because of tip-moth but if you grow them in the shade and ... Oh! Look, there's a smaller one across the road that may have self-seeded from the other ...'

I soon understood what he is so excited about.



Old Growth Rainforest

A month or two later, we drive up to his beloved town of Bellingen. We drive all night, arrive and sleep. Next morning I wake with a view from a converted 'bale' (barn) up a narrow winding valley. Cold white frost covers the grassy field on either side of the river flat. Rainforest shoots out from, and up, the sides of the valley, up and up into national parks that surrounded the community. As it is winter the forest around is quiet but for occasional Black Cockatoos screeching.

And then somewhere, a CRACK! — high- pitched screaming of an unknown tree falling to the ground — CRUNCH!. Frosty silence again.

That day Ray and I together with someone who claims to have 'local knowledge' walk up into the surrounding forest, along logging tracks, higher and higher into the national park. The further we walk the older and less recent the logging tracks until, after about three or

four hours, the tracks narrow to single file and we enter what feels like something from Tolkein's Lord of the Rings.

Massive ancient Brush Box trees — 2, 3, 4 and more metres in diameter; groves of tree ferns, cycads and Bangalow palms, much of it bound together by lianas, some with hooks. I do not know many of the species. They are lush, large leaved, green and with red-tipped new growth. Moss covers the shaded places. Paths and tracks disappear into thick growth. Here are places that have been walked by very few people.

This is a different realm. A place of pre-historic rainforest. We are visitors. We stop, eat a snack and drink what was by now rationed water. Then the long, long walk back again.



The divine discontent identified in Chapter 3 eventually led to an increasingly close relationship with 'alternative' Bellingen and also found expression in the

reading of particular books. Generally, during this time, reading was from necessity; mostly trades books — how to improve soils, propagate plants, run nurseries, prevent and treat plant pests and diseases, assemble watering systems, construct walls, paving and pergolas as well as plant names and classifications. Despite the realities of often-overwhelming family and work demands, I also continued some kind of personal 'search' through reading imaginative texts. What this search was for was unclear. In my own time and space, though, as some kind of counter-balance to other more practical texts, I read among others Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) and *Love in the Time of Cholera* (1988), Castaneda's *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge* (1968) and *A Separate Reality: Further Conversations with Don Juan* (1971), Ondaatje's *The English Patient* (1993) as well as Kundera's *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (1978), and *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1984). These fed my, and again, a broader generational, desire for meaning; exotic, romantic and philosophical. These texts, a reflection of the zeitgeist, could be found in some combination in all our friends' bookcases.

From time-to-time Sandy and I managed to get away from the work routine. One of these get-aways was a trip to Tasmania, bush walking in several national parks. There I read Matthieson's '*The Snow Leopard*' (1978).

The Snow Leopard

The Snow Leopard. I read it slowly ... to savor it. Mattheison's journey, mountain-climbing, through Buddhist and shamanistic history is in search of the literal and metaphorical snow leopard. Detailed elegant, mystical and poignant descriptions of prayer wheels, monks, wildlife, people in the landscape. A perfect setting for reflecting upon his metaphysical searchings.

We walk along beaches, through forests and along rocky ridge tops as my imagination walks through the Himalayas. And as I tire, I silently chant to myself the mantra 'Om Mane Padme Hum'. It gives me a new rhythm and strength to walk along the path through the forest. I am

carried along.

The most influential text I read at that stage of my life follows Matthieson's spiritual journey following the death of his wife in the previous year. In common with Chatwin (1987), Capra (1975, 1988) and Sebald (1996) it is an exploration of relationship to place that is mysterious, spiritual and not always easy: According to Matthieson 'God gives a choice of either repose or truth, but you can't have both' (1978, p. 269).

We, Sandy and I, and many others, didn't choose repose. The desire for another kind of place resulted in a move to the margins; dropping-out, tree-changing or down-shifting (Hamilton, 2004). This move to a new place was strongly accompanied by this desire for new or different value frameworks and lived practice. Looking back, though, I'm not sure if we were being courageous and virtuous or just plain naïve.

4.6 Place-Practice Changes

The experiences of Chapter 4 revolve around encounters of traveling back to the UK; a decade as a gardener and tradesman in Sydney in a variety of roles, and the continued exploration, through reading and traveling, of different value frameworks and places. Changes to place practice can be seen in personal, collective and professional terms. Returning to the countryside and gardens in the UK deepened feelings of exilic confusion but also confirmed in me the importance of craft, of working with place whether gardening for food, ornament or conservation.

With time and experience my repertoire of place practice grows and becomes more complex. Day-to-day work constitutes going beyond naïve and romantic notions of gardening and nature. Never-the-less, despite the physicality and requisite commitment to routines, there remains a special feeling that comes from mastery of materials, skills, processes; from designing things of beauty and the sensuous encouragement of abundance through food growing.

A decade of gardening leads me to understand that the development of place literacy is vital to this kind of work. Place literacy is firstly of story and symbol, and secondly is embodied (Somerville, 2007) tacit (Polanyi, 1967) and intuitive (Schon, 1987). This second literacy, as advocated by Orr (1992) that comes from accumulated experiences of long-term practical work, is very much about entering the 'flow' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991) of action. This often involves limited risk-taking, as well as a deep appreciation of physicality (Ondaatje, 1988), and materiality (Fry, 1994) in order to create and maintain fields of care (Evernden, 1985); fields of care that can care, in return, for the practitioner.

Vitally, such work is craft (Pollan, 1997; Sennett, 2008; Crawford, 2009), requiring that work be carried out in appreciation of what time, effort, material and place will allow. It is also an appreciation that working with living systems and place are as much about acting-upon, as being acted-upon (Pollan, 1996). This second literacy, the literacy of craft and practice is generally under-articulated, assumed and subsumed (Pepper, 1984). Importantly, it is a response to, and requires an understanding and gracious acceptance of what can be achieved in any given, agentic place.

At the end of this decade my deep joy of gardening remains undiminished. However, the ideas and ideals of the 1970s that initially inspired me in my youth, and kept alive through reading, prompt a move to a place that promises the possibility of bringing ideals and practice more closely together. So swept along by a popular wave of generational ethical stance, as well as my own personal divine discontent, we move to a place that promises so much more.

Chapter Five — Alternative Town Promise

My repertoire of place practice shifts focus from learning and living gardening craft in Sydney to immersion into the NSW mid-north coast 'alternative' town of Bellingen. Chapter 5 draws upon images and encounters of the experiences of sustainability, Permaculture, bush regeneration and Eastern spirituality which are strong elements of alternative (sustainability) culture and practice in places such as Bellingen. Deep engagement with these ideas seems to promise so much. However, such a shift can also be unsettling; forcing new ways of feeling, conceptualising and practicing self-place relationship.

This is a shift in focus from suburban aesthetic and associated literacies of place to immersion into a community consciously concerned with sustainability and conservation on a range of levels. Initially, this was through bush regeneration, anti-logging protest, Yoga and meditation, and Permaculture, among other practices. Alternative towns such as Bellingen and Nimbin in Australia, Totnes in the UK as well as many others around the world are places significantly influenced by the idealism of the 1970s (again) and populated by people attempting to live out this set of ideas and ideals. Wave after wave of people move to these places in an attempt to live more sustainably.

5.1 A community of alternatives

We moved to Bellingen and for the first time we owned a house and garden — a good thing as our family was growing with, at that stage, a 2-year old son and another on the way. The town, though, was smaller and quieter than we had expected, and work was hard to come by. That gave us time to meet the challenges of parenting and to slowly work our way into our new community. Before we knew it, we were inundated with new people, ideas, practices and places.

One of the essential elements of the suite of alternative sustainability philosophies and practices that I encountered in Bellingen was '*Bringing Back the Bush*' through the practice of bush regeneration.

Bringing Back the Bush

My friend Ray is showing me around Bellingen — ‘Bello’. He is particularly keen to show me a conservation project that’s been running for years.

We drive to ‘Bat Island’ on the river. The noises and screeching and flapping of tens of thousands of fruit bats and rampant tropical vegetation are almost overwhelming. The incredible noise becomes more familiar but the atmosphere and smell of abundant fertility is almost overwhelming.

I am fascinated. A few people are slowly hand weeding small areas in among a sea of weeds. I want to get in there with brush-cutters, chainsaws, Bobcats and other tools and means proportional to the daunting challenge.

Ray and I chat, ‘Oh, yes, the Bat Island bush regenerators have been working down there each and every Tuesday for years. In a box of books in the back of his car I find Bringing Back the Bush by Joan Bradley (1988).

Later, after the work has finished for the day, we walk through the Island. A perimeter of weeds gives way to darker rainforest of massive buttressed trees, palms, and groundcovers. In among the forest understorey are piles of weeds formed into informal compost heaps.



The theme of forest conservation continued. Not long after arriving, an alert was put out by the local environment centre to 'Protest at Chaelundi Forest'. Concerned locals were asked to support protests against the logging of old growth forest about two hours drive away.

Protest at Chaelundi Forest

I am racing along cold, damp dirt tracks through the old growth forest in our family car. I'm scared and on alert for police, loggers, trucks, ruts, slippery corners. In the car with me are four protesters, who I have not met before, wanting to get beyond the police lines. Backpacks full of provisions, sleeping gear and all the other stuff needed for an indefinite 'illegal' stay in the freezing winter forest. They bundle out of the car through giant Brush Box trees and into the descending darkness. They shout 'thanks' and I shout 'good luck'.

I drive back fully expecting to be stopped by police. But no, I get back to the official protest camp to sit around a fire as temperatures fall quickly.

In the morning the sun comes up and, after a while, thaws the ice on the tents. Campfire smoke drifts across the campsite. As the air warms protesters emerge from tents, hollow logs and makeshift shelters. In the afternoon we march along a logging track with grandmas, 'ferals', children, activists and ordinary people like us. We chat to the police who escort us along the march. They stop us when we reach a prohibited area close to the logging coups and machinery.

The situation feels surreal, ridiculous. Why are we being escorted by police? Why is logging rainforest trees, some over 500 years old, being protected? Why is so much money being spent on the police? And so little on local rural communities and their struggling small-scale sawmills? Why turn the trees into chips and pallets to be used once and then thrown away?

Despite these seriously compelling questions going through my mind protest is not for me. It's like I'm an actor in hackneyed film.

To become part of this place of Bellingen and its community required embarking on a steep learning process. Slowly joining this community of practice (Wenger, 1998) involved the adoption of, or at least the understanding of, a new and sometimes strange set of language, symbols, and values quite different that that I had grown used to in suburban Sydney.

An early place literacy I encountered was bush regeneration (Bradley, 1988). Devised by Sydney sisters Joan and Eileen Bradley on the North Shore of Sydney, the premise of bush regeneration is simple: healthy, diverse, native ecosystems can be reestablished if given sufficient help. Upon first encounter the bush regeneration work at Bellingen Island appeared to be painfully slow. I had yet to appreciate that bush regeneration work *is* slow and gradual, deliberately carried out with minimal disturbance, and effectively at the same pace as the native vegetation can recover. Any faster and the introduced

species simply re-establish. The tools used were small hand-tools such as trowels, knives and secateurs. From the briefest encounter this work clearly revealed itself as requiring a deep patience in the face of often formidable weedscares. (Further experiences of Bush Regeneration feature in Chapter 6 onwards).

Soon I was witness to, and participating in, the protection of native forest in a more dramatic way. The Chaelundi of the early 1990s took place towards the end of series of protests dating back to Terania Creek (in 1979) and Washpool (in 1981-82). In turn these were part of longer and larger forest preservation campaigns in the Blue Mountains in the 1960s and Fraser Island in the 1970s and the Franklin Dam 1980s (Hutton & Connors, 1999). However, protests, direct action and forest blockades did not feel right for me. My personal inclinations, skills and life circumstances led me to want to engage in practical, day-to-day, long-term conservation in a different way. In retrospect I have come to more fully appreciate the importance of the Chaelundi action, among others. These campaigns preserved significant tracts of local forest that in time led to the establishment or expansion of an extensive series of National Parks that could easily be taken for granted today.

The language and practices of forest, conservation, weeds, logging, and protest was one element of literacy of this new place and community. The next engagement with this suite of alternative sustainability practices came through Yoga and meditation. This non-western philosophy and practice is central to alternative culture, offering a way around Cartesian dualism of body and mind. In time this shift in focus to body and emotion strongly contributes to a changed understanding of self and place relationship. In *'Mari's Yoga'* I stretched my body and muscles. My emotional self followed a while later.

Mari's Yoga

'Stand up!'

Hold your pose there

*Spiral up from the ground up through
Your feet, legs, pelvis, torso, neck, arms and head,
And up and out
To the heavens*

*The yoga hall is mirrored
You can see bodies stretching
Morna, strong, Sri Lankan, our Yoga teacher
Incense burning and music (maybe Enya)
Evoking us to be higher selves
Freer selves
More confident selves
Stronger selves
Our real selves*

*Stand up! Straight!
Use your heart
Use your eyes
Be a man!
Her classes are challenging and loving.
People touch
They ask 'how are you' and replying 'good' isn't enough.*

Through the Yoga group I was introduced to Zen Master Hogan. I was soon asked to show him a local place called the Promised Land. My first *Zen Sesshin* followed this.



Zen Sesshin

I'm driving somewhere I do not really know, with Japanese Zen Master Hogan sitting in my old car!! A sunny winter day.

The river, cold and clear as ever, racing over, around and between massive, smoothed granite boulders, over rapids and into pools. Through Casuarina trees and twisted, flood-battered Water Gums.

Hogan carefully unwraps his camera from a series of plastic bags. Hopping from boulder to boulder in his black gown, headband, pristine white socks and sandals. Grinning, almost madly, taking photos.

'Charlie, this the best Zen garden I ever see!'



*Soon I'm sitting at a retreat
A Sesshin
It's winter facing south to the river
Days of this
Agony of limbs then numbness
Facing the wall, fidgeting
Everybody else seems to be so ... Zen!*

*Another day, before dawn, we sit facing the wall in the cold dark
Blankets around each of us*

*Sitting, breathing, letting-go, letting in.
Slowing,
Still
Empty*

Rainforest dawn creeps in
Friar bird song
Kookaburra song
Silences between

Crack!
A Whipbird so clear, so here, NOW!
NOW !!
And the cold morning condensation
Drips off the roof
Perfectly
Through morning sunrays
Into a pool of water
Circles flowing out
Perfectly

Adding to understandings of forest, wood, weeds, and Yoga and mediation were other elements in this suite of alternative sustainability practice. Much of the philosophy of this place and community was imbued with an eclectic mix of Asian philosophies and practices. In addition to encounters with yoga and Zen Buddhism as above, I remember long and earnest discussions on Feng Shui and Taoism as well as listening to people's stories of time spent in places such as Bali or India and in particular, Goa. In my youth I had been captured by Asian philosophies and practices encountered in Schumacher (1973), Capra (1975), Matthiesson (1978) and Gandhian non-violence Mukherjee (1983) among other texts. I was particularly drawn to Zen philosophy and practice that emphasised humility, and practice over text (Yamahata, 1991, p. 34) as well as 'effortless-effort' (Yamahata, 2003).

Bellingen offered this eclectic mix of philosophies and practices to be encountered, understood and to varying degrees adopted. In an unspoken sense this felt like a quest to find *the* 'alternative' way to live. However, there

was no one codified, consistent expression of sustainable lifestyle. The following significant alternative sustainability encounters revolved around Permaculture texts and practice.

5.2 Permaculture and the power of the organic

One set of practices encountered that strongly stand out from that time are those of Permaculture. Permaculture is a set of ideas and practices that aim to design sustainable living systems, most commonly in the form of edible landscapes. Before moving to Bellingen I read *Permaculture One: A Perennial Agriculture for Human Settlements* (Mollison & Holmgren, 1978) and *Permaculture Two: Practical Design for Town and Country in Permanent Agriculture* (Mollison, 1979). Full of promise and inspiration these texts featured designs for a progressive implementation of new, ethical and considered ways of gardening, farming, and generally inhabiting the land. I read, imagined and dreamed my way into these texts, diagrams and particularly the sketched images depicting the growth of designed edible landscape systems — trees, ponds, fish livestock, insects. ...

On arrival in Bellingen I hoped to see examples of Permaculture in practice but was surprised to find that there seemed to be no active organised Permaculture groups in Bellingen. I enrolled in a Permaculture Certificate course being taught in the NSW North Coast town of Byron Bay by 'Bill Mollison'. I then immersed myself into 'The Permaculture package' — a set of experiences that still deeply influence my personal and professional practice.

Bill Mollison

Because Bill Mollison, author of the texts I had read, is one of the co-presenters there are over 50 course participants enrolled. Each day involves some combination of Mollison's provocative and deeply inventive approaches to garden design, urban planning and everything else — and Jude and Michel Fanton of the 'Seed Savers' organisation. Their slower, considered and more collective approaches to learning and Permaculture act as a counterweight. We explore an array of ideas, texts and approaches. Michel Fanton, in particular, reads excerpts from Shattering: Food, Politics, and the Loss of Genetic Diversity

(Fowler & Mooney, 1990) in which the 8,000-year history of domestication and diversification of food crops was outlined and then shown to have been acquired, commodified, misunderstood and threatened by Western Corporate activity from World War Two onwards. Their Seed Savers Handbook (Fanton & Fanton, 1993) shows ways in which these traditional food plant varieties can be enjoyed and conserved; preserving a living heritage.

Bill's vision of Permaculture is inspired but also practical. I return to Bellingen buzzing.

The Permaculture Package

On return to Bellingen, a group of us form Bellingen Permaculture Group. For two years we stage monthly events including tours of existing gardens and orchards, film nights and working bees at each others' gardens, orchards and farms. The overall Permaculture package offers so much it's hard to know where to start or finish.

We take design ideas such as 'Mandala' gardens, 'chicken tractors', herb-spirals, and composting toilets and make them work. Tyre ponds and tyre retaining walls are erected, and garden beds are edged with Lemon Grass and Comfrey. We see weeds as good and, of course, we compost everything! We distrust anything corporate.

It's hot and physical taking these visions and making them material. It's also often contentious; we discuss and sometimes argue over interpretations of zones, (1, 2, 3, 4, 5 to organise land use), and rules of thumb such as 'each element of a design should have three functions'.

These are practical answers for post-hippies wanting to put their ideas into practice in real places, properties and gardens.

According to Permaculture writer Gladwell (2005), this was a right idea at the right time. Mollison (Grayson, 2007) suggests that Permaculture gave direction to the back-to-the-land 'alternates' and 'New Settlers' of the 1960s to the 1980s, who 'could define those aspects of the global society that they rejected ...'. Permaculture offered positive vision, grounded action as well as political consciousness.

Permaculture originated with a series of radio interviews and publications by Bill Mollison, then lecturer in environmental design and environmental

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psychology at the University of Tasmania and his student David Holmgren that outlined the Permaculture vision (Mollison & Holmgren, 1978; Mollison, 1979, 1988). Mollison's background in farming, fishing, working for the CSIRO as well as being an academic combined with Holmgren's political upbringing to create a movement that drew upon, among others, Fukuoka's *One Straw Revolution* (1978), Yeomans' *Water for Every Farm* (1973), as well as Tasmania's rich heritage of organic farming, intentional communities and intellectual ferment (Grayson, 2007).

Throughout the 1980s the ideas of Permaculture spread throughout Australia through Permaculture Design Courses, school projects and through overseas aid projects. Permaculture was an attractive package. Firstly, it provided a fairly coherent set of ideas, guidelines and rules to guide the actions of people interested in living sustainable lives (Holmgren, 2002). Here were some practical answers for those who had tired of protest. Secondly, the ideas and ideals of Permaculture were radically strengthened through the incorporation of systems thinking (Holmgren, 2002, p. xix). Thirdly, although the emphasis was upon the practical it retained an overtly small 'p' political approach (Ball, 2007). Mollison, however, denied this (London, 2005). The greatest strength of Permaculture was its emphasis upon the (re)designability (Holmgren, 2002, p. xxv) of so many aspects of our lives, and particularly the places in which we live.

However then, in Bellingham at least, Permaculture seemed to die a death. Perhaps Mollison's sometimes abrasive character alienated some people. Another factor in the decline of Permaculture could be attributed to its lack of reflexivity, or as Holmgren calls it 'it's over-promotion' (p. xxiii); its proponents desiring to teach, and be taught, overly clear answers to complex situations. However, many of the practices championed by Permaculture in the 1980s and 1990s are now broadly accepted (Holmgren, 2009), including for instance recycling, organic food production, passive solar house design, and composting toilets. In Bellingham, however, the decline of Permaculture was almost certainly due to historical circumstance. In Australia the 1990s became

the decade of Landcare (Toyne & Farley, 2000). Landcare projects were well funded and community-based, quickly attracting people who wished to express their desire for sustainability through practical action.

What can be learned from these Permaculture experiences? Permaculture gave me insights and tools that allowed my place practice to take sustainability into account more effectively. Key to this was Permaculture's emphasis upon *(re)designability of systems* (Mollison, 1988) in gardens, buildings, places and communities. It became clear to me that what we did with our land, growing crops and so on, especially in Australia, was rarely consciously designed, but was actually the product of historical circumstance. To redesign, with sustainability in mind, offers a profound power that I feel has yet to be appreciated by many. I now look about the farms, gardens, buildings, parks and other manifestations of socially constructed place practice and wonder if we realise how different, how creatively reconstructed, these could be.

Permaculture, in common with many expressions of sustainability and conservation, is not easy to critique. Indeed, in keeping with one of the main arguments of this thesis, there is little critical literature available. However, much can be learned from direct experience. As Holmgren (2002, p. xxii) writes, Permaculture originated in academia. Permaculture's strength, i.e. its emphasis upon *design*, was ironically also Permaculture's weakness. It is one thing to (re)design something, but it's quite another to (re)create it, and then even more challenging to maintain that living system in the long term. Simply speaking, a pitfall of Permaculture is that it can feature plenty of talking and good intentions, but insufficient sustained application. My observation was, and still is, that the missing ingredient was that many well-meaning idealistic ex-urban Permaculture design graduates misunderstood the levels of physicality, craft, and commitment to land required to carry out their visions. One of the most publicised images of Permaculture was Bill Mollison in the ABC documentary *The Global Gardener* (ABC. 1995) 'reclining' in his orchard/garden. My experiences of Permaculture, as with working with the land anywhere, is that places have minds, and directions of their own. If you

want to have a productive edible-for-humans landscape it requires developing, and maintaining a close place relationship, place practice, over a long period of time. This involves constant and repetitive physical effort.

A third lesson from Permaculture was an understanding of the formidable power of organic systems. *'The Stump'* is an encounter with organic symbiotic associations.

The Stump

It's early in my teaching career. The day's lesson plan has ended several hours too early. I now have fifteen keen and (scarily) informed adults to teach for another two hours! Thankfully someone asks for a tour of my garden. We walk around and I show them various gardening, landscaping and Permaculture projects. We discuss things as we come across them. All the usuals are covered — soil-structure, composting, mulching, chicken runs, paving, Lomandras, Mulberries, Paw Paws, Leopard Trees.

Coming to an area of my garden that, in my mind at least, is a problem, I describe the recent removal of a large Sally Wattle. I am tired by now.

'This is a problem area', I say.

'Nothing grows here. I've tried compost, soil conditioner, mulch, fertiliser, green manure crops ... but nothing grows ...'

Kate (later a good friend) then moves forward through the group and points to the stump.

'What's that then?'

The Sally Wattle stump is covered in an array of fungus brackets – bright orange, yellow and white. They are a sight to behold; some round and smooth, others crenulated and wavy, all living on the remnant of the Sally Wattle stump. A closer look further reveals how amazing they are. I know that these were just the fruiting bodies of fungal threads that probably run with no bounds throughout the garden, and way beyond. All that week we have been talking and studying mycorrhizal and bacteriological associations. I am embarrassed to have been so mistaken.

Permaculture's insistence upon careful observation of phenomena of dynamic

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systems (Holmgren, 2002, p.15) further opened my eyes (usually!) to the systemic organic processes that are in operation in every garden, site, place, ecosystem, hedgerow, forest, and creek and for that matter, every car park, car, indoor room and person. This insight became more powerful when added to a new understanding and appreciation of organic processes gained through teaching and practicing various aspects of Permaculture-inspired composting (Mars, 2005) and soil rehabilitation (Mollison, 1988, p. 215). What made this a profound learning was seeing that this was not a passive process, as I had been taught as a horticulture student a decade or so previously, but a profoundly proactive process (Margulis, 1998). These bacteriological, fungal and other organic symbiotic and synergistic processes literally develop networks, not just in a compost heap or 'vegie' garden but everywhere. My student, Kate, somewhat embarrassingly reinforced the prevalence of these organic processes to me, during one, unplanned afternoon horticulture lesson.

This observation of the strength of organic processes leads to a keen interest in Gaia theory (Lovelock, 1979, 1991) further explored in Chapter 6. Currently, Permaculture is undergoing a renaissance in Australia primarily through its association with the Transition Towns Movement (Hopkins, 2008; Boehnert, 2008).

5.3 The Promised Land and its shadow

I read Peter Carey's *Bliss* (1981) before moving to Bellingen and have reread it several times since. Written locally in the Promised Land, (the place that so impressed Zen Master Hogan earlier in this chapter), '*Bliss*' is very much the myth of Bellingen. It's the fable of people leaving the city to find other ways of living.

Bliss

Before his first death, Harry Joy, the main character of Carey's novel, is a 'good bloke'. He has a heart attack, dies and is resuscitated. After revival and heart surgery, he returns to the world but not to the one he knew. Suddenly all he sees — his family, his business, his

marriage and his friends — are not what he had naively assumed them to be. In his new hellish world all he can see is dishonesty, selfishness, obsession, shallowness and corporate greed, including his own.

His attempts to question and change this new world, however, land him in trouble with his family and workmates to the point whereby his sanity is questioned and he is committed to a psychiatric institution. His rescue comes in the form of the Honey Barbara who is at once a hippie, sex-worker, apiarist and 'vision splendid'. His love for her eventually draws him into her world in which cities are seen as evil, mind-controlling, cancer-causing, industrial complexes. Places to be used and left.

He spends the rest of his long life planting trees in the Promised Land of hippie shacks, rain, honey and quirky freedoms. He finds happiness, strength, purpose and, some considerable time later, Honey Barbara's love.

Bliss is the story of a 'good guy' forced to come to terms with difficulties posed by a reawakening to relationships with family, work and suburbia and broader social and corporate forces. That this book was written in the actual place of the Promised Land, gives this story additional resonance. Ecopsychologist, James Hillman (1975, 1989), would argue that there is a strong unconscious, mythic element to stories of the Promised Land. Carey captures the myth of Bellingen — that of the promise of salvation and redemption.

This, I argue, is the myth, that runs through alterative sustainability towns, places and practices. Unconsciously underlying Permaculture, bush regeneration, New Age therapies and other alternative practices there is an ancient psychological story at play; the promise of something beautiful, satisfying, redemptive and perhaps final. According to Noble (2005), the story of the Promised Land is the foundation story of Western culture. Taking this further Cronon (1996) identifies 'Edenic Narratives' that often underlie conservation and sustainability. The themes of Edenic narratives and ecopsychology are further explored in chapters 6 and 7.

With promise can come its shadow. It takes great courage to leave urban life in an attempt to put into practice ideas and ideals. Risks associated with dropping-out, tree-changing or down-sizing (Hamilton, 2004) are real. According to Brooks & Munro (2009) 50 per cent of tree-changers experience disappointment and disadvantage and in the long-term 90 per cent of tree-changers return to the city (if they can afford to). In following and trying to practice alternative culture there is a strong sense of something being promised, although it is never clear what it is being promised.



In my twenties I had concentrated upon getting on in life — work, marriage, buying a house, raising children. *‘Just Exhale’* is an encounter of falling apart after years of discipline; the kind of experience that is part and parcel of alternative culture in an alternative town; of hidden emotion bubbling to the surface and identity suddenly falling away.

Just Exhale

Another Zen retreat.

Immediately I am disorientated. It’s an unfamiliar place with unfamiliar people. I am feeling so weird. The weirdness intensifies and intensifies. Can’t sit any more.

I find a close friend to be with. We talk and talk along the cold wind-swept beach. It's desolate.

Zen Master Hogan asks to see me. He talks. His unwavering eye contact. Sitting cross-legged facing me, calm. He has advice for me. I wait an eternity for the conversation to come around to the advice. When it does come I am stunned by its apparent inadequacy.

'Charlie'

'Yes ...'

'Just exhale'.

But exhaling did not work — not immediately anyway.

Becoming depressed is a serious experience for many people. I will not elaborate upon this experience for fear of becoming unnecessarily self-indulgent. Any written account of depression is likely to struggle to adequately put the experience into language anyway. The excitement of the promise of the new town and its ideology of promise had given way to a place of shadow.

Depression is generally seen as an illness, and it certainly can be, but it can also be a profound learning experience. When in time the shadow began to lift it was in part due to an acceptance of the emotionality of living. Thomas Moore (1994) suggests that sadness or melancholy is part of a process of growing up (p.138), of self-knowledge and self-acceptance (p.141). Moore suggests, however, that to do this requires that the dark energy of the experience not be denied (p.142). This deepening of sense of self involves also becoming familiar with loss of ideas and enthusiasm (p.141). Ultimately this experience is a deepening, because it is like a death (p.142).

McLeod's (1997) account of depression from a postmodern perspective sees depression as about the collapse or mismatch of personal narrative (identity, purpose, social role) and experience. To McLeod, the discomfort of depression

is the not knowing of the personal narrative. Zeldin in *An Intimate History of Humanity* (1995) gives a broad, and I think liberating, account of the human condition. He depicts human experience not as a linear civilising progression of battles, conquests, empires and political maneuverings, but as an almost timeless mix of emotion, fear, desire, loneliness, misunderstandings, missed opportunities and dilemmas.

According to Zeldin,

Our imaginations are inhabited by ghosts ... the past haunts us, but from time-to-time people have changed their minds about the past. I want to show how today, it is possible for individuals to form a fresh view of their own personal history and of humanity's whole record of cruelty, misunderstanding and joy.

The mind is a refuge for ideas dating from many centuries ... instead of pointing to their family or childhood, I take a longer view; I show how they pay attention to — or ignore — the experience of previous, more distant generations ...

I am writing about what will not lie still, about a past which is alive in people's minds today. (p. vii-viii)

The past that is alive in the minds of tree-changers, alternative practitioners and sustainability culture in general takes the form of the dominant western myth of the Promised Land (Noble, 2005). In desiring new places and better lives there is a danger of naivety. Cronon (1996) calls these Edenic narratives stories of delivery. But a practice approach to life brings vague promise back to ground and to the realisation and acceptance that in the famous words of Thoreau 'the mass of men (sic) lead lives of quiet desperation' (1854).

5.4 Place-practice changes

What place-practice insights emerge from these critically reflected encounters?

My repertoire of practice moves the focus to working more explicitly with sustainability and conservation concerns, stories, place and practices. The immersion of oneself in an alternative sustainability town such as Bellingen requires the literacy of understandings about forest, weeds, protest, yoga, meditation, Asian philosophies, New Age therapy, Permaculture among a range of concerns and interests. This experience is both inspiring and unsettling. The inspiration lies in becoming part of communities of practice searching for sustainable ways of living; of putting ideas and ideals into practice. The sampling of alternative sustainability practices can be unsettling because they are disparate and chaotic. For some this experience can become a descent into dilettantism and/or social marginalisation (Shields, 1991). For others, it can be a courageous commitment to deepening practice.

Permaculture, as one such alternative sustainability practice, offered some profound contributions to my place practice. From it emerges a deepened appreciation for the strength, resilience and abundance of organic processes (Capra, 1988). This is a theme encountered again with Gaia theory (Lovelock, 1979, 1991; Margulis, 1998) in Chapter 6. A second important insight from Permaculture was the radical redesignability (Holmgren, 2002, p. xxv) of places and practices. However, as with most facets of sustainability practice its pitfall seems to be lack of critical reflection and a naivety (Holmgren, 2002, p. xxv) in terms of physicality, materiality skills and commitment to place.

Amidst a virtual avalanche of learning in and about alternative practices and community, an unsettling insight emerges. There is in Permaculture --and generally in sustainability practices-- a sense that something deep and ultimately undeliverable is being promised. This is not to deny the value of alternative or sustainability practices. That Carey wrote the novel *Bliss* (1981) about alternative culture and the promise of redemption in the real geographic place of the Promised Land in Bellingen is perhaps no coincidence. But that being promised, *redemption-in-another-place (or time)*, is mythic, symbolic and perhaps ecopsychological (Hillman, 1975, 1989). To challenge this story, myth and discourse is to run counter to the very foundation story of western

culture (Noble, 2005). To critique stories, myths and discourses of conservation and sustainability is to be at odds with something deeply cherished. The collapse of this narrative (McLeod, 1997) can only be followed by experience of the shadow.

The deepest lessons in life are emotional (Zeldin, 1995). Inspired by courageous practitioners, the need for a deeper relationship to place, and practice, and swept along by broader social trends I next turn to Landcare at Cemetery Creek.

Chapter Six — Landcare at Cemetery Creek

Chapter six draws from images and encounters with a long-term Landcare conservation project and associated reading and discussions. The regeneration and rejuvenation of Cemetery Creek was, and continues to be, an opportunity to apply experiential learnings as outlined in Chapters 3 -5. By 2010, Cemetery Creek had evolved into a significant project spanning 15 years, regularly attracting direct funding, involving hundreds of people carrying out thousands of hours of work. This project and attendant practices developed as the project grew, offering a series of insights into place practice. In particular, attempts to establish the Cemetery Creek Landcare project were, in the early stages at least, hampered by a series of blocks to action. The project became an engagement with the dynamics between 'alternative' and rural worker 'settler' communities, as well as engagement with the materiality and 'atmosphere' (Wylie, 2007) of these places.

The craft of Landcare at Cemetery Creek was (and remains) deeply, deeply satisfying to me. However, application of critical reflective process (Davison & Chapman, 2006) finds a range of loose ends and questions to be asked about this work. My attention increasingly turned to the Gaia Hypothesis (Lovelock, 1979, 1991; Margulis, 1998) as the best way to explain ecological process in this, and other, places. This represents a mismatch between dominant conservation and sustainability stories of place and what we are, or might be doing, on a less conscious level, in these places.

6.1 Landcare at Cemetery Creek

Teaching a Permaculture and horticulture course in the Bellingen area becomes my '*First encounter with Cemetery Creek*' and the subsequent Landcare project.

First Encounter with Cemetery Creek

My first paid, formal teaching experience is to deliver a seven-week horticulture/Permaculture

course at the local Skillshare (employment agency). It goes well but by the end of it I am exhausted and unwell. So, on the last day of the course I suggest that we take the minibus and go to the beach for some 'beach ecology' i.e. that we have some fun! However, to my amazement, the group unanimously asks to do another project!

We head to 'Cemetery Creek' that runs through the site of Bellingen's popular monthly markets. This is the first time that I pay real attention to this creek. Its name because it flows through the site of Bellingen's original 1840's settler cemetery. It also appears to be devoid of life.

This Cemetery Creek site became the first regeneration project associated with Bellingen Urban Landcare Incorporated. In a region known for the grandeur of clear racing rivers and majestic rainforests, Cemetery Creek is by contrast, narrow, sluggish and murky. A small tributary of the Bellinger River, it winds its way through the back of the town between businesses, clubs, sports fields and the town's older streets. The site being worked on bore the typical negative impacts of settlement; almost non-existent native riparian vegetation, high levels of weed infestation, poor water quality and eroded and slumping creek banks. We set about planning, networking and fund-raising to find the information and resources needed to ameliorate these accumulated damages.

The opportunity to undertake this local creek regeneration work came from the establishment of the Landcare movement at the national level involving an unlikely coalition of the National Farmers Federation and the Australian Conservation Foundation. In 1989 this coalition put a National Landcare Program submission to the Hawke Labour Government and in July of that year Bob Hawke announced this in his 'Our Country, Our Future' environment statement. This saw significant funding allocated with the aim that Australia's agricultural and pastoral lands were to be used within their capability by the year 2000 and for sustainable use of lands from that time on (Curtis & De Lacy, 1996).

Down at the creek at the back of our small town, we were not particularly aware of this vision or rhetoric. It's unlikely that they would have been much help anyway. Such rhetoric tends to be lacking in detail as to how actions are to be carried out (Fry, 1994; Pollan, 1996). As with any such work, the rehabilitation of Cemetery Creek was very physically challenging and dirty and often unpleasant. We became aware of the importance of encouraging volunteers, contractors and work-teams to participate in the project for the project to be successful. *'It's all about People'* was a conversation that crystallised the insight that whatever we do, we are primarily working with people. This includes conservation work.

It's all About People

Bernard — jolly, avuncular and a mentor figure — had opened several doors for me for jobs over the years. He calls out from a table at a popular local cafe on the main street.

'Tell me what you are up to these days'

I have time, so I join Bernard for a coffee at a café table under the shade of the old Camphor laurel trees.

'Hi Bernard. Yeah, training and supervising a Landcare project'

'Good to hear, Charlie. I've been working on ...'

Bernard is always encouraging and, in his own way, directing me.

'What you do so well, Charlie, is communicate with people. And that's the key to it, Charlie. It doesn't matter what you do in this world, you will do it better through good communication with people.'

Once he had started, he is into it. Maybe it was the caffeine.

'It's people who do the damage and see or don't see the damage. It's people that appreciate the beauty, the environment, or care or don't care. People work, pay taxes, and fix the environment. They teach, talk and hear. They act and can act.'

'If you don't think that it's all about people, you cannot understand, and cannot change things.'

'It's all about people and communication, Charlie.'



The regeneration work at Cemetery Creek had a clear community (people) focus from its inception. We were working with teams of people on public urban land in situations in which there were often a range of identified and unidentified stakeholders. Amidst this complexity, as manager for the project I soon found that we could only proceed after *'Overcoming blocks to Action'*.

Overcoming Blocks to Action

Soon I am asked to lead a team working on Landcare projects in the Bellingen area. Over several months of work our small team becomes really productive but getting to this point, though, is not straightforward. In this group there are two basic stereotypical approaches to working with the creek. Firstly, there are those who can be described as, 'alternative' or 'green'. They tend to be sensitive, idealistic and concerned and educated about various conservation issues, but they also sometimes come across as scared, unrealistic and pessimistic. The second group tends to be traditional workers/ farmers, molded by work ethic. They are generally practical and skilled but don't have much time for conservation idealism.

My small team throws itself into implementing the plan devised a year or so before by the horticulture class. It's a simple plan. Dig out the creek, fence one side of it and plant out the creek bank with appropriate riparian species. Bridges are also built to allow pedestrian crossings at strategic points.

But as soon as we start digging it's obvious that this creek has been used as a de facto rubbish tip for the local urban area. We remove nearly one hundred cubic metres of garden refuse, corrugated iron sheeting, broken glass, submerged timber planks and posts, discarded concrete footings and general domestic and rural debris. Making it worse it's all glued together with putrid, anaerobic sludge. The weather gets hotter and drier and what had already been an unimpressive series of stagnant pools now completely dries up. A heavy-duty, post, picket and chain mesh fence is erected to protect the newly defined creek banks and the plantings of Lomandra, Lilly Pilly, Sandpaper Fig, Cyathea tree ferns and other riparian species.

Working in an urban public situation is always going to be a challenge. Though no one 'owns' the creek, there were still many stakeholders. Apart from myself as supervisor and the members of my work group, Skillshare (my employer), there are the local Landcare group, the Total Catchment Management Committee, the Bellingen Community Market Committee, Bellingen Shire Council, and the Department of Land and Water Conservation and no doubt several others. Although some of these organisations are helpful, others are certainly not. They seem incapable of going beyond the requirements of their own organisation. The total effect of being in the middle of these organisations is near bureaucratic strangulation of a small seemingly straight-forward community project. I talk to those who I need to and slowly learn to ignore the rest.

On a more local personal level we also must deal with a combination of praise and criticism. At the time several of us become very sick — probably a combination of physical exhaustion, exposure to a hygienically suspect work site, and perhaps the psychological effects of dealing with several generation's

worth of rubbish and neglect.

It is the members of the local settler/ farmer community, who are generally the most supportive and appreciative of our efforts even though arguably their actions rubbished Cemetery Creek in the first place. Conversely, and surprisingly, the town's 'alternative' and 'conservation minded' community, those who had arrived since the 1970s, seem to be indifferent, unsupportive and often critical. To some the project is seen as 'insensitive to the delicate or fragile state of the creek' and 'impacting' too much. Attempting to 'fix up' the creek is challenging enough, but dealing with people and their values, attitudes and assumptions is often the most difficult of all. As team leader and project designer I find many of these criticisms perplexing and hurtful.

It became my job as Project Manager to ensure the projects actually happened; that good intentions and funding were transformed into effective action through weaving together team participants, project resources and the sites themselves. This role was an ideal opportunity to put into practice deeply felt personal and generational ideals of conservation and sustainability. The planned on-ground works that were to be implemented did not seem particularly controversial. The banks of Cemetery Creek were to be protected from pedestrian traffic by erecting fences and building bridges and then they were to be replanted and regenerated to reestablish the riparian rainforest vegetation. However, implementing this seemingly straight-forward plan encountered several blocks to action, especially in the early years of Landcare.

The first of these blocks to action was the sheer challenge of the physicality of the tasks to be carried out. Landcare work sites were often places that had previously been regarded as unimportant, becoming de facto rubbish tips. It was not uncommon to find dumped building materials, garden refuse, and household waste among the weeds, flood debris and mud. Because creeks are, by definition, the lowest points of any place, gravity, wind and water move unwanted materials in and along the creek. All this meant that this kind of work was very much about physically dealing with weeds, rubbish, flood debris

and silt. Outcomes were achieved through considerable collective efforts of individuals, work teams, community groups and government departments.

The second block to action came from dealing with a range of bureaucracies that gave or withheld funding, permissions and information. While we, the various people involved in the project, were happy to be remaking this place, this creek at the back of the town, we were dependent upon funding, permissions, and techniques and information from organisations that often had little or no idea about the realities of coal-face work. This was, at least in part, because no one had ever tried to do what we were attempting to do! Bush regeneration was relatively new. Landcare was almost new. Working on Cemetery Creek was new. Yet it became fairly apparent to us that we were regarded as the lowest rung of the power/information hierarchy. What we were slowly, often painfully, learning about this place and the practices we were trialing seemed to be unseen and unimportant to various experts and officers. Sachs (1993) warns of this very problem of hierarchical use of technical information in the conservation sector.

Lastly, and significantly, any success in this project required coming to terms with working in a community with polarised and antagonistic views about place, environment and other matters. Fairly quickly, the role of Project Manager for the Cemetery Creek project went beyond what was happening at the actual site to include the facilitation of dialogue between individual team members, the wider community and the community groups and government departments. The focus was not just on site specifics such as identification of weed and native species, water quality, and good work practices, but just as importantly on understanding differing views about 'the environment', conservation as well as work practices in general.

This project exposed me to on-going encounters with another part of the community of Bellingen — one quite different and removed from those of us considering ourselves to be 'alternate' and sustainability-minded. This part of the community, comprised of farmers, rural workers and longer-term

residents, rarely shared the same visions and concerns of conservation, sustainability and place. Normally, 'environmental educators' would see this as a situation in which the 'environmental message' needs to be spread (Palmer & Neale, 1994; Palmer, 1998). However, my background in farming, allied with an evolving appreciation of the places we were working in, gave the voices of the worker/farmers credence. This was brought to greater clarity through reading 'Sometimes a Great Notion' (Kesey, 1964), lent to me by one of the Landcare team with whom I was then working. It depicts workers battling the power of forest and river, wood and water.

Sometimes a Great Notion

One of the members of this Landcare team working at Cemetery Creek lends me Sometimes a Great Notion. I read it as the project progresses. Kesey, also author of 'One flew over the Cuckoo's Nest' (1962), tells a story of a logger in Oregon, USA. This unlikely central character battles the elements, the forest and the ever-threatening murky river that runs through his property and past his farmstead.

This is a physical struggle with the almost always-overwhelming forces of forest and river. Kesey's descriptions are of hands, knuckles, muscles, the cold hard metal of tools, the cutting sharpness of blades and cables. Of mud, water, tree and wood. The interactions between the characters in this place and situation are as tough and sinuous as the logging operations that they rely upon for a living. In the background there is always the tension of the river that regularly floods its banks and threatens to tear away his house, family and life.

The local rivers or creeks often flood — brown muddy, full of logs and debris from the forests up in the hills — this story is an evocation of water and forest not as romantic but as tough, dangerous and sinister. I picture small ordinary people trying to cope with massive forces to make a living. This is not just a story of a town in Oregon in the North West of the USA but of this place, Cemetery Creek that I am working in. It describes the feeling of this place that seeps into you as you work.

The brilliance of Kesey's work lies in leading the reader to sympathise with unlikely and unfashionable characters and values. This is a perspective held to

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some extent by another part of the community; the people and community who cleared (often required to do so (Lake, 1987)) this place less than 150 years ago. Kesey's novel resonated deeply with my experiences of the work we were carrying out at Cemetery Creek. The conservation stories that guided our Landcare intentions did not really describe the sheer physicality of place; its elements of tree, growth, water, wood, shade, heat, cold, mud and decay or its 'atmosphere' (Wylie, 2006). Neither did the stories and language of Landcare portray the heavy, embodied, sinewed work being carried out. Kesey's story, characters and place are dark, dirty, tough, raw and dangerous and not romantic. As with Ondaatje (1988) as mentioned in Chapter 4, Kesey portrays a life of struggle in the face of power of place and bureaucracy.

Somehow however, both locally and nationally, Landcare worked. Although Toyne, one of the architects of the NLP, later concludes that the stated aims of Landcare were 'wildly optimistic' (7.30 Report ABC, 2000), the NLP did profoundly influence natural resource management in Australia. In time Landcare spread overseas to five continents and 18 countries (Garritty, 2000). The Landcare movement has attracted critique for its seeming inability to be genuinely self-reflective (Vanclay & Lockie, 1997). Critique did come, however, from Landcare originators, Toyne and Farley (2000), who cast doubt upon the effectiveness of the Landcare movement in terms of use of public funding and the environmental outcomes actually achieved. Nevertheless, Landcare in Australia has been a highly significant land conservation initiative involving all States and regions, diverse community groups, and many thousands of ordinary and extra-ordinary people.

Success on our local projects often came when individuals and community groups allowed their polarised and antagonistic views and positions to soften. Cemetery Creek, this strange place at the back of a small rural town, seemed to afford space away from these socially constructed stories and positions. The embodied exertion involved in creating and remaking places and entering the 'flow' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991) of action, seemed to quieten and suspend previously antagonistic stories. In retrospect it seems obvious, and may

appear clichéd, that each party was able to learn elements of their evolving practice from the other. A similar learning occurred on a personal level for me. Not only did the work teams often represent the broader community, national and global, even, environmental debates and conflicts, but they also reflected this same dichotomy held within me. I had been both student protester and an idealist, but also a practical worker with a farming background. I was forced to attempt to reconcile these within myself and shift beyond this apparent dichotomy. There seemed no point in adopting the romantic impracticality of the 'alternative/greens' and equally no point in admiring and teaching practical skills without encouraging visions that went beyond treating the world as a resource that seemed to lack an ecological sense of 'specialness'.

Ultimately, my greatest challenge came from the criticism of 'alternative/green' friends and colleagues. The Landcare projects at Cemetery Creek involved taking actions that were reasonably considered, planned and executed yet many of these friends and colleagues seemed unhappy about this. Our project team was actively dealing with widely held conservation and sustainability concerns and desires yet whatever we did seemed not to meet what I saw as their idealistic and often romantic expectations. I felt, that perhaps, they unconsciously liked the stress of being overwhelmed in crisis. As is argued throughout this thesis, ideas and ideals, as important as they are, are one thing, and their application as practice is quite another.



My dearest memory of that first Landcare project came when Cemetery Creek is 'Flowing Again'.

Flowing again

As deadline for the end of the course and project looms we realise that we are running out of time to complete the last component of the project, which was a fairly complicated timber bridge. This is no ordinary bridge. We rout it, paint it, distress it, sand it and generally try to give it a heritage feel. We work longer and longer days and take shorter and shorter breaks. The team works far beyond the call of duty for no one other than ourselves and a sense of common good. We finish it late one evening just before the scheduled official opening and celebratory barbecue.

Having finished the project we are now impatient for the rains to come so we can see the rejuvenated creek flow again. About a month later it rains enough to generate some run off. I head down there and sit on the bridge with beer in hand. The grass, ferns and other plants are beginning to thrive. Cemetery Creek flows again — towards me and then under the bridge and past. I am so, so satisfied.

Out of the spotlight of bureaucracy and 'alternative/green' criticism, and away

from the crossfire of the environmental battleground of the warring factions of 'alternates' and rural, working community members we had put our 1970's conservation and sustainability ideals into action. The satisfaction was almost boundless as water flowed again down Cemetery Creek and under the newly built bridge. Hands calloused and some hard lessons learned.

6.2 Years of Weeding

Slowly, over the years, the regeneration process of Landcare sites extended along the parks, schools, clubs and reserves of Cemetery Creek. Rubbish was removed; structures such as bridges, tree guards and fences erected; riparian vegetation encouraged through bush regeneration and/or planting and lastly, introduced weed species were discouraged through a range of weeding techniques. Such regeneration work requires preparation and planning, effective 'first phase' implementation as well as plenty of 'follow-up' or 'maintenance' work (Birnbaum, 2008) carried out year-in, year-out with the long-term vision held in mind. Maintenance involves the application of energy, craft, labour and resources and constitutes perhaps 95 per cent of any successful project. In theory it diminishes over time as the native ecology becomes increasingly resilient (Bradley, 1988). However, working along frequently disturbed rivers and creeks, ever-emerging vine weeds, and considering the limits to what can reasonably be achieved with available energy, labour, resources and funding means that attaining ecological restoration goals is a complex and unpredictable process (Hobbs & Huenneke, 2002).

Further Landcare funding allowed Bellingen Urban Landcare to continue regeneration on a 'New Site on Cemetery Creek'.

New Site on Cemetery Creek

Contracts are negotiated, drawn up and signed. Permissions from various authorities are applied for and eventually received. Plants and materials are ordered and picked-up. Press releases are written and circulated, phone calls made and e-mails sent to potential Landcare

volunteers.

I arrive early on the first day of work at the new site with a trailer full of tools and I wait for volunteers to turn up.

And wait.

I smoke a cigarette or two and drink tea from a thermos.

And wait.

It seems that it may just be me for this working bee. I turn and face a daunting five-metre wall of Lantana. Secateurs in hand, I cut small sections of lantana away. They are cut into small pieces and dropped to the ground to become mulch. The smell of Lantana in the air is distinctive, acrid and sweet. It reminds me of other Lantana removal projects, the chopping, and the serrated bark, scratched hands and arms, the other regenerators talking, sweating, itching, and smelling that smell.

Lantana (camara/complex) is not so bad. In fact, if I had to have one weed I might choose this one. It is easy to chop up and it does not have a big taproot. It also shelters native seedlings. So, as I gradually turn the wall of Lantana into mulch, native seedlings, Guoia, Jackwood, Glochidion and Pittosporum, emerge. They are tagged with coloured tape. It becomes an archaeological dig of sorts.

After a while some volunteers do arrive and as a small team, we work our way into the wall of Lantana.

We chat as we work —

'What is this plant?

'Don't know — better tag it'

'And this one ...?'

After maybe four or five working bees (45 hours of work?), we have cleared nearly all the Lantana. The area reveals itself as 20 metres round, bounded by the murky Cemetery Creek around two thirds of its perimeter. Fifty or so tagged native seedlings are dotted

about. The outside of the island is thick Paspalum grass; no other plants, native or exotic, can compete with this. Our work also reveals a tangle of rotting flood debris. We untangle it and stack it into pyramids. When dried out we will set fire to them. We leave a partial canopy of weeds — tobacco bush, Camphor laurel, and small-leafed privet partly for native pigeons and partly for their canopy. Camphor laurels are ring-barked two metres up their trunks with the flat of a carpenter's hammer.

Two years later, on this Island, the rainforest is returning. Guoia, Jackwood, Glochidion, Pittosporum and other plantings have grown to about two metres in height. Repeated brush-cutting has kept weeds down. The fire has been rebuilt and relit after floods and for celebrations.

Five years after the initial work, the Island has become almost impenetrable again. It's the natives this time that form a thick wall, but beneath is a 30 centimeter thick carpet of Tradescantia weed (Wandering Jew) and Tropical Chickweed. The latter is a new weed in the area, as are the purple-leaved Elephant Ears that now fill about half the creek bed all around Fig Island.

It would be easy to recount hundreds if not thousands of similar experiences of weeding whether through Landcare, Permaculture or ornamental or vegetable gardening. The principle characteristic of weeding is the endlessness of this act. Any worker who works with weeds (many millions of people around the world) knows that they, or another weed species, will return. For me the act of weeding constitutes a deeply embodied, endlessly repeated and memorised set of actions that stretch back to childhood; that go right back to 'Fond Memories of Sickle and Scythe in Devon'.

Fond Memories of Sickle and Scythe in Devon

One of my fondest childhood memories is of me helping 'Gramp' on the farm on Devon farm summer evenings. I would spend hours with him cutting down nettles and thistles with a hook or sickle.

The routine starts ...

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Check the handle

Is the blade straight?

Rest blade on a post or stump

Sharpen with sharpening stone

Check it

Repeat until ready.

Then

Find a good patch of thistles/nettles

Set a target in mind

Position feet securely

Fix eyes on a good place

Swing hook to hit just above ground level

Watch them fall

Keep hands away

Flick them back with blade

Fix eyes on a good place

Swing hook to hit just above ground level

Cut clean and keep going

Watch them fall

And repeat over

And over

In a timeless rhythm

Gramp working into the patch of weeds from the other side with his scythe. Sweating. Thick shoulders of an old farmer. The rhythm and exertion in the cooling evening air will always be with me. On finishing, the field would be clean again. 'Proper job' and 'Neat and tidy' he would say.



Such a powerful memory evokes a range of deep feelings about childhood, the love of a dear Grandfather, the feeling of exile from some sense of childhood, summer and home back there.

These memories, though, are far more than a personal reverie; a great deal can be learned from weeding which constitutes one of the main activities of any worker on a farm or garden or Landcare site. There is very much a moral element to weeding (Pollan, 1996, p. 72). Weeds, both in Devon farms as well as more widely are generally not only unwanted but actually seen as 'bad'. On farms weeds are bad for production, in gardens for ornamental value, in conservation for ecological integrity. However, this is beyond utilitarian badness; it's as if the growth of weeds and the allowing of this to occur is a serious moral failing (Pollan, 1989, 1996). Talk in the conservation industry is of control and eradication, perhaps driven by moral imperative, but this does not take into account *'The Difference between Talking About and Controlling Weeds'*.

The Difference between Talking About and Controlling Weeds

For several years I sit on various vegetation management committees. I hear these statements and questions from professional environmental managers over and over —

'We are committed to a pre-1770 landscape/ ecology'.

'When are you (Landcare) going to go to the head of the catchment you are working on, and work your way down systematically removing weeds?'

'How will we eradicate (Lantana, Privet, Camphor Laurel ...) species?'

But talking about weeds and eradicating or controlling them is quite different.

I leave committee meetings with an almost evangelical belief that we are about to rid the world of the bad and the wrong (weeds) and deliver us into pristine Promised Land (of pure ecology). That somehow we are in control ...

But either literally, or in my mind's eye, I return to Cemetery Creek remembering and feeling wave after wave of (weeding) energy that have already shaped this relatively limited project.

There is so much that can be learned from reflection upon any long-term practice. Years of weeding in different situations with differing objectives in widely varying places gives a deep embodied, ingrained feel for the activity (Polanyi, 1967); for tools used, for acts of cutting and resistance and for machinery and poisons used. This feel is also for the vision of colours of leaves, for the smell of fumes, vapour and scent. It's also a feel for what needs to be done and what can be done. Give a gardener or bush regenerator a weeding task and they will go into an almost unconscious, habitual, embodied set of actions.

Other learnings can be drawn from this most central of place practices. Arguably, the best guide to the craft of weeding; its aims, process and practice of weeding come from the Bradley Method of bush regeneration (Bradley, 1971, 1988; Buchanan 1989). In this approach weeding work starts from identified centres of strength (i.e. highest concentration of native species) outwards towards more weed-dominated areas (Bradley, 1971, 1988; Buchanan, 1989). Other considerations are the use of minimal disturbance, of privileging regeneration over replanting as well as the targeting of new and

emergent weed threats (Williams & West, 2008). Ultimately, the Bradley Method is a guide to working with the limited amounts of energy and resources available, in various situations, in order to avoid exhaustion, and to get desired project objectives achieved (Birnbuam, 2008).

The work of regenerating Cemetery Creek was, and continues to be, a great success. Throughout the regeneration process, and partly to satisfy monitoring requirements, photographs were taken of sites at various stages of work. Regeneration is slow at first, but photographs nearly always show remarkable, almost exponential, rates of growth. Flowering and fruiting often occurs after about seven years and trees form part of the canopy after 10 or 15 years. The outcomes and aims of the projects we were, and still are, contracted to carry out are almost always achieved. Exceptions that do occur are usually due to floods and only constitute a temporary setback.

However, weeding doesn't actually work — not in the long run. A range of practitioners and authors, from related conservation and sustainability practice fields acknowledge and work with a more sanguine approach to weeds. Recently, Peter Andrews came to the fore in Australia through a television documentary (Andrews, 2005) and book (Andrews, 2006), which in part featured the use of weeds, and weed growth as means to improve pasture. This idea is not new; Yeomans (1973) used the same approach to improve soil and water systems some decades ago as did Fukuoka (1978). The latter two have been drawn upon in Permaculture's philosophy and practices regarding the use of weed species. Permaculture is often accused, and probably rightly so, of being naïve and nonchalant about weeds and introduced species, but at least there is a degree of realism associated with this approach to weeds and weeding.

To work in conservation and sustainability is to work with inspiration and idealism and it's a privilege to work with! However, one of the criticisms of the Landcare movement (Vanclay & Lockie, 1997) is that it is not comfortable with critical reflection. This discomfort in engaging in critical reflective process was

also encountered with Permaculture in Chapter 5. When idealism is interwoven with political policy lobbying, community education initiatives and campaigning in general there is little or no opportunity for such a critical reflective process. To critically reflect can be seen as undermining 'the message' and giving energy to the 'opposition'.

Critical reflection is further stymied as conservation discourse is firmly positioned in the positivist epistemological domain; Fry calls this 'scientific and deterministic truth' (1994, p. 20). Discourses of conservation (i.e. Landcare and bush regeneration) are almost entirely sourced from a combination of science community (i.e. CSIRO), university sector and government. A few practitioner authors, such as Pollan (1996), Low (1999, 2002) and Andrews (2005, 2006) do offer practice-based understandings of weeds and ecology but these are, however, the exception in an industry characterised by top-down flows of information (Sachs, 1993) and profound disjuncture between theory and practice. This really is an encounter with Creswell's 'obliteration of practice' (2003). Practices and practitioners of weeding, or caring for places, are not seen (Ehrenreich, 2003) or heard.

This disjuncture between theory and practice becomes further problematised, when Gaia theory (Lovelock, 1979, 1991; Margulis, 1998) is considered as an explanation for understanding encounters with living systems and the problem of weeds. This augers a fundamental shift in place practice and creates a difficult set of questions.

6.3 Gaia Hypothesis

Through Permaculture I was exposed to ideas of 'ecosynthesis' (Tane, 1995; Holmgren, 2002) and the Gaia Hypothesis (Lovelock, 1979, 1991; Margulis, 1998). Permaculture's emphasis upon observation and understanding of systems that are in operation in every garden, site, place, ecosystem, hedgerow, forest, and creek and for that matter, every car park, car, indoor room and person. This emphasis upon observation of phenomena is similarly applicable to weeds and weeding. *'Weeds are Good'* is a somewhat tongue-in-

cheek encounter with a radically different perspective of the role of weeds.

Weeds are good

Forty or so of us are sitting listening to the Permaculture 'guru' Bill Mollison. He takes a break and, in his absence, a discussion occurs about spraying weeds and pests. We are all opposed to spraying biocides, under almost all circumstances. Someone asks:

'Why not use garlic or soap spray to get rid of the offending aphids, grubs or whatever?'

The group seems to divide into 'not spraying biocides' versus 'not spraying anything at all'. An articulate guy speaks up.

'Let me explain. Whatever ecosystem we are working with is attempting to heal itself through the mechanisms of Gaia. Whenever we intervene, whether we are using natural or artificial toxins, we open up the niche again and Gaia will bring in whatever he/she can to fill the hole'.

'When we temporarily eradicate one weed, more will be there next year. We must learn to work with these forces, not against them. There is no point in doing otherwise because these forces are the forces of universal life and they are bigger than the spray nozzle'.

He continues, 'What we need are more pests, not less. The more pests there are, the more predators/parasites/consumers there are, and the more quickly a dynamic balance is restored'.

This encounter with the idea that weeds and pests in general can be seen as part of a larger ecological repair mechanism requires a radical shift in perspective. To see weeds as part of the process of ecological repair requires both a conceptual inversion and the investment of trust in processes of wildness (Everndon, 1992; Pollan, 1996). Low in *The New Nature* (2002) recognises that weeds form part of a new ecological order. Pollan, in *Botany of Desire* (2001), takes this much further though. In his astonishing and refreshing text, Pollan casts doubt over the Cartesian order of species, asking: why not see humans as the vectors (i.e. spreaders) of other species? Apples, 156

tulips, Lantana, rats and dogs and so on, all have relocated around the world to create, adapt and take advantage of new habitats. So why not see these species as the agents of their own dispersal and humans as the almost passive, and quite unconscious, vector? This is an attribution of purpose and intelligence to the other-than-human; a complete contravention of established Cartesian order as identified by Everndon (1992), Plumwood (1993) and Hillman and Ventura (1992), Hillman (1995).

Reading Capra's 'Web of Life' (1996) re-writes, once and for all, my Gaia-based understanding of life as living systems.

Web of Life

An epiphany for me. The Gaia theory explained, contextualised. The micro-theories that make it more than just another sweeping grand theory.

Reading Capra's 'Web of Life' both at university then later in my parents lounge room. I pay little attention to what is going on around me. 'Yes', I say over and over again. 'Yes'. 'Yes' this is so good. My critical mind finds little or nothing to object to. This is not so much about being subdued as being met.

An overview of systems biology, chaos and complexity, self organising, dissipative structures, the 'Gaia' theory of Lovelock and Margulis, and the cognitive theories of Gregory Bateson and Maturana and Varela.

From this work there emerges a profoundly new science of life that underpins the Gaia theory of Lovelock. Life is composed of a process of self-organising, complex, intelligent, dynamic, and flexible, non-linear, feedback structures that defy the forces of entropy. This can only be understood by thinking systemically, and holistically (p. 36).

Furthermore, these patterned networks of life are autopoietic, i.e. self making (p. 98), and tend toward increasing complexity. This is taken further by the cognitive theories of (a) Gregory Bateson (1972), who suggested that 'mind is imminent in all levels of life' (p.168) and this is the 'pattern that connects' life, and (b) Maturana and Varela (1980), who said that

'mind is the essence of being alive' (p. 169).

This way of thinking overcomes the Cartesian split; no longer are humans the sole possessors of cognition (p. 170). This also challenges the notion that evolution and indeed life is the result of accidents. Kauffman (1993) puts it thus, 'Evolution is not just a tinkering. It is an emergent order honored and honed by selection' (p. 221). According to Lynn Margulis (1998), who worked with Lovelock, 'life did not take over the globe through combat but by networking' (p. 226).

Sitting there in their lounge room, head nodding, maybe my parents think that I have lost touch with the world. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The central message of the Gaia Hypothesis as proposed by Lovelock (1979, 1991) and Margulis (1998) is that all living systems are, by definition, 'autopoietic' (Maturana & Varela, 1980), i.e. self-making. Effectively, living systems on Earth behave as if it is one organism that through feedback cycles, create and maintain optimal conditions on Earth for life. Gaia Hypothesis, in its original form, is radical, because it posits that living systems *are* intelligent, powerful and/or purposeful, as opposed to being the result of fortunate accidents (Capra, 1996, p. 221). In Margulis's words living systems are a 'networking' 'emergent order' (1998, p. 226). These are emergent living networks that are powerful and endlessly persistent. Initially Lovelock's hypothesis was rejected and sometimes ridiculed by mainstream science. Kirchner (2002) describes how the early rejections of the hypothesis lead to dialogue between its proponents and the more circumspect scientific community. Over time a 'weak Gaia' theory came to be generally accepted, along with Margulis's symbiogenesis (1998). 'Strong Gaia', by which living systems are teleological (future orientated) and purposeful, remains largely rejected as romantic wishfulness or at best is seen to be scientifically unproven (Kirchner, 2002).

Lovelock, the originator of the Gaia hypothesis, appears to have shifted his position since his earlier publications. More recently, he argues (Lovelock,

2006, 2009) that Gaia may not be resilient enough for the perils posed by climate change. However, 'Strong Gaia' remains consistent with *my* experiences of years of practical work, a perspective that embraces a systems approach, and vitally, a willingness to see and question socially and psychologically constructed Cartesian order. Gaia theory explained what I already bodily knew. My personal global perspective merged the moors and abandoned fields in the UK; gardens reverting to their former wilder selves in Sydney; the study of ecology in Singapore; Continental Drift/plate tectonics at University in Sydney and organic processes as understood and practiced in Permaculture in Bellingen.

This Strong Gaia position is not one of sentimentality; it creates as many challenges as it solves. It does take some of the sense of crisis away from conservation and sustainability work but at the same time creates a deep dissonance between conservation and sustainability theory/discourse and practice. In discussions with colleagues it is rare that anyone sees living systems as strong. The following is another encounter that gives further credence to this idea of ecology as dynamic and self-healing. In 1987 a massive storm ripped through the UK. Most trees around my Grandparent's farm in Devon were brought down blocking roads for several days. Ten years after that event a friend in the UK sent me a press clipping, *Great Storm that made us Green and Pleasant* (Author unknown, 1997). This is an encounter with 'Rethinking the Great Storm'.

Rethinking the Great Storm

The biggest storm in 300 years killed 18 people, felled 15 million trees including a seventh of all the trees in South-East UK — overnight. At the time this was widely seen as the end of Britain's woodland ecology.

Ten years later this article argues that the loss of these trees has provided an opportunity for regeneration of other species and ecosystems, the likes of which have not been seen for centuries. According to Dr Keith Kirby, 'increasingly people realise it was not so bad. Leaving

aside the damage it caused it was very exciting. In some places we were being too precious about our woodlands ... many people felt woodlands were stable and permanent. The storm shook up our assumptions'.

Twenty years after the Great Storm of 1987, rather than being the death of British woodlands, many affected properties are transformed (Eccleston, 2007). For instance, according to the article, Scords Wood that had been left untouched since the storm is now thriving. Among the huge trees that lie where they fell that night is a rich variety of insect life, regenerating tree seedlings, as well as Clematis, Honeysuckle and Heather — previously unseen in the area for more than a century. Birds have also benefited: the Woodlark population has increased, Nightjars have moved in as well as Owls, Tawny Owls, Hobbles and Sparrow Hawks.

Many similar stories of ecological resilience can be found around the globe. Some of the more high profile examples include newly emergent Pilliga forests of north western NSW (Rolls, 1981); threatened White-Naped Cranes establishing colonies in demilitarised Korea (Higuchi, Ozaki, et al., 1996) as well as the recolonisation of Mount St Helens volcanic eruptions (Franklin, MacMahon, et al., 1985). Perhaps most astonishing is the reestablishment of previously threatened species and ecological communities in the Chernobyl exclusion zone (Chesser & Baker, 2006).

What does embracing a framework of Gaia hypothesis and ecosynthesis mean for Landcare at Cemetery Creek and conservation in general? Conservation is an ideal and set of ideas that, once put into practice, need to be questioned and reviewed. Vanclay and Lockie (1997) suggest that this is not easily done in the case of Landcare. The notion that such places can be *weeded back* to ecological originality or pure nature is wishful at best. A practice perspective (Pollan, 1996; Low, 2002; Davison & Chapman, 2006) throws significant doubt on such an idea no matter how deeply culturally ingrained it may be. The Cartesian order and the myth of progressing towards some form of Promised Land (Noble, 2005) of place become evident. This is, however, the

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conservation story that guides our actions; one that says, or strongly implies, that we are in the process of recreating perfect pristine places that can somehow miraculously be then left again — by us humans? Adams (1996) argues this is colonial 'romantic conceit' (p.102); Langton (1996) identifies darker colonial racist assumptions of 'terra nullius' associated with such thinking. (Associated themes are further considered in Chapter 8).

In short, and at first glance, the inescapable consequence of embracing a framework of Gaia hypothesis is the need to ask certain questions — i.e. why bother? Long time environmental care workers and organisers, after years of this work, can end up unsure of why they are even doing it (Davison & Chapman, 2006). So, why bother if weeding doesn't really work in the long-run and the Gaian process will regulate and protect living systems? For the deeply concerned conservation practitioner Gaia hypothesis does offer deep existential assurance. The worst story ever told — that of the end of life on Earth as imminent — comes to feel more like a dark fantasy of writers such as Hamilton (2010) and Flannery (2010a). Back at the Creek, on the ground, we are actively creating islands, refuges of ancient ecology; or versions of these (Macleay, 2005). These are places that are becoming inhabited, storied; places of human emotion; fields of care (Evernden, 1992). This involves people and communities coming into *closer* relationship with places. *This is not about a recreation of something perfect in the future, but a current, maintained and deepening place relationship mediated by craft.* The answer to the question posed is yes, this kind of work is worthwhile!

For me there emerges a sense of being liberated from an oppressive discourse. I can carry out this work, the craft of conservation, with less stress and more joy. I can be carried by the strength of these places.

6.4 Place-practice changes

In Chapter 5 I argued that alternative sustainability practices, as encountered in towns such as Bellingen, can either become a deepened practice or can run into dilettantism. Landcare at Cemetery Creek, as a long-term and large-scale

community-based creek rehabilitation project, is a deep immersion into practices and place craft, offering an incisive set of learnings. The community-based nature of this project highlights the adversarial social tensions between 'alternates' and rural-worker communities. Such a project can only progress when the active narratives are understood. Other potential blocks to carrying out this project are posed by top-down bureaucratic power and information flows (Sachs, 1993), and the sheer physicality of the work. Working in literal and symbolic valleys is an opportunity to develop personal practice to climb from a personal place of shadow (Moore, 2005).

Landcare at Cemetery Creek offers fresh insight to place practice. This really is an encounter with Creswell's 'obliteration of practice' (2003) whereby practices and practitioners of weeding and caring for places, in this instance, are not seen in general (Ehrenreich, 2003) and consequently are undervalued as sites of learning (Raelin, 2007). Beneath predictable romantic/traumatic stories and discourses of conservation and sustainability and through engagement with texts such as Kesey (1964), and the 'atmosphere' (Wylie, 2007) of that place, a grittier sense of place emerges. Intimacy with practice, physicality and materiality, as well as never-ending practices of weeding/maintenance, create an embodied literacy (Orr, 1992) very different to conservation-based stories generally used to frame these experiences.

What is experienced represents a radical challenge to Cartesian order. Rainforests regrow but so do weeds and in the long-run and globally, ecosynthesis (Tane, 1995; Holmgren, 2002) and the Strong Gaia Hypothesis (Lovelock, 1979, 1991; Margulis, 1998; Kirchner, 2002) becomes the best way to understand the organic realm of life. Living systems are experienced as fluid, immanent, resilient and purposeful. The worst story ever told — that all life on Earth will die soon — is revealed as a cultural story (Cronon, 1996), along with its corollary the Promised Land (Noble, 2005) of returning ecologies to the imagined past (Adams, 1996). This re-storying of conservation and sustainability, resulting from critically reflected practice, offers me profound existential reassurance as well as a personal sense of being liberated from an

oppressive discourse.

Landcare and similar projects are successful not through creating something perfect in the future, or the imagined pristine past (Davison & Chapman, 2006), but through current, maintained and deepening place relationship mediated by conservation craft. This work involves the creation of fields of care (Evernden, 1985) that in turn offer care to the practitioners. Qualities of ecopsychological place relationship are considered in Chapter 7.

Chapter Seven — Ecopsychology and the Divine

Chapter Seven draws upon images and encounters of researching, teaching and practicing ecopsychology (Roszak, 1992, 1995 among others). These encounters emerge through the continued negotiation of the relationship between formal learning and informal learning acquitted through the regeneration of Cemetery Creek, teaching and traveling back to the UK and Ireland where I have continually found myself drawn to special places including moors, churches and graveyards. The encounters described and critically reflected upon in this chapter follow on from Chapter Six in which conservation discourses are seen to be inadequate in describing actual place practice.

This chapter argues, after Roszak (1992, 1995), Hillman and Ventura (1992), Hillman (1995), Tacey (1995), Schama (1995) and Illich (1986) among others that place-practice encounters can be more deeply understood from an ecopsychological perspective. As part of Social Ecology (Hill, 2004) and place studies (Cameron, 2003, 2008; Somerville, 2007 among others) an ecopsychological approach emerges through focusing upon qualities of emotional, symbolic and storied self/place relationship. Following visits back to the UK and Ireland that revealed a personal allure to churches, graveyards and sacred trees and groves (Schama, 1995) and water (Illich, 1986), a personal reconceptualisation and re-imagining of 'sustainability' takes place.

7.1 Ecopsychology

In my mid-30s I returned to university as a post-graduate student studying Social Ecology at the University of Western Sydney. '*Hawkesbury Experience*' describes my first impressions of the campus and this fascinating and sometimes confronting course.

Hawkesbury Experience

I walk the famous grounds of the Hawkesbury campus. Mature trees, well-tended lawns,

sports grounds, sandstone buildings and garden quadrangles. Echoing past glories; farming, rugby, war all imbued with a country matey toughness. The tallest palms I have ever seen commemorating student soldiers fallen in war.

The place reverberates with what feels like institutionalised rural Australia. The 'Ag' students are on holiday and we temporarily occupy their dorms, bar and classrooms for a Social Ecology residential.

It's only the first day and I'm already feeling confronted while work-shopping something. There is a passion to learn here that is unbelievable. And what a mix of students; deep ecologists, eco-feminists, depth psychologists, farmers and activists from a range of places and cultures. The university literature says that the course will 'do this and this'. It does, but much of the learning is unstructured, incidental and informal. The 'theory of learning' sessions are close to anarchy! Despite, or because of this, learning is often radical, imaginative and highly motivated.

I can remember later sitting on my veranda at home with course readers and precious new books. Friends would come by but I was fully immersed in all manner of Social Ecology-related ideas, theories, critiques, inspirations, and insights. I was free to critically explore my life practices. What a joy!

I studied a wide range of Social Ecology related texts that included *Rules for Radicals* (Alinsky, 1971), *The Spell of the Sensuous* (Abram, 1996), *Remakings* (Fry, 1994), *Social Construction of Nature* (Evernden, 1992), *Landscape and Memory* (Schama, 1995), *H2O and the Waters of Forgetfulness* (Illich, 1986), *Descartes Error* (Damasio, 1995), *Anthropology That Breaks Your Heart* (Behar, 1996), *An Intimate History of Humanity* (Zeldin, 1995) and *World as Lover, World as Self* (Macey, 1991) and so on. But foremost among the texts read at that time were those that revolved around what is variously termed depth psychology, post-Jungian psychology and ecopsychological inquiry. Most particularly, *We've Had One Hundred Years of Psychotherapy and the World's Getting Worse* (Hillman & Ventura, 1992), *Edge of the Sacred* (Tacey, 1995) and *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind*

(Roszak et al., 1995).

Hillman writes a brilliant forward for *Ecopsychology* (1995). In *A Psyche the Size of the Earth* he starts by asking, 'Where is the 'me'? Where does the 'me' begin? Where does the 'me' stop? Where does the 'other' begin? (Roszak et al., 1995, p. xvii)

To Hillman this is the core issue for all psychology. He argues that studies of postmodernism and ecology have thrown doubt into understandings of the self or soul. He traces this question back to the 'cut' of Descartes and argues that unconscious aspects of the self need to be resituated. He continues:

Sometimes I wonder ... how psychology ever got so off base. How did it cut itself off from reality? Where else in the world would a human soul be so divorced from the spirit of the surroundings? Even the high intellectualism of the renaissance, to say nothing of modes on mind in ancient Egypt or Greece or contemporary Japan, allowed for the animation of things, recognizing a subjectivity in animals, plants, wells, springs, trees, and rocks ... We cannot be studied or cured apart from the planet. (Roszak et al., 1995, p. xxii)

The works of Hillman and Ventura (1992) and Tacey (1995) in particular are dense, imaginative, challenging and ultimately subversive. On a personal level, I found this approach, particularly Hillman's, to be deeply healing. This may have been, in part, because ecopsychological healings of self and place were seen to be co-terminus; satisfying to a person such as myself working across both ecological and social disciplines. The healing of this ecopsychological approach, however, ran far deeper than that: it ran to the very heart of the emotional and symbolic relationship with place.

Inspired by ecopsychological insights I ran an experimental course 'Teaching Ecopsychology' only to find that conveying such ideas was not as

straightforward as I imagined it might be.

Teaching Ecopsychology

I am asked if I would like to run a course at the local community adult education centre. The course is designed around key texts of Hillman, Tacey, Schama, Everndon, Lovelock and Rozak.

Three evening sessions are loosely structured around the presentation of excerpts of texts followed by dialogue. Each week the lively discussions are recorded, and each week I drive to Muttonbird Island on the coast nearby, where I listen to, and transcribe, the discussions. Among eagles, dolphins, wind, and waves, I play the tapes over and over looking for insights and discontinuities to bring to the next ecopsychology session.

After the course finishes, I am left with the clear impression that the participants found it engaging but also bemusing. It seems that this is not something that can be 'taught' — it is too embodied and mysterious.

I recently spoke by phone with an old friend. He is an experienced and highly qualified scientist working at a prominent scientific establishment. I talked briefly about the course. He seemed rather surprised to hear that there might be such a thing as 'ecopsychology'.



An ecopsychological approach to place practice is far from easy to grasp. A shift is required away from a rigid, literal, rational (Hillman & Ventura, 1992; Tacey, 1995) and mechanistic worldview (Evernden, 1992; Plumwood, 1993). Such a worldview can be ascribed to 'misplaced concreteness' (Hillman, 1996, p. 85), science (Fry, 1994; Schama 1995), modernity (Baudrillard, 1983; Myerson, 2001), patriarchy (Plumwood, 1993) settler 'frontier mentality' (Tacey, 1995), social power arrangements (Illich, 1986), textual abstraction (Abram, 1996) and, of course, Cartesian dualism (Evernden, 1992; Plumwood, 1993; Hillman & Ventura, 1992; Hillman, 1995).

According to Hillman (1975) and Dirkx (2001) this shift is to 'imaginal' process and realm. Tacey (1995) advocates psychic 'loosening-up' (p. 90) and 'humility' (p. 77). Perhaps a way of describing this process is to allow one's world to be and feel significantly less clear, understandable or predictable. Challenges to psychic rigidity can be seen to come from drug use (Castaneda, 1968, 1971), postmodernity (Tacey, 1995; Baudrillard, 1983), depression (Moore & Hillman, 1989; Moore 1994, 2005), Eastern spirituality (Capra, 1975), emotionality (Zeldin, 1995) and also shamanism (Abrams, 1996; Mindell, 1993, 2007). Importantly, Tacey (1995) suggests that deep engagement with place; particularly Australian 'country', can have the same effect.

This psychic loosening is particularly pertinent to self-place relationship. Hillman and Ventura (1992) argue that the soul (self, psyche) can be imagined and allowed to expand to re-animate (*anima mundi*) the world around. Similarly, Tacey advocates extending the soul (1995, p. 126) out into culture, history and environment (p.154). Hillman rails against the 'scientism' that wants to squash and kill our souls; that has already been active in the environment (1992, p. 12). In asking where the self ends, Hillman (1995, p. xvii), as well as Tacey (1995), Schama (1995), Zeldin (1995) and others, argue that the self is largely constituted by collective and unconscious processes. Further, that emotions, myths, stories and symbols already exist,

ready and waiting to be experienced and interpreted once they have been imagined and acknowledged. Again, according to Hillman, (1996, p.126) we are beings of perception, imagination, myth, and metaphor (1996, p. 282). This ecopsychological mythic approach to place practice is exemplified by, and explored through, two texts: Illich (1986) and Schama (1995), below.

However, to relinquish collective and highly conditioned Cartesian understandings and language is far from easy. It requires an almost weird de-structuring of self/place and a deep shift in conceptual understanding to become embodied (and emotioned) into practice. It takes a series of challenges for a deep shift in conceptual understanding to become embodied (and emotioned) into practice. About the same time I read these ecopsychological texts I attended a mediation Sesshin with Zen Master Hogan (as encountered in Chapter 5), which was then followed by a 'Beach Run'. Mediation, walking, chatting and a Zen Koan create an insight into Cartesian dualism and a confrontation with the problem of 'the environment'.

Beach Run

Facing the wall meditating. It's early morning and it's been a while since I last sat. I fidget and fiddle. My back aches and legs go numb. But soon a familiar slow contentment spreads through me. Coming and going.

Zen Master Hogan leads; chanting of the heart Sutre (prayer). A deep bell rings ending the mediation. People straighten and stretch; bowing as they leave. Hogan asks me if I would like to join him for his morning jog along 'the endless beach' as he calls it.

Soon we are jogging and chatting through streets on the way to the beach. He asks about things; Permaculture, sustainable living and so on. He expresses his worries about nuclear power, earthquakes, over-busyness and over-cramping in Japan, his homeland.

Close to 'the endless beach' we come across something that we both find ugly and distasteful — something to do with commercialism and tourism on this beach.

Hogan points,

'This is artificial'

Without thinking, I ask,

'Are humans part of nature?'

'Yes', he replies

'Then what is artificial?'

We laugh. In a way I feel clever for pointing something out to a Zen Master. Later upon reflection, I sense that this is probably just as he intended.

For a while Zen Master Hogan and I corresponded through letter writing, exploring themes of sustainability, nature and practice. Soon I found myself writing about being troubled by the language and notion of 'the environment'. 'Kill the Environment' is an adaptation of a Zen Koan.

Kill the Environment

A Zen Koan says,

'If you meet Buddha on the road, kill him!'

(Kopp, 1972)

Why? Possible answers to this riddle might be as follows. If you think you have seen the Buddha then you are deluding yourself. Or, you are thinking too hard and too literally. Finally, anyway, so what?

Recently I was thinking about the word 'environment'. What is it? What does it describe or designate?

The trees and shrubs, soil, insects?

All flora and fauna?

Interacting with non-living systems

And humans?

And all our movements?

And symbols and feelings

Inside and outside are separated by what?

And then it, 'the environment', ceased to be

Which is odd

When you are an 'environmentalist'

But really I want to kill it

The environment

Because it keeps me separate.

In this experience the Cartesian split dissolves, revealing no describable boundary between me and my, 'the environment'. In fact, the term and imagined thing 'environment' becomes profoundly problematic (Gandy, 1996; Whatmore, 1999). Life forms, cells and energy circulate at varying rates around and around. I am at best a node in a series of ebbing and flowing networks. What is around me passes into me and becomes me. What is around me, in me and what is me are all storied; understood via socially constructed narrative (Evernden, 1992). These narratives do not make the existence of these phenomena, but they frame meanings, ways of perceiving and even ways of being. According to Evernden, 'the dualism between nature and culture cannot be resolved because it never actually existed' (p. 96) because 'it is a fiction' (p. 99). Further, he argues that 'we have locked ourselves in a dangerous fiction' (p.103). The Cartesian split, division, divide, dualism is nothing but an enormously powerful, barely-conscious, dangerous and hurtful psycho-political-linguistic construct (Evernden, 1992; Plumwood, 1993).

Emerging from these ecopsychological place-practice insights I experience an

ever-increasing doubt about being an 'environmentalist'. Discourses and messages used to mediate both practical projects and environmental education are reflected upon below. This is followed by reflection on ecopsychological insights into emotional sustainability that arise while traveling in the UK and Ireland.

7.2 Environmental education messages

Ecopsychological insights are similarly applicable to environmental education practices. Looking back at the seminal texts that originally inspired me back in the 1970s — Schumacher (1973), Capra (1975), Meadows et al (1972) among others — it is clear that the problem and challenge of conservation and sustainability (environmentalism, ecology and so on) was seen as being one of *information* and *getting the message out there* (Palmer & Neal, 1994; Palmer, 1998). In 2010, prominent environmentalist authors Flannery (2008), Hamilton (2010) and McKibben (2010) put forward the idea that 'dissemination of information' will lead to 'taking action'. This message, and its underpinning assumptions, remain largely unaltered through 40 years. This is consistent with positivist and scientific notions of knowledge. Fry (1994) argues that such environmental discourses represent a 'significant but troubling body of work' (p. 20), that are insufficiently problematised particularly by deconstructive theory (p.18). A postmodern deconstructivist perspective is likely to focus upon what discourse *does* (Lyotard, 1984; Baudrillard, 1984) especially in terms of social power, rather than what it literally says.

A critical approach to environmental education messages is explored below through two experiences of environmental education. Firstly, an incident from a Permaculture facilitation workshop highlights the '*Message of Crisis*' that is often at the heart of such eco-messages.

Message of Crisis

I'm at a Permaculture teacher's workshop in Queensland.

A group of about 15 participants think about to how best introduce Permaculture to some hypothetical new students. The tradition, apparently, is to read out lists of facts and figures that illustrate the litany of environmental, social and psychological damages of the contemporary world. A picture is created of a world that was in dire need of change.

A small group of participants decide to carry out a guided visualisation. The rest of us lie on the carpeted floor. Windows are draped. The guided visualisation voice encourages us to immerse ourselves in a comfortable quiet darkness; legs and arms relax and release, breathing slows ...

*Breathing out
Releasing body
Big breaths let out
Letting go*

*Release face
Neck
Release mind
Aahh ... open*

*A gentle voice talks
About our lives in the rainforest
(Taped) birds sing
We are proud
Social, spiritual
We hunt and gather
With respect*

*All around
Totems and spirits guide us*

*We sleep
Together
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In our huts

Listening to

Night noises

Under stars

THEN THE TERRIBLE SCREAMING

NOISE OF (taped) CHAINSAWS

RIP through our place

Bulldozers and SIRENS (taped)

Terrify us out of our relaxed states.

A person SCREAMS

Another is crying.

The organisers quickly step in. Curtains are rapidly pulled apart. Lights turned on. Some are now crying almost uncontrollably, others angry and confused.

After a tea break we attempt to debrief what went so wrong.

The second encounter is of a more successful, and less controversial, 'Ecotourism Lesson'. However, the pleasure of teaching and researching ecotourism is tempered, once again, by a sense of discomfort about what is actually being taught.

Ecotourism lesson

We're sitting in a local café with butcher's paper spread before us over the tables. With coloured pens in hand we brainstorm 'ecotourism'. We are free to design the curriculum of a six-week course. This is before the days of competency-based training, accreditation and all that these entail.

We sketch out a multi-disciplinary, practical course that includes elements of social theory, ecology, tourism, economics, cultural appreciation as well as practical business skills. It's a self-reflective eco-tour of horse riding, canoeing, bush walking, bush-tucker excursions

including a guided Aboriginal cultural tour.

Our aim is to replace 'ego-tourism' (Wheeller, 1993), with a tour that appreciates but does not depreciate. We continuously pose the question, what are the effects of this activity on the environment or culture being experienced?'

By way of lesson preparation I carry out background research into ecotourism (Honey, 1999). I find that this approach to tourism has its origins in scientific and business concerns. It's also a story of backpackers, public servants, academics and others wanting to escape the 'Disneyfication' of everything; wanting to find 'authentic' and 'unspoiled nature' and 'culture' without leaving trash, and 'walking paths without widening them'. To find, enjoy, understand, and yet not alter the authentic through this encounter.

At times, I feel deeply uncomfortable with something in these desires and assumptions. There is joy in experiences of seeing sun slanting through ancient rainforests, vines ascending, untamed rivers, adventures in wildernesses ... and, in my mind, glimpsing the possibilities of other cultures anciently adapted to landscape. All in harmony from times before colonisation and commodification.

But is this unattainable fantasy? Glimpses of past innocence in paradisiacal places that probably never existed?

What seems rarely appreciated in the field is that environmental education messages are neither self-evident, nor just 'information', but are profoundly ecopsychological in nature. The substance of such messages is a set of assumptive stories that are almost immutable; of the crises of life, of damage wrought by humanity (as a whole) and the promise of somewhere else better — if prescribed actions are followed. However, what these actions should be is rarely made clear among the slogans and rhetoric used (Fry, 1994).

According to media theorist McLuhan (1964) the 'medium is the message' — but also 'the medium is the *massage*'. Environmental education messages are not neutral information but a process; recipients of environmental education

are massaged with narrow, 'troubling' (Fry, 1994) and deeply emotional messages. Saul (1997) suggests that simple utopian messages offer a retreat from complexity, into childlike unconsciousness in the face of uncertainty (1994, p. 95). The stories we tell, and are expected to tell, as environmental educators, convey the specialness of species, creeks, ecosystems, values and ways of being in places, but emotionally and ecopsychologically this can be a dark process. The language used is of *impact, intervention, footprint, fragility* — the feelings engendered are of *fear, guilt, shame* and, I would argue, *separation*. There is an almost inescapable and inevitable teleological logic to this line of thinking. To Myerson (2001) there is a danger of creating an Ecopathology of Everyday Life in which each and every day, lived experience reverberates with the menace and fear of imminent and universal ecological crisis.

The process of putting these ideas into action is often a reminder that pedagogic practice involves real and vulnerable people. This is particularly apparent when teaching at the social margins where people are often cut off from place and belonging, skills, and social power. A participant in a conservation course writes and presents an insightful song, '*A Hole in Our Hearts*', about human suffering.

Holes in Our Hearts

'We have a hole in our hearts' is the chorus line of a song presented by a student in a Land Conservation course.

Alan and 14 other adults are participating in this course — running over 10 weeks, three days a week. It is half applied bush regeneration work at a new Cemetery Creek site, one quarter theory, and the rest relevant local excursions.

This 'LandCon' course, like other such courses, is divided into modules — plant and weed identification, site assessment, occupational health and safety, fencing techniques and so on.

During the early part of the course it becomes clear that Alan isn't at all happy. He is given permission to attend a retreat as long as he returns in time to do his major assessment presentation to the group in the last week. For inspiration I suggest that he reads Ecopsychology (Rozak, 1995).

Though not a curriculum requirement, I arrange class presentations as a way to give courses a focussed climax. Few participants are likely to invest much time or passion in 'fencing techniques' or 'weed identification', so they are asked to present anything that they think is (vaguely) relevant to land conservation in general.

Alan returns clear-eyed and refreshed in time for the presentations. They are outstanding. Alan's presentation is a song about his insight that we all, i.e. all human beings, suffer, are emotionally in pain from time-to-time throughout our lives, and often feel incomplete, lonely and needy. We try to fill these holes by attaching ourselves to and consuming the materials and products of mass-consumption. The result of the collective heart-holes is the environmental damage that we see around us.

The group is clapping and congratulating him.

This encounter was emblematic, firstly, of the practice of lived life, on the ground, in de Certeau's metaphoric city (1984), as involving considerable emotional and psychological struggle. In this vein Thoreau (1854) talks of lives led of 'quiet desperation'. Secondly, this encounter is emblematic of the belief that ecological damage can be attributed to material over-consumption by people. This argument is popularly represented in Australia by Clive Hamilton in *Growth Fetish* (2004) and Hamilton and Denniss's *Affluenza: When too much is never enough* (2005). Despite being widely acclaimed texts, authors and arguments, I argue that they are highly problematic and indeed can be deeply damaging to adherents of these messages/messages (McLuhan, 1964). A discord arises. As I write I feel that I am rubbing conservation and sustainability culture the wrong way; being critical of, and heretical (Davison & Chapman, 2006), even, towards highly cherished stories. However, having

lived, taught and attempted to practice these *stories* for 30 years I can say that they are neither pleasant to live by, nor helpful when enacting practical conservation projects. *Stories of sustainability and conservation are themselves unsustainable*. They do not deliver sustainability on an emotional level to the people who use these stories to mediate their lives, identities, purposes in the lived world. This is a profound problem.

Fry's (1994) critique of 'popular and populist environmentalism' still stands, particularly in relation to the works of Hamilton (2004, 2010), Hamilton and Denniss (2005). That his books *are* popular and widely acclaimed in the sustainability and conservation community indicates the proximity of this narrative to some kind of cultural mother lode. Fry (1994) suggests that such work is, 'generative of profiles of problems that so often create disablement through fear or fatalism', 'scientific whilst being culturally crude' and 'rel(ying) upon gestural rhetoric while slogans and grand goals so often stand in for a detailing of the means of action' (1994, p. 20). This, the story of the impending end of life (on Earth), is the worst story that can ever be told. The focus of conservationism is upon dramatic, uncritiquable, apocalyptic stories; for instance, Hamilton's *Requiem for a Species* (2010). These grand narratives (Gare, 2001) of conservation and sustainability are never far from Hillman and Ventura's (1992) repressive Puritanical myths (Shepard, 1982); echoing undeniable Christian biblical roots (White, 1967; Shepard, 1982; Cronon, 1996).

To be clear, it is not being argued here that material consumption of finite resources is not a problem; of course, it is. It is, however, being argued that such conservation and sustainability stories create ecopsychological templates that are themselves also deeply problematic. These stories ecopathologise (Myerson, 2001) self/place relationships, thereby reinforcing the modernist Cartesian 'cut' (Hillman, 1995) and hyperseparation (Plumwood, 1993). In effect, people, being emotionally vulnerable, are forced, either literally or symbolically, away from the other-than-human. Both ecopsychological connections and people are damaged by these stories. They are forced

through guilt, fear, shame or anxiety back to the human-centred world. These conservation and sustainability stories *do not offer any real sense of sustainability* — but they could.

7.3 Churches, Sacred Groves, water and images of these

Concerns about, and the search for, notions of place and sustainability are rarely far from the surface for me. As identified in Chapters 1-3 this is my life theme; my personal divine discontent. However, when traveling, my exploration of matters of place and sustainability really comes to the fore. Each trip I take back to the UK and Ireland becomes a tour of special remembered places and always features a visit to dark, mystical, powerful Dartmoor. Admittedly, this is a tour down memory lane infused with the easiness of life that usually comes with being on holiday, but there's a 'here-ness' in these experiences I don't generally find in Australia. Is this perhaps because these place relationships were formed in childhood and youth; before I acquired a conservationist world view? A view that, as argued above, can be inclined towards rigidity and fatalism?

In any such ecopsychological place-musings there can be no certainty; this is the realm of imaginational process (Hillman, 1975; Dirkx, 2000, 2001). I do know that during these trips I gain a great deal of personal reassurance from visits to particular places or kinds of places; places that somehow offer senses of personal and emotional sustainability. These trips are exciting but also weird; an exploration set in a Sebaldian liminal world (Sebald, 1996; Schlesinger, 2004) of the exile-briefly-returned-home. The vividness of the memories of encounters, as well as multiple actual physical boxes and digital folders of photographs collected of moors, trees, churches, crosses, graveyards and statues are testament to the personal importance of these places. If allowed, such images can be of almost primal importance to reflective practice (Boyd & Myers, 1988; Dirkx, 2000).



Other than visiting Dartmoor, I also always find myself being '*Drawn to European Churches*'.

Drawn to European Churches

As I drive around England or Ireland I am strongly drawn to churches, church graveyards, and crosses. This happens frequently and powerfully.



They resonate with something that I really want, though I am not sure what it is. Crosses, gravestones, stone walls conveying collective personal histories. Grass, gardens, trees tended or otherwise.

A range of place-study and ecopsychology texts shine light upon what this attraction might be. In this, the realm of emotion, myth and symbolism, two texts stand out: *Landscape and Memory* (Schama, 1995) and *H2O and the Waters of Forgetfulness* (Illich, 1986). It took me a full summer to read and take notes on Schama's epic journey through mostly European and North American landscape mythology. This was in part due to the book being 600 pages long, but more so because I really wanted to savor it. After years of interpreting and re-creating, designing and conserving landscapes and places, and with my ancestral, symbolic and mythic roots firmly in Europe, this book really excited me. It offered illumination of my unconscious place-practice motivations and desires.

Landscape and Memory is a tour of times and places of symbolism of forests, rivers, mountains, and landscapes. It is a remembering that places such as forest landscapes enfold organic myths of the sacred, wildness, virtue, nationalism and much more. Schama illuminates forests of German racial purity, English woodlands of 'sylvan liberties', class conflict and Robin Hood; moving on to American giant Redwoods, heroism, Christian pilgrims and Romantic wilderness. As I read Schama, water became a metaphor for consciousness and the mysterious female sources of life. Rock became representative of masculine vigour, even fascism; ascetic sacredness and spirituality (Sacri Monti), danger and also evil. Groves of trees could be seen as holy groves, Sacro Bosco (1995, p. 534), the Pagan forerunners of Christian churches.

Schama takes a different stance to that of mainstream scientific and environmentalist depiction (and discourse) of landscape. He argues that culture and nature are inseparable; that every landscape is, and has been, modified by humanity, and, if we look deeply enough, we will find that every

landscape has woven through it a rich tradition of myth and memory. Schama sees myth, echoing Hillman and Ventura (1992) and others, as the means by which we understand our shared living world; living 'beauty is poetic rather than literal' (p. 506), 'especially when contemplating an irreducible whole' (p. 508). These myths are both real and not real at the same time. Schama also agrees with anthropologist, Mircea Eliade, that the universal nature myths as identified by Jung have survived, fully operational, in modern as well as traditional cultures (p.15).

My attraction to Christian crosses as well as graveyards, especially in these trips back to Europe, started to make more sense in this historical and mythic light — *as originally Pagan symbols* (p. 217) *and places*. Schama traces the Christian cross back to two separate historical and botanical sources. Firstly, Middle Eastern Date Palms, which can appear to be dead during droughts but able to come back following rain; and, secondly, to Northern European pre-Christian 'trees of life', as symbols of life coming from death (p. 214). These are simultaneously symbols, myths and trees — of death, resurrection and life in which 'death is no death' (p. 239).



In churchyards in the UK and Ireland I find crosses and Yew trees among ancestral graves. According to Chetan and Brueton (1994) in Northern Europe it is the Yew tree, *Taxus baccata*, which is 'tree of life'. The name 'Yew' is derived from Sanskrit for 'eternity and life force' (p. 75). Yew trees are able to survive for up to 5,000 years. They are particularly resilient, being able to regenerate via internal root systems in old, damaged or hollow trees (p. 23, p.171). Ancient Yew trees can be found all through the UK and Ireland having been planted over both pre-Christian burial grounds and churchyards (p. 50) as symbols of immortality (p.112). These trees are Pagan symbols of sustainability and hope for people struggling their way through life — *importantly they are, literally, rooted in place, in the present and in the other-than-human.*

As I walk between the graves, crosses and trees, thinking of Schama's Pagan
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trees of life, I doubt that I am seeing as a European, but as an Australian — these things are unlikely to be so appreciated by those who have them as part of their daily landscape. These ideas are in my mind on one particularly poignant trip around 'Autumn Ireland'. Traveling down the West Coast, I remember a tragedy and find a powerful symbol of hope.



Autumn Ireland

Storming skies, so low overhead, as I drive through the stonewalled country lanes. Snow falls, darkness too, in a land of pubs, villages, dirty towns, moors, cliffs, drizzle, castles, churches, stone circles, graveyards.

The history, my history, is so thick it intoxicates. Small, close, grey, yet warm and colourful. And in England too, old Oaks, Yews of life and death stand guard in the mist. Hawthorn. Holly. All the life, lives stored in all that is around so it can be remembered, respected and rewritten. Wells of unconscious 'otherside' spring, water that can mean so much. Roads that lead to towns left to fall-in after famines of the last century.

Ghostly monuments, rights of way, point me to more grief, more joy, more connection and more rights of way. Love, poetry, pathos, passion, bombs, jokes are never far away in this place. An Irish home I have never been to.

Young soils, young forests, in hedges and patchworks. Stone walls, houses, gravestones, roofs, statues, cliffs. Young countryside thick with meaning, inhabited past and present.

High, high above, close to the top of the mountain, I can just make out the bright white statue of Christ with arms wide open. To me this is not a figure of sacrifice, but one that says:

'You (all) are cared for'

'Everything will be — OK'

Below, I in the valley, I sponsor Oak and Ash trees of remembrance for two young boys ... we once knew.



Schama's (1995) remembering, of myths held by the living world re-enchants (Hillman & Ventura, 1992; Abram, 1996; Kidner, 2001; Tarnas, 2006) the other-than-human world. Trees turned-crosses-turned-trees again; living emblems of hope, assurance and symbols of sustainability. The resilience of a Yew tree next to graves of my ancestors became my source of resilience amid the uncertainty of life.

Illich's (1986) *H2O and the Waters of Forgetfulness* as a work is similar to Schama's (1995) but then takes the argument further. In contrast to Schama's epic tome, Illich quickly and critically cuts to the core of the

'historicity of materials' (Todd & Cecla, 2002) using the example of water. Water, formerly the carrier of myths (p. 32) becomes transformed, reduced, to the material H₂O, becoming the domain of and rationed by technicians (1986, p. 75). Not only does Illich remember forgotten water's mythic, imaginative and organic qualities but, consistent with his broader extensive body of works, he attributes this process to corrupted Christian-based social process (Snyders, 2005). Through reading, Schama (1995), Illich (1986) and then *Celtic Sacred Landscapes* (Pennick, 1996) while touring Ireland, water, as previously with trees, becomes psychically alive again. I feel it then I remember it – these *'Symbols of places of taking life seriously'*.

Symbols of places of taking life seriously

And now I look at churches and crosses and I see symbols of trees that are not trees. I see rows of Yew trees; the pagan tree of life. I feel tradition, contemplation, struggle, and reassurance.

I like the feel of a place taking life seriously, deeply. Symbols of this. I also feel this with other spiritual/religious symbols and sounds. I want the singing bowl of Tibet. I want the haunting 'Adhan' call to prayer. The peel of church bells. Spire. A lost temple in the jungle. A shrine.

This is my personal perspective, my musings, my exploration. The messages of Schama (1995) and Illich (1986); my experiences of and responses to crosses, churches, trees and groves; and memories, images and imaginings of these combine. This process constitutes a 're-animation' and 're-enchantment' (Hillman & Ventura, 1992; Abram, 1996; Kidner, 2001; Tarnas, 2006) of place, landscape, and the other-than-human. However, this process goes further than this. There is a quality of 'specialness', of reverence for life, that suggests that this process involves 're-sacralisation' (Tacey, 1995). This is not something I write lightly or even particularly willingly, but is an observation that these experiences occur in places of spirituality, the sacred, the divine. For me, these are places where life is taken seriously, where grace is privileged over the profane (Eliade, 1987), and where there is

acknowledgement of being in the presence of, and part of, something complex, mysterious, intelligent and powerful. The strongest image is of a white statue of Christ, arms outstretched, high up a wild Connemarra cliff face. It's important that it is set in a rugged wild place. It becomes a symbol of resilience of, and in the face of, the struggle of lived life. This resilience, sustainability, is a sacred, historic inter-weaving of the human and the other-than-human.

I don't think these are *just* my imaginings, however. What is deeply significant is that, firstly, this ecopsychological re-animation and re-sacralisation features Pagan symbolism, and secondly, that in this schemata living systems are seen as strong. Hillman (1996) and Schama (1995) argue and illustrate that the Pagan mind returned, and took refuge, in Arcadia, the Garden here on Earth. Paul Shepherd in the brilliant text *Nature and Madness* (1982) asks why all the major religions fail to affirm other-than-human life (p. 55); seemingly wanting to escape the Earth. Tracing humanity's relationship to nature back to Judean, Protestant reformist and urban mercantile historic periods Shepard passionately argues that this is a psychopathy (p. 127); a result of symbolic and ontological stunting and immaturity. The resulting 'Edenic narratives' (Cronon, 1996) of Judean migrational myths of paradise (1982, pp. 47-51), combined with Protestant reformist disdain for organic 'mess' of body and the other-than-human (1982, p. 85) are corrupted Christian (Illich & Cayley, 2004) mythic heritage that underpins the western worldview, but also importantly attitudes and behaviours towards nature, landscape and place. These are seductive, powerful almost unconscious myths surfacing as modernity, damaging living systems while perversely revering them (Shepard, 1982, p.119).

Pagan symbolism, places, stories and symbols are rooted in relationship to place and the other-than-human. However, conservation discourses, that over the years I have found increasingly frustrating, echo the biblical Edenic narrative (Cronon, 1996) promising another fantasy of a pure, perfect, untainted promised place — somehow progressed towards yet ever denied. A

process of re-sacralisation is, I argue, only possible in the presence of, and part of, a Gaian conceptualisation of living systems as strong, intelligent, and resilient. Without that understanding we are back grasping for meaning and security in the human-only realm. In the age of ecology, we know that this is not possible — not sustainable.

Is this the divine that I have been searching for? Is this the heart of the matter? According to Shepard (1982):

The function of (Pagan) cults were to lead the realisation that divinity inheres in very particle of the universe and its beings. (p. 76)

But here, in Bellingen, on the ground, there are no churches out in the landscape. They are in the towns, or where towns used to be. There are no church spires, crosses, Pagan statues, Buddhas, groves, or any other tangible symbols of the sacred — that I can identify. To be honest this place still lacks something so important for me. I realise how much I miss church spires and crosses in the landscape. Ideally, they would be made from stone; able to resist the decay of everything.

7.4 Cemetery Creek in a new light

Work successfully continued at Cemetery Creek, year after year becoming almost formulaic in its application. We worked to the aims and objectives as per funding contracts; projects of water quality, riparian repair, wildlife corridors, protection of habitat of threatened species and endangered ecological communities, bush tucker plantings among others. Sites slowly matured; after two to three years regeneration, plantings had grown above weeds and most of the dangers of frost and flood. After five to six years a degree of canopy formed, protecting and moderating sites and creating space for an understorey to be planted or regenerated. Around five to 12 years regenerated plants leapt into new stages of flowering and fruiting; they themselves became sources of regeneration. Only recently, I was enthralled to find under one of the original plantings a Blue Quandong now reaching 20

metres, its large blue fruits; closer attention revealed emerging seedlings. The riparian vegetation re-established — Lomandra, Cheese tree, Guioa and Sandpaper fig — regenerated roots binding the riverbanks of Cemetery Creek which becomes higher, narrower and more distinct.

Over time, and with accumulated collective effort, the regeneration sites, as places, became more powerful, more cared for, more and more ordered — at least until the next major flood! These became places of people, characters, challenges, stories, skills, attitudes, and incidents and events that have occurred while working at the creek. For me the personal significance of the Cemetery Creek project grew over time. It became a matter of getting to know it, inhabiting it, embodied, feeling, the materials, and the energy, working in it and with it.

As argued earlier, the regeneration of creeks, places and ecosystems was the creation of ever extending the fields of care, concern and self (Evernden, 1985, 1992). No Landcare site was ever 'finished'; free of weeds, or damage from floods or human activities. So, we looked after more and more places; more parts of the Cemetery Creek to regenerate. Following is an encounter of 'Landcare Community Power' at yet another new site.

Landcare Community Power

The next Cemetery Creek site that we undertake is so infested with weeds, flood debris, rubbish and particularly Coral tree that we cannot find the actual creek at first! Walking into the area is to risk sinking into anaerobic tropical mud, spiking by the Coral tree, as well as bites from ticks and spiders.

The creek is so blocked with rubbish that we have funding and permission to remove it mechanically with a backhoe. We nibble away at the edges of the chaos with rakes, chipping hoes, axes, and a lot of volunteers. Rubbish is collected and removed by a Subaru, pulling a trailer. Piles of flood debris and Camphor laurel are stacked in pyramids to dry before being set on fire. A small chainsaw is used from time-to-time.

We decide that the funding can be made to go further by clearing the creek manually. It is filthy, physical work, but the community volunteers love it.

Some months later a contractor removes Camphor laurels and the remainder of the Coral tree; we plant and regenerate the site and congratulate ourselves. Our local Shire Council Planner, with whom we negotiate permissions and funding can't believe his eyes when he sees the finished product.

A revegetated and rejuvenated section of Cemetery Creek flows again, thanks to a team of local volunteers with some basic tools and determination and vision.



This was testament to the power of community effort, commitment, idealism and willpower. Probably, and realistically, this was an exceptional occurrence, even by the standards of a particularly community-minded town such as Bellingen. To carry out such work required the planning, consultation with stakeholders - particularly the local Shire Council. Although not always compulsory now, this previously required the submission of a 'Council Development Application' each time. Clearly, the Development Application process is required to regulate building projects, but filling out these forms always raised the same question:

Council Development Application

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Another funding application has been successful for Cemetery Creek. I'm doing the Project Manager rounds before the on-site work can start.

Networking, e-mailing, phoning, leaving messages with the whole range of stakeholders: Landcare people, Departments, community groups we want to work with, contractors, neighbours and residents. It's a matter of drawing together and energising a network of possibilities. All made possible through encouraging latent goodwill.

And to Council. I know many of the staff, so it's easy to find them and talk to them. Each time, I fill out the form — the Development Application form. Among the many questions there is always this one:

'What impact will the proposed works have upon the environment?'

Various suggested answers are given to help the respondee regarding potential 'impacts' on water quality, biodiversity, tree preservation and so on.

The form then asks: 'What measures will be taken to minimise these impacts?' But why are the 'impacts' seen as negative? Why automatically assumed to be negative?

I usually write something like: 'The proposed work will impact positively on the site. It is intended to enhance the environmental quality of the site and therefore these 'impacts' will not need to be minimised!'

Far from negatively 'impacting' places, the craft of regeneration work required finely tuned skills, intention and attention. As an example of the craft and practice 'Brush-cutting' involved qualities greater than just cutting down weeds.

Brush-Cutting

New Landcare plantings at Cemetery Creek need intensive care and protection for about two years. Initially this can involve watering but usually it's weeding so that new plantings and regeneration are not out-competed before they become established.

We use hand-held scythes or brush-cutters to keep the weeds clear around the plantings until they become more established. (Mulch gets washed away in floods). Brush-cutting sounds like an unpleasant job and sometimes it can be. Occasionally there are hassles with the broken cord, petrol mix, safety gear, irritated bees, allergy-causing plants and of course rocks or sticks that get flicked up somehow getting through safety equipment.

But having said all that, brush-cutting the Cemetery Creek sites is and was nearly always a pleasure to me. This work is generally done alone. It becomes an act of intimacy and creation. As I wave the brush-cutter over the sites I do so with deep concentration. All plants are identified (through smeared goggles) as I work my way along. Any loose action and in an instant a plant is ring-barked and destroyed. In this state of deep concentration, there is a kind of trance set up through the rhythm of the swinging machine and my footsteps. The safety gear cuts my senses off from everything else. My vision is accentuated, my mind quiet.

Afterwards, the site looks cared for, valued, the recipient of good intentions, skill and craft.



Hundreds of such encounters could be recounted that reflect the sustained effort, idealism, intentionality and practice of community and volunteers. The regeneration of Cemetery Creek was pushed along on a daily basis often

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quietly, in the background (down at the creek) and unheralded. Countless individual people immersed themselves in this, and similar projects, usually deriving satisfaction in return. In line with conservation funding requirements, report outcomes and dominant scientific conservation 'language games' (Wittgenstein, 1953; Baudrillard, 1983; Lyotard, 1984), outcomes were measured in terms of species biodiversity, weed percentage reduction, quality of riparian zones or water quality (Curtis & de Lacy, 1995).

Although seen as generally successful, there can be little doubt, that Gaian forces (Lovelock, 1979, 1991; Margulis, 1998) of the ecosynthesis (Holmgren, 2002) of old rainforest and new weeds (Low, 2002) could be seen (if open to this observation) to be occurring all around our sites and in the area broadly. Despite substantial funding, intentionality and committed work weeds kept on keeping on. This year's Madeira vine flowering, featuring large areas of canopy covered in fine white flowers was spectacular, if alarming. It is only a matter of time before Cat's Claw vine makes the attempted control of Madeira vine look easy. Just yesterday a quick walk through Landcare sites revealed Tradescantia and Elephant Ears thriving — with no possibility of them ever being controlled. Far from being an 'impact', an 'intervention', or returning these places to something historic (Hilderbrand & Watts, 2005) the age-old craft of working with ecosystems and places is set to continue as it has done for thousands of years. It is a recovery of place and is also the recovery of craft; an ecopsychological healing of both place but also of the practitioner (Roszak, 1992, 1995).

The craft of working at Cemetery Creek involved intense focus, attention and intention. Works were carried out despite being guided by what were often disconnecting and disempowering conservation and sustainability stories (Myerson, 2001). As argued by Schama (1995) and Willis (1998) this language of science is not capable of conveying the livedness of experience. Terms and language used in dominant, monocultural conservation discourse are distant, rigid and inadequate in describing and understanding my emergent place practice at Cemetery Creek. In the 'flow' of action

(Csikszentmihalyi, 1991), down the creek, and at the margins of place (Cresswell, 2009) different imagined interpretations of place practice came to the fore.

An ecopsychological 'loosening-up' as advocated by Tacey (1995) can come from pedagogic disruption through critically reflected practice. Knowing that places resonate the more they are visited, cared for, enjoyed and respected (Rose, 1996), for me, they become transformed by images, and experiences of churches, crosses and graveyards in Europe and by powerful ideas of the texts of Schama (1995) and Illich (1986). I glimpse Cemetery Creek rich with symbols of life and death; sites become sacred groves. Trees and water symbolically come to represent, offer and reflect resilience, care (Evernden, 1985, 1992), and hope (Schama, 1994). Again, this is edging towards the beautiful but difficult ground of the sacred and the divine. However, to watch regenerators and gardeners at work is to watch people holding places in high esteem, with idealism; with a serious, almost devout energy. It's like the practitioners are reaching out, or reaching in. There is an unconscious sacred quality to this reaching.

It is important to understand that this gesture of *reaching* takes place in the context of our foreign colonial culture and hegemony held, suspended, above this place (Carter, 1996). Maybe practices of removal of (foreign, invasive, and so on) weeds are motivated by colonial guilt (Davison & Chapman, 2006)? This may be a partial, unconscious motivation, but there is more to this. Personally, I find it hard to connect my European-ness, and perhaps Asian-ness, even my Global-ness with this place, because it is so, so different; even when I am becoming so intimate with its materiality. It truly is a landscape reticent about revealing itself (Tredinnick, 2003). Maybe it would help if my ancestors, and their symbols, were here.

Cemetery Creek is but a microcosm of Australia — meandering out from ancient rainforested hills. The hills, 'Old Man Sleeping' as they are called around here, look over Bellingen, powerful, old and unsettling. According to

Tacey (1995) spirits in the land conquer the invader (p.134). This place seems to want me here. I try to get away from it; from the Cemetery Creek project, but the craft of working there pulls me in. Despite this I find that it's very hard to connect to the land and the place of here. It's a place geographically and historically marginalised; away from the generation of wealth, power and stories of colonial historical places such as Sydney, Brisbane, London and Manchester. To spend a long time here, not something that many professionals do (Bauman, 1998), and to be open and reflective is to be drawn as if into a vacuum. I am drawn into uneasiness and over-quietness in this place that seems to go largely unnoticed. In my trips to the UK and Ireland the history of waves of colonisation and inhabitation make places rich and chaotic. There the history hits me again and again — stories resonating. But here, this history, held taut in the present, is difficult and fraught with unconscious emotions (Sebald, 1999). It's so silent! The silence itself is almost withheld.

7.5 Place-practice changes

An ecopsychological approach to understanding place practice emphasises, acknowledges and imagines emotionality, symbolism and myths that mediate relationship to and with place, nature and the other-than-human. This perspective encountered while studying Social Ecology (Hill, 2004) and place theory (Cameron, 2003, 2008) as part of the 'Hawkesbury experience' (Bawden, 2005), is a response to the disjuncture between conservation practice and discourse as identified in Chapter 6. Conservation practices of weeding and bush regeneration of sites along, for instance Cemetery Creek, is a re-inhabitation of these places with feeling and story; coming into closer relationship.

An ecopsychological perspective offers, and requires a psychic loosening (Tacey, 1995; Hillman, 1995) that allows a rediscovery of latent and forgotten emotionality, symbolism and myth of place (Illich, 1986; Schama, 1995). It constitutes a re-animation of everything 'cut' (Hillman, 1995) in the Cartesian schemata, but this is not something that can be just taught; it requires a

strange de-structuring of self/place relationship that can come, for instance, through drug use, depression, embodiment or other sources of embodied dissonance.

Further, an ecopsychological approach to place shines a problematic light upon mainstream environmental education messages (Palmer, 1998). The unproblematised use of the term 'environment' points to deeper pitfalls. These are messages/massages (McLuhan, 1964) that effectively pathologise (Myerson, 2001) place relationships through discourse that combines fear, guilt, crisis as well as spectres of trauma/promise (i.e. Hamilton, 2010; Flannery, 2010a). Popular environmentalist and official conservation talk of 'impact' and 'intervention' are testament to the re-enforcement processes of Cartesian hyperseparation (Plumwood, 1993), through creating fear and disablement (Fry, 1994).

Cartesianism may be a fiction (Evernden, 1992) but it is also a deeply hurtful psycho-political construct. For me this requires a personal reconceptualisation and re-imaging of sustainability because conservationist place-mediating stories of authors such as Hamilton (2010), Lovelock (2009) and McKibben (2010) offer grand narratives (Gare, 2001) that are themselves *unsustainable* to live by. My personally powerful trips to the UK and Ireland feature being drawn to special places, particularly churches, crosses and ancestral graveyards. Insights gleaned from Illich (1986), Schama (1995) and well as Chetan and Brueton (1994) reveal the Pagan symbolism of the resilience of life in the face of death. That these symbols of life are literally rooted in landscapes is important; as is the understanding of place from a Gaian perspective; of life being strong and able to provide. 'Edenic narratives' (Cronon, 1996) of a corrupted Christian (Shepard, 1982; Illich & Cayley, 2004) Promised Land ever-denied are now displaced and replaced by re-animation (Hillman & Ventura, 1992) and perhaps re-sacralisation (Tacey, 1995) of place.

The work at Cemetery Creek now resonates with re-animated meaning. Places

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already inhabited by stories and incidents of Landcare practice now come to hold mythic agency and power; the workers (not 'impacting' or 'intervening' but practising everyday place-practice craft) on such sites can be seen to be part of an idealistic, unconscious reaching into place. This is beyond conceptions of untainted past/future that dominate conservation. An ecopsychological approach offers a co-terminous healing of place and people (Roszak, 1992, 1995). However, despite becoming increasingly intimate with the materiality (Fry, 1994) and atmosphere (Wylie, 2007) of this place, I am increasingly aware of a deep discomfort. Firstly, I yearn for spiritual symbols out there in the landscape made of stone and able to resist the decay of everything. But that pales into insignificance against the deep, awful silence of this place.

Chapter Eight — Critical perspectives: Loss and Re-emergence

Chapter 8, the last of the 'encounter' chapters, draws upon images and encounters of place engagement from critical academic and artistic craft perspectives in both Bellingen and Devon. Coming to the fore are the themes of both deep grief but also of re-emergence and renewal. After exploring an ecopsychological approach to sense of place practice (Chapter 7) that shifts focus away from the literal and concrete towards the symbolic, psychological, emotional and Shamanic dreamlike state (Castaneda, 1971; Mindell, 1993; Abram, 1996), a critical perspective re-engages with the world of social power. This perspective reveals a most powerful underlying dynamic.

Encounters with teaching and researching in Social Sciences at Southern Cross University, in particular poverty studies (see, for instance Vinson, 2003) and continued involvement with the Cemetery Creek project combine to create a growing deep discomfort that is somehow held in the landscape. The shadow of this place (Plumwood, 2008) of deep unexpressed grief held in the landscape (Bartram, 1981; Blomfield, 1981; and Shepherd, 1982) of the Gumbaingirr, but also settlers (Brady, 2004), 'alternates' and professionals. The insight of deep grief held in the landscape is accentuated as I return to Devon to farewell my farming Grandparents and their farmland.

There is a danger that sustainability and conservation have become the latest colonising discourse (Sachs, 1993). However, place practices and craft of food gardening, Permaculture, Landcare and bush regeneration among others, offer re-emergence, renewal and re-inhabitation (Gruenwald, 2003), through inherent embodiedness, emotionality and materiality. Further, the craft of aesthetic interpretations of projects involving stonework seem to allow this place, so reticent in revealing itself (Tredinnick, 2003), to speak.

8.1 Problems of place

After close to 25 years of physical site-specific work I was happy to take up an
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offer to work at Southern Cross University (SCU). I continued to be involved with the Cemetery Creek regeneration project but in my day-to-day working life I was employed to teach, research and act as a conference coordinator in subject areas that included critical literacy, reflected practice, applied ethics and poverty studies. In a sense I had come full circle; it had been a critical political and ethical stance that had initially led me to gardening and conservation back in the early 1980s. My belief that human social power dynamics underlie so much of everyday lived life was brought back into focus again.

An ecopsychological sense of place-practice, as explained and explored in Chapter 7, tends towards the symbolic, mythic and emotional and towards experiencing an almost shamanic dreamlike state (Castaneda, 1971; Mindell, 1993; Abram, 1996) of another world beyond language. This is a sense of place that often feels geographically and metaphysically positioned well away from centres of power. This though, in one significant respect, is an illusion. A range of authors, including Macy (1991), Evernden (1992), Schama (1995), Roszak (1995), Suzuki (1979, 1999), Flannery (1995, 2010a), Hamilton (2004, 2010), Hamilton and Denniss (2005) shine considerable light upon matters of the living environment, deep ecology, environmental philosophy and ecopsychology but then tend to treat humanity as some kind of homogenised whole; thereby failing to reflect upon the critically important intra-human realm. In reading these authors I find myself wanting more; wanting the next step to reveal what human power arrangements underpin the various sustainability, conservation and place problems being examined. This omission leaves me feeling frustrated and angry. Social power to me is about winning and losing, and loss in particular.

This chapter starts with an encounter, *'Hill with no name Place Seminar'*, of the awkwardness of the inhabitation of landscape in everyday life. It points to a deep disjuncture between everyday activity and human inhabitation of a particular place.

Hill with no name Place Seminar

'It's a chance for you to get your research ideas out there, Charlie'

With that I agree to present a seminar at the university campus. It is months away and then suddenly its next week. Soon, I'm thinking it through at night-times, writing notes and playing around with PowerPoint presentations. It's a lunchtime seminar for academics who are already far too busy. So, I ask myself questions; what's a simple metaphor that will 'hook' them? What's a different activity or perspective that can illuminate and problematise 'our' relationship to place — to this place?

Then it occurs to me to take them up the hill that dominates the education campus that I work on. In the past I had taken conservation students up there to meditate, to look down on the landscape below to perceive, and think in terms of, systems – landforms, soil, clouds, weather, vegetation communities and human settlement.

I realise then that this hill has no name! The hill that dominates an entire education campus of thousands of students, staff and workers. The hill from which you can see the sea on one side and the escarpment (of the Dividing Range) close by on the other.

I run the seminar entitled Deconceptualising place. The aim is to explore and convey ways to feel place by revealing and neutralising the way we think, or not. Luckily it rains heavily during the day so I can stop worrying about OH&S or access and equity considerations of taking staff up the 100 metres or so up the steepish and muddy hill. But the metaphor of the hill-with-no-name is useful.

It appears that I remain one of a handful of staff who have been up there. How can such a hill have no name?

The argument of the seminar was an early iteration of this thesis. I drew upon Somerville (2006, 2007) and Cameron (2008) to create a theoretical framework to problematise the deeply confused field of conservation and sustainability and suggested a place theory framework as a way to overcome rigidity, dualisms, and other problems of this field. According to Somerville
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place relationships are storied, embodied and subject to contestation, particularly between western and Aboriginal experience and story (Somerville, 2007, pp.1-2). To that, Cameron (2008) would add that place relationships are personal, experiential, often unconscious and can vary in experiential depth (pp. 284-5) of experiencing. My thesis asserts that there is a disjuncture between theory and practice/experience; so that the challenge to research is to find ways to suspend, displace, illuminate and remove existing conceptualisations to allow practice and experience to speak or be written. Practice though is felt, autobiographic and ambiguous — qualities with which contemporary academia is generally uncomfortable (Denzin, 2009). The hill-with-no-name seminar motif was of interest to staff with interests in geography, place theory and Aboriginal social welfare.

A social science approach is generally one of problematisation of 'common sense' arrangement generally leading to discomfort (pers. comm. Hil, 2003), revealing almost every aspect of life to be socially constructed to some extent. Located at the same education campus, I spent six months researching experiences of poverty and was then subsequently employed as coordinator of a conference highlighting the prevalence of poverty in the mid-north coast region. Having previously worked with a wide range of socially marginalised volunteers, trainees, neighbours and other participants at the Cemetery Creek, I become increasingly conscious that '*Struggletowns*' are the norm for this part of Australia.

Struggletowns

I am offered work at the local university and I jump at it. It is to work as a research assistant on issues of regional poverty; before long this job evolves to include coordinating a poverty conference.

Over six months I liaise with speakers and workshop leaders from government departments, NGOs, community groups, social welfare, church and Aboriginal organisations among others. Locally, we listen to, and record, stories of people's experiences of poverty and

social exclusion. We listen aghast to tales of disadvantage, damage, despair, violence and grinding choicelessness. I often leave the interviews feeling sick to my guts. The worst is the ubiquitousness and depth of this 'relative' poverty — yet somehow so systemically silenced.

During this time, I talk to one of the herbicide spray contractors at Cemetery Creek over a beer. He isn't at all surprised. 'Yes mate; they are all 'struggletowns' round here'.

Cameron (2008) talks of tensions between place-responsiveness and social justice in place theory. Place theory, traditionally the domain of phenomenologists inspired by Merleau-Ponty (1962) and Heidegger (1962), and place writers Rollins (1981), Tacey (1995), Read (2000), and Tredinnick (2003) in Australia and Snyder (1995) and Lopez (1986, 1989) in the United States, was widely critiqued from critical social science, feminist, and practice disciplinary perspectives (for instance, Massey, 1994; Harvey, 1996; Lippard, 1997; and Plumwood, 2008). Broadly, the critique of place ranges between one of romantic naivety to being downright politically dangerous in terms of encouraging nationalistic extremism. The encounters above are neither romantic nor sentimental but instead speak of disjuncture and disadvantage. Place theory is able to give space to considering such problems in a way that 'environmentalism', 'sustainability' and so on cannot. Conversely, the heart-wrenching experiences of poverty can be further understood when located in theoretical frames of reference beyond the disciplinary domain of social sciences. Place theory -- particularly a framework of place practice -- can bring social theory concerns to sustainability thinking and grounded sustainability concerns to social science.

Auge (1995) talks of certain kinds of places as being 'non-place'. His non-places, roads, airports, shopping malls and so on, are places of transition, movement, and subject to constant re-making. To Auge, a postmodern conception of place is often 'inauthentic', a term originally used by place pioneer Relph (1976). Music, colour schemes, branding, stories, the meanings and purposes of such non-places are readily changed irrespective of the particular geographic location, or inherent non-human characteristics of that

place. The education campus is such a place, much like any other education campus, a place of mobility and endless substitution; in which little or nothing of the place as it existed before it became a campus is evident.

The hill-with-no-name, however, was not a non-place. Its qualities were not of freely inter-changed meanings generated and substituted to make the place experience. Neither was it a place of transit. It's a place that is barely inhabited and appears to be devoid of meaning and story. It is perhaps 'unplace'. The campus sits astraddle the hill; the commanding hill that affords such panoramic views. Here I am reminded of Carter (1987) who, in *Road to Botany Bay*, argues that Australia was colonised as suspended state, above the land, almost not touching the pre-colonial land. Even closer to the mark is Rose (1996). In *Nourishing Terrains* where she describes the almost winded, one imagines, expression of Aboriginal elder Daly Pulkara coming into country in the Victoria River district that had been uninhabited for a long period of time. A place that hadn't been walked, hunted, burned, dreamed or sung or imagined Daly calls 'the wild, just the wild' (p.19). He continues, 'the life of the country is fallen down' (p.19). Although the hill-with-no-name is mowed regularly by contractors, other than that it is uninhabited, un-storied unplace — country falling down. It is a place of erased history.

This line of argument, of course, runs counter to the popular conservationist understanding of 'impacting the land' of minimising our 'ecological footprints' and of course 'wilderness'. The latter, in particular, is inimical to understanding inhabitation of place and is argued against by Rose (1996), Langton (1996) and Plumwood (1998). Conservation and sustainability discourses, with their associated baggages, when moved aside, afford room for new place-based understandings to come to the fore. In the case of the hill with no name this is a variation of Augé's non-place (1995) — unplace. The second encounter, above, is of poverty, exclusion, of 'unpeople' (Pilger, 1998, p. 44); unplace and unpeople run hand-in-hand.

The *Conference on Poverty* attracted a range of speakers including Michael

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Raper, former Chair of ACOSS, Professor Judy Atkinson, Senator Aiden Ridgeway and Professor Tony Vinson. Vinson's *Poverty by Postcode* (Vinson, 1999) research showed that the mid-north coast of New South Wales is deeply disadvantaged, confirming findings our own interview-based research. Poverty literature comprising Henderson (1973), Townsend (1979), Bourdieu (1999), Vandersluis and Yeros (2000), Peel (2003) and Eitzen and Smith (2003) among others, create a compelling and competing organising story, for me, of the place in which I live. Conservation, sustainability stories, concerns and passion become, in some ways, subordinate to issues of power, powerlessness and the social mechanisms that create them. A story of place emerges about losing, and winning, and maybe resistance and renewal of people doing their best in difficult circumstances. I am also conscious that when I was first drawn to environmentalism back in the 1970s through reading Club of Rome's *Limits to Growth* (Meadows et al., 1972), the problems of poverty were seen as central to the 'world problematique' (Peccei, 1977). What happened?

8.2 Deep grief held in the Land

Factors combine to further shift my understanding of this place that I have now lived in for over 20 years. The silence of these unpeople (Pilger, 1998), the awkwardness of inhabitation of the landscape (Carter, 1987), the liminality (Somerville, 2007) of my migration experiences (Schlesinger, 2004) and the atmosphere of this place (Wylie, 2007), come to a head 'At a Small but Quite Good Party'. I find myself saying something quite unexpected.

At a Small but Quite Good Party

During the day, I visit, with my oldest son, an art exhibition depicting 'Bellingen'. We pick our favourites. The great majority of art works are breezy, sunny. Bellingen as a beautiful niche in the rainforest; as paddocks, as gardens of flowers, as experienced lying next to the river, and so on. Bellingen as place of healing for tired dispirited city folk.

But my favourite picture is one that shows McGrath's Hump, otherwise know as 'Old Man

Sleeping' (this escarpment runs around, and looks over, Bellingen and the Promised Land) on what I assume is a nondescript, cool grey Autumn late afternoon. A shiver runs through me.

That evening I am at a small but quite good party. The majority of revelers are dancing to some retro dance music but it's not my thing. I'm content to hang out in the kitchen watching and chatting — and drinking a bit too. Conversations blur into each other and the alcohol and I find myself chatting to Jean, an artist.

The music is getting louder, and my hearing is not so good after years of using power tools. I lean forward, a bit disorientated. 'What do you do?' 'OK, what do you paint?' 'Landscapes?' I think she said. And I'm imagining painted landscapes similar to those at the exhibition.

The conversation comes around to my research and rather than going through the usual boring explanations I find myself in new territory. I hear myself saying,

'The landscape around here is so full of unexpressed grief.'

There is a deep, deep unexpressed grief held in the land around here. Lying in bed I sometimes hear the 'Sound of Black Cockatoo and Lapwing'. Especially in winter, these birdcalls resonate with sadness and loneliness.

Sound of Black Cockatoo and Lapwing

When Black Cockatoos fly and wail it is said that rain is on its way. The more cockatoos there are, the more days of rain there will be. They come down to the valley when it's cool and rainy to eat grubs in young Eucalypts. They perch on them and listen intently. Once found they saw, with their great bills, through the hardwood inches at a time to get at their meal.

The birdcalls of Cockatoos and Lapwing evoke sadness.

The Cockatoos fly down

Black

Wheeling in groups

Crying

Loud, long shrieks

Sad, angry

And Lapwings fly along

Calling

When I'm in bed on winter's nights, Lonely, flying low

Across cold empty land.

I am moved to deepest sadness by the grief of this history. The brave works of Sebald (1996, 1999) and Behar's *The vulnerable observer: Anthropology that breaks your heart* (1996) shows the way to this as an academic matter. Behar argues, passionately for emotionality in attempting to describe, convey and confront mortality, mourning, loss and grief. Crucially, she describes even the difficulty of imagining, for instance, the Holocaust. She writes 'call it sentimental, call it Victorian and nineteenth century, but I say that anthropology that doesn't break your heart is not worth doing anymore' (p.177). Sebald, similarly, attempts to come to terms with why post-war Germans seem not to face the horrors of World War II (1999). He writes, moodily, strangely, obliquely (Jaggi, 2001), working his way under cliché and sentimentality to the horror challenging 'preconscious self-censorship' (1999, p.10) and 'an almost perfectly functioning mechanism of repression' (1999, p. 12). These writers, writing as academics, are deeply, deeply moved and moving. The matter at hand in my research, in this place, is so sad that as Behar says, 'all the tears have already been cried' (1996, p. 176). I only wish that more people were moved by this too. There is a wrought, dark silence that inhabits these valleys that does not reveal itself easily. This is the shadow of a place (Plumwood, 2008) popularly known for 'alternative' light, positivity and healing. The silence is the awful silence of just after a battle — wounds open; shock; shame. The word hurting is nowhere nearly powerful enough. Black Cockatoo and Lapwing, lonely, flying low, across cold empty land.

Australia is perhaps one of the most colonised and least colonisable places on Earth. Away from the cities that are places more likely to be connected to Europe or Asia than non-urban Australia (Pers. Comm. Hay, 2004), this is most apparent. Here the land is stronger, tougher, wilder, weirder and more likely to invade the invader (Tacey, 1995) than the other way around. Here the postcolonial is so recent — in most places around here 170 years, and it's often been tough and terrible. The novel *Darker Grows my Valley* written by Grace Bartram (1981), a one-time resident of Bellingen and ex-ABC journalist, describes the poverty, conflict, confusion, vulnerability, distance and sheer raw fear of the early settlers and the Aboriginal inhabitants of the valley, in the 1840s. I am assured by local historians that the plot of *Darker Grows my Valley*, culminating in conflict and massacres of local Gumbaingirr, is realistic. Local history is sketchy and written by and for local settler families (Davison, 2000) still clinging to their dreams of their Promised Land. However, Bartram's depiction of the history of this place at that time *feels* so real: how could it have been otherwise? Just imagine your way, under sentimental patriotic colonial dreams, under rural idyllic escape, 'sea-change', healing and rainforest eco-beauty, into it; into the dark vine-crossed decaying valleys of memory. It was at this time that the first settler cemetery in Bellingen was established giving its name to the small creek nearby, Cemetery Creek.

Since then there have been 170 years of death, and systematic and institutionalised denial of place and practice to the Gumbaynggirr. For a European, or any other non-Australian, such a historical time span is, perhaps, short; just a few generations. But that is almost irrelevant; the impact of an entire state imposing an institutionalised penal, working and religious social arrangement so quickly and brutally, via massacres (Blomfield, 1981), denial of land, family, health, culture, language and movement to this place/people was, and remains, arguably, genocide (Moses, 2004). An indicator of local historical conflict can be found in the fact that in the 1967 referendum on Aboriginal rights to vote and to citizenship the highest 'no' vote was registered close by in Kempsey (Landers, 2009). A plethora of reports, literature and

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government initiatives (Wilson & Dodson, 1997; Rudd, 2008; Gillard, 2010) illustrate the dire statistics of Aboriginal disadvantage — incarceration rates, addiction, mental health, life expectancy, social welfare interventions. These indicators of poverty are terrible and shameful. To Clendinnen, (1999) this history, and its silencing, is not a source of shame or guilt, but grief (p. 97). She 'tugs' readers in *True Stories* through history, because 'there remains a scar on the face of this country, a birthstain of injustice and exclusion directed against that people ... who once possessed this land' (p.114). As I have said, all this, I feel, is almost beyond words, beyond expression and perhaps beyond crying. The healing of this wound cannot possibly start until this becomes at least a competing story of this place.

The grief in the landscape, this place, however, is not only Aboriginal grief — far from it. Perhaps this is a contributing factor to the active denial of Aboriginal grief. I have no wish to, in any way, diminish or to be seen to dismiss Aboriginal grief, but the next layer of grief held in this land, also largely unacknowledged, is of the settlers of this area. They themselves generally came from troubled places, wars, bringing dreams and hard, hard work with them to this inhospitable place (Brady, 2004).

During a Landcare project, my team and I set off in search of an abandoned workers town, '*Lloyd's Siding*', somewhere in the overgrown forest.



Lloyd's Siding

As leader of a Landcare work team of four, I become aware of the need to do something different after weeks of difficult work. Cutting walking tracks through the rainforest for the local ecology field studies centre is challenging partly due to the physicality of the cutting, slashing, sawing and so on, but probably more so because we are a conservation team. Cutting down rainforest trees and vines is not what we expected to be doing.

It's our big day out. We are walking up the old rail track that we had been working near in search of 'Lloyd's Siding', an old abandoned town. Apparently, it's a few hours walk away. We walk enthusiastically pushing through decades of weeds and regrowth. We dodge, climb and slash our way through and around Lantana, vines, fallen trees and so on. We don't know how far we need to walk or what to expect. Will there be buildings? Citrus trees? A Crepe Myrtle tree? Old chimneys ...? Remaining signs of occupation?

Eventually we come across some big rusted machines — boilers, in among the Lantana. This first sign of the old town promises further amateur archaeological finds. But we find

nothing. Soon the vegetation changes to neat rows of exotic plantation Blue Gums. Not much else. A coin is found.

We wander down to the creek close by to get out of the sun. And there, there it is — the remnants of the town that had existed for 50 or 70 years; that had held two or three generations of timber and rail workers, women making homes in the bush, children going to school — all bulldozed down into the creek. Twisted, rusty, corrugated roofing iron, bits of 'fibro'. After a lunch break, we walk back not really knowing what to think.

Later we are told that the town had existed as a place to load timber into trains, to be sent wherever. Once the timber profits had gone, the authorities, whoever they were, bulldozed the buildings and planted it out with Blue Gums.

In the bus trip back home after work we try to come to terms with what we had found. A debate rages — 'It's great that the people left and the town was cleaned up. But why didn't they plant local eucalypts?'

'Why do that? Why just push the whole place into a pile like these people, and the place, and their history, was of no importance?'

On the drive home to Bellingen, we pass through a series of ex-timber towns, burnt, depopulated. 'Deliverance country' someone jokes and impromptu banjo duet breaks out in the minibus.

I feel the loss of these places. Exploited and gone. People, forest, trees, place. Emptied — to other places and people of greater power. Leaving the Lantana, vines, and fallen trees to reclaim.



Lloyd's Siding on the escarpment, overlooking Bellingen, is an example of many settlements that existed briefly in areas such as this. New towns, farms and homesteads made the place 'civilised', 'moral' and 'productive' a 'new Britannia in another world' (Brady, 2004, p. 9) but the place and people were for a short period exploited ruthlessly. These places are now largely abandoned, empty country, 'country falling-down' (Rose, 1996). What remains are a handful of marginally productive farms, National Parks acting as 'nature' exhibits for tourists and thriving communities of weeds. These places, this region, have been subjected to utter exploitation. Old ex-towns such Lloyd's Siding are testament to this. Poor people moved to the forests for work and to bring up families. They battled the rainforests (try living in one — the romance soon fades) for 50-80 years. Forests were felled (mined) and shipped to be value-added in Australia's capital cities or other parts of the British Empire; for instance, Coachwood was used for Spitfires in World War II (Boland, Brooker, et al., 2006). It was one of several high-value timbers that were logged rapidly; others included Hoop Pine and Australian Red Cedar (Boland, et al., 2006). When this was no longer profitable, it stopped. Popular stories of 'the bush' feature brave, independent and stoic 'timbergetter' pioneers; maybe they were stoic, and remain so, because no one listens. Again the quite freely available statistics of rural decline, poverty, mental health and poor life expectancy (Pritchard & McManus, 2000) clearly contradict dominant

sentimental 'bush' myths.

A visit to Bellingen library reveals multiple historical booklets celebrating the establishment of schools, bridges, the hospital and the war memorials, Country Women's Association, new crops, butter factories as well as the establishment of various momentous urban amenities. Other booklets trace the flourishing of pioneering families; surnames clearly English, Irish, Scottish with a few German and Italian (Braithwaite & Beard, n. d.; Lean, 2008). The occasional publication hints briefly at the difficulty of living here. Blewitt (1997) dedicates single lines to World War I, the Depression, World War II, destructive floods in the 1950s, and the collapse of the dairy industry in the 1960s (pp. 26-27).

Certainly, from the 1960s this region went into economic and social decline until the next wave of colonisers arrived — the hippies and 'alternates' (Blewitt, 1997) riding a wave of Aquarius energy and 1970's idealism — finding relatively cheap (ex)-farmland on which to set up intentional communities. However, again the dominant story and indicators of well-being are in conflict. The majority of hippies or 'alternates' return to the cities within years (Brooks & Munro, 2009) — if they can. The sadness and grief over the difficulty of inhabiting this place is passed on through each wave of colonisation/inhabitation. The deep grief held in the landscape is of genocide of the Gumbaingirr but also of a brutalised settler community and then deeply disappointed 'alternates' (Brooks & Munro, 2009). In each case the grief silenced in different ways.

Deep grief becomes the theme of my life at this time. In two Bellingen summers/UK winters I head back to Devon to farewell my grandparents who passed away in their nineties. Their longevity was testament to clean air, hard work, home grown food and who knows what else. Nevertheless, there is no doubt their passing represented an *'End of an Era'*.



End of an Era

*From fecundity of Bellingden Summer
I fly and drive to the cold dark depth of Devon winter.
To the death of family as I have always known it
The end of family farming that goes back to almost forever*

*Black silhouetted trees
White yellow sun
Ground frozen all day
I dream, crying, so deeply, clutching at the muddy ground
For years*

Amid the funerals, I visit Schumacher College, near Dartmoor, set perfectly into hedgerows of twisted resilient Oaks; rolling verdant lawns featuring a giant Chestnut tree. I met and talked with Dr Stephan Harding, a colleague of

James Lovelock, and discussed Gaia theory, books, place and the importance of intentionality. I also visited Totnes, an early home of the Transition Town movement (Hopkins, 2008) and then drove down to Cornwall to visit the Eden Project. The excitement of these visits to progressive conservation and sustainability projects could not, however, distract me from the embodied shock of loss of such important, intimate, inspirational people as my grandparents; and knowing that the farm, and farming, that had run through my family for multiple generations, had gone. An era ends. Place gone. Reeling.

That it was the depth of winter was appropriate. So was the obvious fact that the farmlands of Devon; its famous hedgerows, molded over thousands of years through the craft of farming (Hoskins, 1955) appeared to be rapidly becoming the geometric borders of industrial and chemical farming (Shoad, 1980; Hosking, 2009). The soils of my homeland becoming further subjected to industrial regime; the farmlands and communities themselves emptying of people: was this the death of Devon farming?



8.3 Beyond conservation to the waters of remembering

A range of authors write about grief in relation to place. Famously Paul

Shepard in *Nature and Madness* (1982) writes of 'loss that runs like an aquifer beneath all our conscious discourse, but which has never been articulated this clearly ...' (p. xviii). As outlined earlier, Shepard argues passionately and evocatively that this grief stems from loss of psychologically healthy relationship with nature. He claims that historical processes of migration, urbanisation and farming have distorted the human/nature relationship into a perverse immature 'madness' of simultaneous reverence and destruction (p. 119). Joanna Macy (1991) is also well known for her grief work in relation to humanity's destruction of, and destructive relationship to, nature. Her workshops with John Seed aim to express and release pent up feelings of despair (Seed, Macy, et al., 1998). The work of Hamilton (2010) likewise attempts to come to terms with the grief of this damaged relationship.

Grief, however, is complex; I suspect sources of grief are not always clear. Perhaps the discomfort felt by British Northern European cultures in regard to death (Reanney, 1995), failure (Lopez-Pedraza, 1990), organic bodily and place process (Shepard, 1982, p. 87) mean that our griefs are collectively suppressed until a large symbolic event can lead to a mass outpouring of grief as with the unforgettable funeral of Princess Diana in 1997, or the terrible scenes of destruction and despair following the events of 11 September 2001.

Grief, in our culture, tends to be denied and then unconsciously wells up. The grief that emerged, that broke through, that so darkened my life, during this recent phase of my life concerned the passing of my grandparents; their passing was also a passing of farm and farming practice. The enormity of this still does not have words, even years later. Grief and more grief merge, becoming darker still sometimes, with the grief of this place; the people, materiality (Fry, 1994) and atmosphere (Wylie, 2007) of Bellingen, particularly Cemetery Creek. This place so heavily shaped by barely narrated experiences of colonisation, exploitation and difficult inhabitation. I can, however, identify with some confidence, another deep grief — one that arises from what is happening to the conservation, sustainability and environmental education industry. I say industry, because that is what it is in danger of becoming — an

assembly of self-serving interests. As much as professionalisation gives income to people who, in previous years, were volunteers or underpaid casual employees, and reflects a promoted community profile for conservation/sustainability, it is in danger of becoming the latest colonising, puritanical discourse and class interest (Sachs, 1993). This is happening both here in Bellingen and, more broadly, in each and every similar place and situation, involving often distant and disembodied bureaucratic interests lauding over local populations. To rephrase Behar's (1996) line 'if conservation does not have a good look at itself it's not worth doing anymore'.

In framing this thesis I have argued, citing Evernden (1992), Dowie (1996), and Guha (2000) that conservation is not working, that is, not meeting the challenges of conservation/sustainability in terms of meeting its desired objectives. In the last six months, and since writing the opening thesis chapters, the issue of climate change has divided Australian federal political parties, cost the Australian Prime Minister his job and then suddenly fell from the popular political agenda. The Green vote was boosted at the recent federal election, but probably only until the next election. As argued in the Prologue, and largely based upon Fry (1994), there are a range of criticisms that can be leveled at sustainability and conservation; however, the industry seems to be largely resistant to critique.

The following encounter describes a confrontation with 'A Bitter Man' while carrying out a Landcare project with a Green Corps team. As usual, we are working on public land. The implication of working on public sites is that we are forced to think very much in terms of community consultation and community education (and of course public liability). As we work, we often encounter people offering support, asking questions and offering advice.

A Bitter Man

I am working with a Green Corps team of 10 youths and a team leader. We are weeding along a new section of creek in Bellingen. A neighbour comes out to talk with us. He's quite

insistent and questioning — and relentless. I put on my Project Manager persona and answer questions cordially and try to be generous to his (many and strong) points of view. However, his energy does not wane, and a nasty edge comes into the way he speaks. I suggest that the team comprising impressionable and vulnerable youths be taken away from this guy and his rant.

*But the rant continues. No amount of generosity and graciousness seems to be enough for him to pause, breathe, reflect or give me any credit. Red-faced, swearing and with aggressive stance this goes on for more than half an hour. Slowly my reasonable persona gives way to 'Ok mate you've had your say', and 'OK mate I've had enough'. He continues, 'what does Landcare know about anything?' 'You and your f***ing greenie mates are idiots, why are you here? What would you know anyway? You and your f***ing pathetic team will do bit of work then bugger off ...' I get in my car and drive away.*

For days, weeks and months I am deeply disturbed by this incident. It's not the criticism — in my role I'm used to that. It's something about the depths of bitterness that goes to my bones. Eventually, I ask myself what is it about that situation and place that could create so much bitterness?

This incident was not isolated. Incidents and confrontations occurred from time-to-time during my tenure as Project Manager for Bellingen Urban Landcare Incorporated. Perhaps most tellingly, one in which the chainsaw removal of Willow trees from Cemetery Creek prompted a local council employee to shout at us: 'What is wrong with those trees? I grew up with them!'

What needs to be faced is the reality that the conservation/sustainability industry is a part of a power dynamic; we are the latest wave of colonisers in this place. We remove trees planted by the settlers and replant the places that local workers and farmers so painfully cleared for pasture so recently — 100 years or so ago. Wielding 'technical' knowledge, held by the few and administered down to the many (Illich, 1986), conservation and sustainability is a new colonising discourse (Sachs, 1993; Suchet, 2002; Banerjee, 2003).

As with any dominant discourse it carries socio-economic power, moral superiority, puritanical inclinations as well as effectively being increasingly conservative (c.f. Lovelock, 2006; Linkola, 2009). Hugh Stretton (1976) warned back in the 1970s that environmentalism could be either democratic or authoritarian but, regrettably, the point at which such choices and distinction might be made are passing already. The conservation inspiration of Durrell (1976) and the 1970's idealism (i.e. Schumacher, 1973; Capra, 1975; Meadows et al., 1972) is tempered by a divorce of institutionalised conservation and sustainability and critical reflexivity, particularly in relation to discourse, power and political positioning. This is Foucauldian discourse as power (Hall, 2005, p. 72) and language games (Baudrillard, 1983; Lyotard, 1984; Schatzki, 1996) running hand-in-hand with class process. It is a source of grief that, with the exception of a few hardy 1970's idealist practitioners, radical conservation seems to have passed. This is a conservatising direction well away from the 'world problematique' (Peccei, 1977) that conceived of conservation/sustainability as running coterminous with the fight against global poverty along with being an obliteration of place practice (Cresswell, 2003). This *is* the underlying dynamic that underpins many of the problems of conservation, sustainability and environmentalism as identified by Fry (1994, pp.18-22) and in Chapter 2.

This is so devastating to me that I am reminded of the lifetime of work of Ivan Illich that moved, part way through his life, from sharp social critique to elegy (Hoinacki & Mitcham, 2002, p.18). Illich sensed that such social critique was powerless in the face of vast vested interests. There is so much grief stemming from the efforts of so many people who are denied voice by these social arrangements. However, the effectiveness of conservation, sustainability and environmental education work depends upon re-invigorating critical reflective process perhaps despite Illich's stance. When often dominant, puritanical, conservatising discourses of conservation and sustainability are put aside, are suspended, then grief, loss and sadness, held in the land, the country, can seep to the surface. It can burst through the reserve, control and repression as identified and challenged by Sebald. An embodied, emotional

approach to place can tap into suppressed memories, but in a way unlike Illich (1986) or Schama (1995) researching paintings and archival material, because this history barely exists as archive. This emotional explorative process is more in accord with the work of Sebald searching for deeper feelings, beneath culturally conditioned sentiment and cliché (1999). This place reveals itself if, and when, allowed.

The processes observed by Illich in *H2O and the Waters of Forgetfulness* (1986) can be reversed. Water can be allowed to regain it's living, mythic and metaphoric (p. 25) characteristics; be wrested from its lifeless 'eidolon' (p. 34), rationed state under the control of technicians and bureaucrats (pp. 70-76). The natural flow of symbolic water can be restored to the oral source of memory and stories (p. 32) reflecting and nourishing, dreaming and living (pp. 24-32). The very nature of water can be re-imagined (Hillman, 1975) to be the holder of life-force energy (Coates, 1995) and emotionality (Emoto, 2004).

Coming back to Cemetery Creek one more time; working with the materials of rainforest, of rampant vegetation, wood, water, as well as decay, weeds and mud runs counters to sentimental rainforest images depicted in those iconic 1980's wilderness posters (Macleay, 2005, p.185). It's generally damp, overgrown — places dominated by processes of decay and mud. Most of the mud and silt that sits in excess in Cemetery Creek is historical, having been washed down from its deforested catchment 100 years ago, or more. Now the escarpments, long since found to be largely unviable farmland, have re-afforested through regrowth. This mud, formed by the historical exploitation of peoples, forests, species and place, in this catchment, fills the once clear pools and riffles of Cemetery Creek. Held in this mud and water is deep, suppressed and silenced hurt and grief.

To unclog this creek of rubbish and semi-decayed logs is to allow the water to flow again and the mud to move. To replant and regenerate the riparian zone and to remove Willows, Coral Trees and Privet from the centre of the creek is to allow the creek to flush out during flood time. Over years the creek banks

reform, the creek narrows and deepens, the water becomes cooler, cleaner and re-oxygenated. And when the creek does flow again, it is a flow of grief, sadness, bitterness, anger, loneliness dammed up and unspoken in the hills, forests, valleys and waterways of this place. This is a historicised story of this place; a place that cries and will need to do so for a long, long time.

8.4 Dancing by the creek

The function of discourse, in this case conservation and sustainability, can be explored through a deconstructive, critical postmodern, post-structuralist perspective. Such a perspective, superb for uncovering patterns of power and knowledge is, however, commonly criticised for its inability to generate meaningful direction for politically informed action to take place (Calvino, 1981; Spretnak, 1997; Hil & Brennan, 2004). Italo Calvino in *If on a Winter's Night* (1981) argues that after all critical, deconstructive work there remains underneath the never-ending cycle of life and death (p. 259). The grieving and crying required of this people and place is no small thing and it may never consciously occur. In among the damage, disrespect and sometimes despair, however, resistance and re-emergence work their work, in glimpses, quietly; in almost unnoticed moments. Life then death then life ...

This next encounter is of an Aboriginal performance troupe *'Dancing by the Creek'*.

Dancing by the Creek

The energy of town rises through a brief spring and plunges into the heat and humidity of summer. The change of weather brings visitors to town here this weekend for the annual Global Carnival of world music.

As dusk falls a group of us meet for drinks and then we walk into town — and town is 'going off' for the festival. There are all sorts here — hippies - down from the north coast one imagines, world music enthusiasts, general revelers, as well as various diverse locals soaking

up the energy. We walk past intoxicated people, drummers, buskers, fire-stick twirlers, and then to a sight I never imagined I would ever see or hear.

An Aboriginal dance group, from the Northern Territory, sings and dances by the creek. Voices are sweet and rhythmic; dancing confident, powerful.

For a short while the awful silence of this place is gone. Loneliness of this place is gone.

I watch, listen and feel enthralled. My friends head on to the pub.

It seemed that this was history, performance and place meeting each other. For that moment the fit was perfect. What was the sense of rightness though? Was it sentimentality? Or did this encounter offer some kind of vision of rightful restoration, no matter how problematic that might be? I suspect that despite there being a mismatch between places of the songs and stories, what stood out was that this was performative *celebration*. This was so different to the normal silence and emptiness or brief perfunctory 'welcome to country' appearances at events. Also, so different to the joy-denying Puritanism and ontological desperation of living out mainstream sustainability, conservation and environmental education messages.

This was re-inhabitation, but also performance, art and play. Artistic interpretation is something that is, in effect, precluded from the narrow worldview of restoration, rejuvenation and conservation. It's hard to interpret place when the outcomes of work are so prescribed. In a sense one could say that it's hard for place to speak both through a disciplinary worldview and its practical applications. One can imagine that an Aboriginal approach to restoration would *not* be about creation of places that are literal or scientific but organic, symbolic and ecopsychological.

Between other conservation and teaching contracts I continued to design and create gardens, partly for income and partly because it remained very

satisfying. The following encounter is about the unconscious power of place that seemed to act upon me and a co-worker, Nigel, as we worked, unconsciously making a 'Snake Wall'.

Snake Wall

I am in the grounds of a beautiful property at the Promised Land. A series of gardeners and landscapers have worked here over several years. The result though is that the gardens seem disjointed. The house sits adjoining and overlooking the Never Never River and an award-winning riparian regeneration project. Negotiations for the design take several weeks.

I design a flat central meeting area between house and river. Soil from higher ground is to be loosened and used to raise the lower parts of the site. However, one of the people involved in the design negotiations suggests that this constitutes digging into sacred ground; that such 'impacts' are inappropriate. I persuade the owners that our digging will be minimal, respectful and appropriate.

We soon regret that plan. The soil proves to not be soil, but jagged rocks locked together by tree roots and thousands of years of floods. For two days, with crow bars, and mattocks we painfully loosen and level the packed rocky ground. Larger rocks are set aside into a pile to be used for construction of a stone wall.

This place is picture perfect. Each day, arriving for work, I pinch myself. This truly is the Promised Land. Over the next few weeks, my co-worker Nigel and I build a wall one to two metres high, and 20 metres long, from large, smooth river rocks. Each workday, negotiations take place about the height, direction and other characteristics of the emerging wall.

Building rock walls is a craft. As a child I watched my Gramp build dry stone walls for hedges and later watched many tradesmen. Each rock is different and has different faces. As the wall progresses, new and different gaps appear. Only the right stone will do at the right angle. So, much of the rock wall building process is spent looking for a certain rock and imagining or trying rocks in parts of the wall. It's a meditation.

We choose our rocks from the pile that was situated in the middle of the flattened area.

Once the right rock is positioned, it is removed, cement put in the gap, and the rock pressed back again. Excess cement is removed with a trowel. The wall is sponged down carefully and meticulously every hour or so, so that the rocks do not become hidden by dry cement.

A large 'two-person' stone is rolled into position to finish the wall.

'Twist it there'.

'No, back a bit ...'

'That's good. It sort of fits'.

At morning tea we sit in a place that gives us a view along the wall. Then we realise that the wall is a snake — right down to the head at the right angle, an eye and a mouth. We are proud of our work and amazed to be so slow to see what had been emerging. The back of the snake is a snake curve except for a kink part of the way along.

Some finishing touches to the wall require us to search through the pile of rocks. Nigel quietly exclaimed and walked across to me.

'Look what I found.'

In his hand is a swamp snake about half a metre long. Two thirds of the way down its back a kink, a break, where a rock must have rolled on it. It is alive and OK considering. Nigel shows it to a few people and lets it go — well away from the house.



The newly leveled area was contained by the constructed stone wall. Somehow, we unconsciously and collectively designed and created a sculptured stone and cement snake flowing through the throbbing rainforest, alongside the Never Never River. The power of this event and creation was not lost on us. Were there totems or stories of broken-backed snakes in local Aboriginal stories? Were place and myth reclaiming *us*? The act of digging into the ground, this sacred ground, made the ground no less sacred; probably the very opposite. In working with the sensitivity of conservation ethic but with the aesthetic courage of garden creation the snake wall emerged, symbolic, mysterious and sacred. Was this the sacred symbolism that I was looking for in Church spires?

The next encounter is of '*The Boys' Stone Sculptures*' made for their final year high school 'major work' art projects. The sculptures speak for themselves.

The Boys' Stone Sculptures

In the morning I drop Daniel off at the Never Never River. In his rucksack is water, food, matches, spare clothes and camera. He's going there to make sculptures as part of his high school art project.

*At the age of 17 he has already read many of the Social Ecology and Buddhist texts on the bookcase at home, for instance, *The Snow Leopard* (Matthiessen 1978). At school he takes a keen interest in the works of Andy Goldsworthy (2007). He and his friends are sometimes as hippy as we were 'back in the day'.*

I pick him up late in the afternoon — winter chill dropping down from the rainforested escarpment falling through and along the river.



Four years later and younger son Thomas is making similar stone sculptures for his high school art project. The difference is that Thomas drives himself there, and his strengths are strength, embodiment and vision ... and he always takes things to their limit ...



These encounters of dancing by the creek, an emergent snake wall, and stone sculptures rooted in the river reaching up are aesthetic and performative interpretations. These encounters somehow look forward in time rather than attempting, through images or representations, to summon or reconstitute something vaguely historical. Perhaps the clearest example of this historical confusion can be found in 'bush tucker' (Cribb & Cribb, 1975; Cherikoff, 1989; Low, 1989) by which historical foods are promoted while introduced naturalised edible species are controlled as weeds. This is surely a naïve romance, or colonial guilt; more about unresolved problems of history than localising food. Local bush regenerator and writer Mcleay (2005) argues that restored rainforest ecology is in itself an aesthetic — an artifact. These encounters show that place reciprocity changes quality when this practice, craft and expression become something that looks forward and is explicitly, deliberately, consciously and aesthetically expressive; celebratory even!

8.5 Idealism, hope and craft

As author, researcher and nominal subject of this research I now search and ponder what the last encounter(s) might mean for this thesis. What shall I describe, write, explore and reflect upon? Where shall I 'finish' this research process, that has taken so many years; this burden I have carried along for so long; this privilege I have been given and have taken; this duty to better know one's own practice? A life time lived again and again until it is transformed into something else — what that is, is not entirely clear of course. It's something richer for the air that it's been given, something less unknown yet more mysterious; something that has made the heart bigger and stronger.

Really, there can be no 'final' point to be made in this process of action, mindfulness, writing, reflection and critique and rewriting, and critique and rewriting! And, of course, there is no possible ultimate truth in such process of interpretations of interpretations (Geertz, 1973). There is, however, an opportunity and requirement to draw this process to an important point of

attention and intention before it is paused; allowed to slide away — as a thesis project anyway.

I write several potential encounters and start reflecting upon them. The first is 'Singapore again!' in which a last minute decision takes me back to Singapore to my old school, United World College, for a 30 year reunion. There we swap life stories and I re-connect with other alumni some of whom I still hold dear, and who practice, our seminal 1970's ideas. These inspirations that have so shaped my life. Then I write an encounter about 'Place Craft Encounter' (yes, a poor heading that would have been edited) about the sheer joy of working with youths and other volunteers at a working bee one fine spring morning at Cemetery Creek. As I am contemplating this, I head to a new coffee shop in Bellingen to read Swain (1993) and 'Flannery (2010)'. This is the final encounter that I settle for ...

Flannery (2010)

Today I go for a coffee in town. Town is full - warm Bello the town of hope. I pass a stunning old Yesterday Today Tomorrow shrub flowering.

My aim is to make some sense of Swain's A Place for Strangers: Towards a History of Australian Aboriginal Being (1993). It's a complex book attempting to detail Aboriginal ontology. However, the young coffee barista who also sometimes works as a bush regenerator wants to chat. He's tells me how pissed off he is, how hurt, after some recent vandalism of a project he has been working on. I tell him the only response is to not let them win.

Before leaving the house though I had printed off a newspaper article on Tim Flannery's Here on Earth: An argument for Hope, called To the Ends of the Earth (2010a) also written by Flannery (2010b). Flannery weaves together Lovelock (2006), Diamond (2005) and McCarthy (2006). He argues that in the face of the evidence of climate change brought on by overpopulation and over-consumption that there are few options but one of those is about hope. Just past the 40th anniversary of man's landing on the moon Flannery argues

that if 'we' 'the growing human family' combine super-intelligence, global government and 'love' there is hope yet. He finishes the article —

'But I am certain of one thing — if we do not strive to love one another, and to love our planet as much as we love ourselves, then no further human progress is possible here on Earth'

Racing after a strong coffee I write down in the margins -

'Who are 'we'? What is the human family? Do humans really love themselves? This is the same uncritical story over and over. Sure, there's reason to have hope but this article, among all such similar articles, makes me despair'.

This line of argument (if that is what it is) is the obliteration of practice (Cresswell, 2003)! That this archetypal Australian conservation narrative persists so un-critiqued year after year, justifies the effort of this research.

This research has illuminated some of the complexity of working in sustainability and conservation and consequently there is a degree of personal and professional confusion that remains despite this research process. However, taking action requires both a plan and the energy to carry it out. The plan requires that deliberations, negotiations and doubts be transformed into solutions; the energy comes from the hope that any given plan can be achieved. A successful place practice can only work if based upon praxis of embodied craft and critical reflection.

A final word about Australia: I am, no doubt, a sometimes reticent and far from settled citizen of this country — this place. However, I do recognise that this is indeed a special place from which to learn. Critical reflection upon practice developed in Australia, and particularly places such as Bellingen, constitute particularly strong place-pedagogy (Gruenewald, 2003; Gruenewald & Smith, 2008; Somerville, 2006, 2007; Cameron, 2008) because it is so challenging to work here. This place, these places, is and are so big, wild and

old, but also strange and raw. Practices originating in Australia and being exported, for instance Permaculture (Lawton, 2009) and Landcare (Garrity, 2000), are a response to the challenges posed by this place. These challenges are as profound as anywhere and require the establishment of a deep place practice. According to Swain (1993) Australian Aboriginal cultures, despite interaction with many other cultures and colonisation, are some of the most pre-eminent place-based cultures in the world (pp. 276-293).

8.6 Place-practice changes

Following Chapter 7, which explores ecopsychological qualities of practice and place, Chapter 8 takes a critical perspective cutting through to 'shadow place' (Plumwood, 2008). For me this represents a return to the explicit political world view that first led me to gardening then sustainability and conservation. Experiences of working in social sciences, poverty studies (see for, instance Vinson, 2003), with local community and the atmosphere (Wylie, 2007) of Cemetery Creek sites reveals the profound importance of a critically reflected social science perspective for understanding this place-practice work. It is argued that a wide range of authors, including Macey (1991), Evernden (1992), Schama (1995), Roszak (1995), Suzuki (various), Flannery (1995, 2010), Hamilton (2004, 2010) Hamilton and Denniss (2005) fail to critically deal with the intra-human. This is *the* underlying dynamic in relation to matters of conservation, sustainability and place.

The awful silence of place as encountered in Chapter 7 can be better understood once the dominant place story of conservation is set aside. Through critically reflected embodied practice and the deployment of Sebaldian (1999) search beneath culturally conditioned sentiment and clichéd place story there can be emotional confrontation with this silence. It is of genocide (Blomfield, 1981; Moses, 2004). Any place practice takes place in the context of this aftermath. Grief is also of 'settlers' (Bartram, 1981; Brady, 2004), and later again 'alternates' (Brooks & Munro, 2009) struggling to successfully inhabit this place. These are places and people that have been subjected to ruthless exploitation, rendering them 'unplaces' (Brennan, 2008)

and 'unpeople' (Pilger, 1998) and leaving 'country falling down' (Rose, 1996). This exploitative dynamic, is of course, not just Bellingen and surrounds but worldwide. In my other home of Devon, farms can be seen to be increasingly mechanised and depopulated (Hosking, 2009) by the economics of food (Pollan, 2008).

This is the context of my place practice. However, conservation and sustainability discourses, even place studies, are almost always naïve about social power dynamics. The conservation/sustainability industry is very much in danger of becoming part of this exploitative power dynamic. No longer are the 1970's conservation and sustainability messages of Meadows et al. (1972), Schumacher (1973), Capra (1975) among others, understood as stating that conservation and poverty are co-terminus with the 'world problematique' (Peccei, 1977). Now rare technical 'environmental' knowledge held by the few is administered down to the many (Illich, 1986) becoming another, new, colonising discourse (Sachs, 1993); the latest colonising dynamic of this place.

The work being carried out in places such as Cemetery Creek can, however, be reframed. Putting aside this dominant discourse of conservation/sustainability that can be seen to be Puritanical, moralising, fundamentalistic, evangelical — anything you might expect of a corrupted Christian discourse (Shepard, 1982; Cronon, 1996; Illich & Cayley, 2004), the work is of, but goes beyond water quality and biodiversity, to the mud of the history of the catchment. This is the mud of exploitation of peoples, and places held suspended like the silenced stories and erased place histories of the Gumbaynggirr, settlers and alternates. The restoration of Cemetery Creek is also the moving of the mud of history. The creek and catchment become re-inhabited, restored and re-storied — grief, sadness and bitterness can slowly flow.

A further reframing of place-practice work comes to light when embodied, critical craft merges with sculpture and performance. Freed from constrictive conceptions of an imagined pristine past, artistic expression through sculpture

and dance can look forward and even be celebratory. In my practice, an unintended mythic snake wall clearly emerges from a landscape normally reticent about revealing itself (Tredinnick, 2003). On my travels I witness a renaissance of craft from Bellingen to Devon through Landcare, Permaculture, Transition Town movement, and art installations in places such as the Eden Project. These emphasise craft and re-skilling and are a re-instatement, as opposed to obliteration (Cresswell, 2003), of practice.

Australia is arguably one the most colonised and least colonisable places on Earth. Place practices, imported to Australia from foreign Britain, tend to fail to deal with the toughness, wildness, weirdness and rawness of this place. On the other hand, place practices that have evolved here, for instance Landcare, Permaculture and Bush Regeneration are now being, in a sense, exported from Australia. Ultimately, this is the place of one of the most pre-eminent cultures (Swain, 1993). This is a fantastic place to learn about place-practice; to learn Country (Rose, 1996; Cameron, 2008).



Chapter Nine — Conclusions

The central aim of this research is to explore the disjuncture between discourse and the practice of putting 1970's inspired ethical conservation, sustainability and environmental education ideas and ideals into action. It is posited that the discourses around this vitally important but complex field tend to repel critique. As a consequence, place practices are 'obliterated' (Creswell, 2003) under-articulated (Raelin, 2007) and largely ignored as sites of learning. Experiences of practitioners in the field and of practice in general, seem to be assumed, subsumed and effectively silenced. This thesis *does* privilege practice as a site of learning. Identified experiences and critically reflected upon encounters are viewed as touchstones against which ideas, ideals, theories and discourses are considered.

This thesis has illuminated and critically reflected upon a series of encounters in order to address three key questions posed in Chapter 1. These are, firstly, what is my repertoire of place practice? Secondly, how has this place-practice repertoire developed, changed and possibly deepened through time? Lastly, following on from these questions, what are the broader implications arising from this research for conservation and sustainability discourse and practice? The ultimate aim of this research process was to uncover new understandings of personal and professional place practice in order to reshape practices and theoretical framings of sustainability and related concerns. In so doing, the thesis complements a range of authors, including Evernden (1992), Dowie (1996), Guha (2000), and by implication, Lovelock (2009), McKibben (2010), Hamilton (2010) and Flannery (2010a), who argue that current approaches to sustainability are not working. A practice approach to sustainability looks to illuminate (Willis, 1998), acknowledge and learn from existing practice. The term 'practice' is seen to comprise practical work (Pollan, 1996), professional experience (Schon, 1983; Willis, McKenzie, et al., 2009) as well as a social theory understanding of practice of everyday on-the-ground actions and routines (de Certeau, 1984; Creswell, 2003) of lived life.

Academics, in undertaking research in the disciplinary realms of social science, social ecology and cultural geography often work with 'problematising' issues, situations and social arrangements. This is a process of teasing out values and assumptions, unraveling threads of discourse and behavior, and of reframing meanings. This process is undertaken in order to understand and expose the social constructedness of the world. Inherent in this process and position is a degree of time and distance. For the practitioner, the imminent focus *must be upon* finding solutions in order for actions to be taken. The roles of academic and practitioner often overlap but are quite different. The practitioner has little by way of the comfort of time or distance of theory, nor its apparently panoptic clarity. In this sense practice is described by a range of authors; de Certeau (1984) in terms of tactics and strategy, Schatzki (1996) as Wittgensteinian language games, Reckwitz (2002) as bodily and mental routines, and by Schon (1983) as the repertoires of practice comprising theories-in-use (Argyris & Schon, 1974).

It almost goes without saying that when practice is silenced, hidden or undervalued there is disjuncture. However, when practice is illuminated and critically reflected upon, the ensuing challenge is to fold practice back into discourse, theory, and story to create an ideal praxis. As this research is undertaken in order to improve practice the emphasis of this chapter moves from deconstruction and problematisation to finding solutions; no matter how tentative such solutions might be.

9.1 Reflections on the research process: Waiting, dismantling, not knowing

It is important to reflect upon the lived experience of engaging in this research process. Chamberlain (2000) suggests that there is a danger of 'methodolatry' whereby conforming to the structure (and implicit expectations?) of any given methodology dominates actual research findings. As the thrust of this thesis is ethical, disruptive and practice-focussed and this now extends to describing the difficulties and messiness around what turned out to be an emergent

research and learning process. There is always a risk that the real messiness of research can be sanitised away.

Chapter 1 asked the question, 'how did my repertoire of practice change?' That initial methodological question was useful in opening this research process but now appears in danger of being to some degree naïve. Thinking in terms of a repertoire of practice remains a useful and valid research question in this field of critical inquiry but appears to underestimate that this kind of research is far more personal, unsettling and transformative than thinking in terms of a repertoire of practice seems to imply.

This research involved a process of opening up, disruption, dismantling and unsettling of stories, memories and practices and ultimately of *myself*. The search for greater knowledge, of congruence of story and experience, ironically highlighted and involved long periods of uncertainty. Throughout most of the research process there has been a deliberate attempt to keep questions alive. This meant that if, and when, stories appeared to have become in some way problematic or redundant there was no rush to reinstate a new story. This fermenting process was allowed to continue for 10 years as I recorded, worked, read, reflected and lived out the encounters of stories, memories, texts and Sebald-inspired images. Boundaries blurred between the known and the unknown, between text and image, between present and past and between people and places. The spirit of Sebald's work moved the exploration process beneath 'cliché' (Sebald, 1999, p. 25) and 'socially aligned repression' (p. 83). Memories, brought to consciousness, were reframed in line with the memory work of Haug, Crawford, et al. (1987). These processes were then subjected to critical interrogation over and over, and then trialed in practical projects, teaching and personal reflections.

Once I gained confidence in this approach to research and the kind of thesis that it was likely to create, I often found it engaging, compelling, meditative, rich and useful in the field but also sometimes controversial. From time-to-time I found myself at odds with friends, academic colleagues or fellow

practitioners when discussing the research. This re-inforced doubt and uncertainty already inherent in this research approach. This was creative research being lived, which often seemed to involve rubbing conventional ideas and practice the wrong way. A tension began to emerge between what I was trying to convey and what I was expected to write, personally, professionally and academically. I concluded that in trying to write accounts of one's own learning encounters you are dealing with the powerful tendency of stories of encounters to adopt or conform to various forms, or norms, be they social, archetypal or political. The process of description and critical reflection upon place-practice encounters felt like an actual physical process of dragging practice to theory and theory to practice in an attempt to bridge disjuncture.

Perhaps the best explanation of the actual practice of this deliberately unraveling research (i.e. of Cartesianism, modernity and dominant political, psychological and archetypal narratives as embodied in self) approach comes from Somerville's (2007) *Postmodern Emergence*:

An ontology of postmodern emergent methodology then focuses on the undoing of self; the space of unknowing; the absences, silences and disjunctures of the liminal space with no narrative; the relational of any coming into being; and the messiness, unfolding, open-ended and irrational nature of becoming-other through research engagement.
(p. 235)

Throughout this research process the question shifted back and forth between the original 'how has the repertoire of practice changed?' to, 'what transformations took place?' to a more postmodern position of 'what have I become?' and, lastly to 'what am I becoming?' (Somerville, 2007). This was anything but a smooth and comfortable process. Social researcher and academic Brene Brown (2010) talks of the personal psychological breakdown she experienced while carrying out a 10-year research project into matters close to her heart. I can relate to her tales of periodic visits to her therapist due mainly to her personal immersion into her sometimes personally

unsettling research project. This research of self in relation to the world constituted 'waiting in a chaotic place of unknowing' (Somerville, 2007), but this is also at times a *falling apart* in a chaotic place of unknowing.

I continue to be composed of ideas, fragments, stories, impulses, images, hurts, tensions and desires. However, the stories I now use to mediate and make the world and that constitute me have changed and new stories have emerged. This is not to say that I have somehow emerged from Schon's (1987) swamp of practice into a positivist clearing with attendant vistas of control and understanding. However, the great store of experiences held inside (Malouf, 2008), through the processes of remembering, writing, re-writing, editing and critically reflecting, have slowly but profoundly changed in nature. In the words of O'Sullivan (2000):

Transformative learning involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feeling and actions. It is a shift in consciousness that dramatically alters our ways of being in the world.
(p. 29)

9.2 Emergent place-practice repertoire

The following section is a distillation of themes that have emerged through the critically reflective process of chapters 3-8 and as framed by the prologue and chapters 1 and 2. This constitutes both a description of practice but also an elucidation of emergent strands and themes that at times are in tension and at other times cohere. Despite my misgivings about over-clarity in this process, clear themes can be seen to have emerged across personal, professional and academic realms of my place practice.

Emergent themes from research thesis Chapters 3-8

Chapter 3 - Sowing Seeds of a Divine Discontent

- Heightened sensitivity to, and interest in, matters of landscape, place and placelessness. Often came through solitude, (Cobb, 1992) loneliness or sense of exile. Place is encountered as agentic — powerful, alive and wild.
- Part of a generational critique of the meta-narratives of economic and scientific progress. Drawn to a specific set of ideas and ideals, including Schumacher (1973), Illich (1971), Capra (1975) and Meadows et al (1972), that combine conservation and sustainability, non-western value frameworks, new approaches to science and concern about global poverty.
- An embodied urge to literally do something other than be suspended in a world of reading, worrying, thinking, and ethical deliberation. The awkward, newly arrived migrant digs, in awkward suburbia, into Australian ancient, very foreign, ground.

Chapter 4 - Learning Gardening Craft

- Returning to the countryside and gardens in the UK confirms the importance of craft (Pollan, 1997; Sennett, 2008; Crawford, 2009) of working with place through gardening for food, ornament or conservation. Despite physicality and requisite commitment to routines, there remain special feelings that come through mastery of craft and materials, skills, processes; from designing and encouraging beauty, sensuality and abundance.
- A decade of professional landscape gardening leads me to understand two literacies of place vital to this kind of work. Firstly, this is of discourse, story and symbol, and secondly is embodied (Somerville, 2007), tacit (Polanyi, 1967) and intuitive (Schon, 1987). This literacy, as advocated by Orr (1992) comes from accumulated experiences of long-term practical work, an appreciation of physicality (Ondaatje, 1988), and materiality (Fry, 1994) and creation and maintenance of fields of care (Evernden, 1985), is generally under-articulated.

Chapter 5 - Alternative Town Promise

- 1970's idealism remains undiminished, personally and generationally prompting alternative sustainability towns and communities attempting to practice ethical/sustainability ideals. This experience is both inspiring and unsettling; for some a descent into dilettantism and/or social marginalisation (Shields, 1991) and for others a patient and courageous commitment to deepening practice.
- Permaculture, as one such alternative sustainability practice, offers insights into the strength of organic processes (Capra, 1988) and radical redesignability (Holmgren, 2002, p. xxv) of places and practices. However, Permaculture can be critiqued for a lack of critical reflection (Holmgren, 2002) and naivety in terms of physicality, materiality skills and commitment to place.
- In sustainability practices there is, broadly, a sense that something deep and ultimately undeliverable is being promised. But that being promised, *redemption-in-another-place (or time)*, is mythic, symbolic and perhaps ecopsychological (Hillman, 1975, 1989). To challenge this story, myth and discourse is to run counter to the very foundation story of western culture (Noble, 2005). To critique stories, myths and discourses of conservation and sustainability is to be at odds with deeply cherished archetypal, historical and cultural metaphysical constructs. In the shadow of promise often lies disappointment and social marginalisation.

Chapter 6 - Landcare at Cemetery Creek

- Landcare at Cemetery Creek, as a long-term and large-scale community-based creek rehabilitation project offers a series of place-practice insights. However these are not evident because of top-down bureaucratic technocratic power and information flows (Sachs, 1993) which constitute an 'obliteration of practice' (Creswell, 2003) whereby practices and practitioners of weeding, maintenance work and caring for places, in this instance, are not seen (Ehrenreich, 2003) and consequently are undervalued as sites of learning (Raelin, 2007).

- Intimacy with practice, materiality as well as the sheer physicality and craft of weeding/maintenance, create an embodied literacy (Orr, 1992) of this place. A grittier sense of place emerges in which rainforests regrow but so do weeds and in the long-run and globally, ecosynthesis (Tane, 1995; Holmgren, 2002) and the Strong Gaia Hypothesis (Lovelock, 1979, 1991; Margulis, 1998; Kirchner, 2002) become the best way to understand the organic realm of life. What is experienced represents a radical challenge to Cartesian order.
- In this context this work involves the creation of fields of care (Evernden, 1985). These in turn offer care to practitioners. Landcare and similar projects are successful through current, maintained and deepening place relationship mediated by conservation craft. A craft approach requires both mastery of, and humility towards, materials, energy, place and self.
- Such a community-based project can only progress once active narratives are understood. In the first instance this is of adversarial social tensions between 'alternates' and rural-worker communities. Beneath assumptive romantic/traumatic stories and discourses of conservation and sustainability and through critical engagement with texts, the worst story ever told — that all life on Earth will die soon (i.e. Hamilton, 2010; Flannery, 2010) — is revealed as a cultural story (Cronon, 1996), along with its corollary the Promised Land (Noble, 2005) of returning ecologies to the imagined perfect past/future (Adams, 1996). Landcare works not through creating something perfect in the future, or the imagined pristine past but through deepened relationship in the present.
- This re-storying of conservation and sustainability, resulting from critically reflected embodied practice and immersion in alternative/sustainability culture and community, offers me profound existential reassurance as well as a personal sense of being liberated from what increasingly feels like an oppressive discourse.

Chapter 7 - Ecopsychology and the Divine

- An ecopsychological (Roszak, 1995) approach to understanding place practice emphasises, acknowledges and imagines emotionality, symbolism and myths that mediate relationship to place. It offers, but also requires a psychic loosening but (Tacey, 1995; Hillman, 1995) is not something that can be just taught. It requires an almost weird de-structuring of self/place relationship that can come, for instance, through drug use, depression, embodiment or other sources of dissonance. This is ecopsychological deepening into place that constitutes a re-animation of everything 'cut' (Hillman, 1995) from Cartesian order.
- In sharp relief to mainstream conservation, sustainability and environmental education messages/massages (McLuhan, 1964) are seen to effectively pathologise (Myerson, 2001) place relationships through discourse that combines fear, guilt, crisis as well as spectres of trauma/promise (i.e. Hamilton, 2010; Flannery, 2010). Popular environmentalist and bureaucratic conservation discourse of 'impact' and 'intervention' are a re-enforcement of Cartesian hyperseparation (Plumwood, 1993) and create fear and disablement (Fry, 1994). Cartesian conservationist place-mediating stories of authors such as Hamilton (2010), Lovelock (2009) and McKibben (2010) offer 'Edenic' (Cronon, 1998) grand narratives (Gare, 2001) that are themselves *unsustainable* to live by and distance place and block practice.
- Entering the flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991) of embodied action creates a space in which to come to new deeper place-practice understandings away from contested narratives and rigid conservation discourse. Illich (1986), Schama (1995) and Chetan & Brueton (1994) reveal the Pagan symbolism of the resilience of life in the face of death in trees, forests water and so on. That these symbols of life are literally rooted in present living landscapes is important; as is the understanding of place from a Gaian perspective of life being strong and able to provide.
- For me the work at Cemetery Creek is re-animated with this meaning of Pagan symbolism. In this context work being carried out is not of

invisible workers 'impacting' or 'intervening' but of everyday place-practice craft — making and keeping fields of care within highly agentic and conscious places. In this vision there are feelings and glimpses of this work offering ecopsychological co-terminous healing of place and people (Roszak, 1992, 1995).

Chapter 8 - Critical perspectives: Loss and Re-emergence

- Despite increasing intimacy with materiality (Fry, 1994) and atmosphere (Wylie, 2007) of this place, I am aware of a deep discomfort that has two aspects. Firstly, I yearn for spiritual symbols out there in the landscape made of stone and able to resist the decay of everything; that would denote calm, meaningful, re-assuring inhabitation of this place. However, this pales into insignificance against the deep, awful silence of this place. Experiences of working in social sciences, poverty studies (Vinson, 2003), with local community and the atmosphere (Wylie, 2007) of Cemetery Creek sites reveals the profound importance of a critically reflected social science perspective to understanding this 'shadow place' (Plumwood, 2008). Conservation and sustainability literature often speak in terms of homogenised humanity and fails to address underlying intra-human driving dynamic of social power in relation to matters of conservation, sustainability and place. The awful silence of place can be better understood once dominant place story of conservation is set aside.
- Through critically reflected embodied practice and the deployment of Sebaldian (1999) search beneath culturally conditioned sentiment and clichéd place story there can be emotional confrontation with this silence. It is of genocide (Blomfield, 1981; Moses, 2004). Any place practice takes place in the context of this battle aftermath. Grief though is also of settlers (Bartram, 1981; Brady, 2004), and later again 'alternates' (Brooks & Munro, 2009) struggling to successfully inhabit this place. These are places and people that have been subjected to ruthless exploitation, rendering them 'unplaces' (Brennan, 2008) and 'unpeople' (Pilger, 1998) and leaving 'country

- falling down' (Rose, 1996). This exploitative dynamic, is of course, not just Bellingen and surrounds but many/most places worldwide. All this is a place and area known as an idyllic retreat!
- The conservation/sustainability industry is very much in danger of becoming part of this exploitative power dynamic. The 1970's conservation and sustainability messages of Meadows et al (1972), Schumacher (1973), Capra (1975) among others, saw conservation and poverty as co-terminus as the 'world problematique' (Peccei, 1977). Now rare technical 'environmental' knowledge held by the few is administered down to the many (Illich, 1986) becoming another, new, colonising discourse (Sachs, 1993); the latest colonising dynamic of this place. This dominant discourse of conservation/sustainability can, at times, be seen to be Puritanical, moralising, fundamentalistic, evangelical — anything you could expect of a corrupted Christian discourse (Shepard, 1982; Cronon, 1996; Illich & Cayley, 2004),
 - The work being carried out in places such as Cemetery Creek can be reframed. The work is of, but goes beyond, water quality and biodiversity, to the mud of the history of this catchment. This is the mud of exploitation of peoples, species, life systems and places held suspended like the silenced stories and erased place histories of the Gumbaingirr, settlers and alternates. As the creek and catchment become re-inhabited, restored and re-storied — grief, sadness and disappointment can slowly flow. These stories need to come to the surface for any healing to begin.
 - A further reframing of place-practice work comes to light when embodied critical craft merges with sculpture and performance. Freed from constrictive misconceptions of imagined pristine past/future, artistic expression through sculpture and dance can look forward and be celebratory even. In my practice an unintended mythic snake wall clearly emerges from a landscape normally reticent about revealing itself. On my travels I witness a renaissance of place- practice craft from Bellingen to Devon through Landcare, Permaculture, Transition

- Town movement, and art installations in places such as the Eden Project. These emphasise craft and re-skilling and are a re-instatement, as opposed to obliteration (Cresswell, 2003), of practice.
- Australia, perhaps the most colonised and least colonisable place on Earth, tough, wild, weirdness and raw has evolved practices, for instance Landcare, Permaculture and Bush Regeneration that are now being exported. This, the place of one of the world's most pre-eminent place cultures (Swain, 1993) is a fantastic place to learn place practice; to learn *country* (Rose, 1996; Cameron, 2008).



9.3 Research questions, implications and recommendations

In Chapter 1 three key questions were posed — what is my repertoire of place practice? How has this place-practice repertoire developed, changed and

possibly deepened through time? And, lastly, what are the broader implications and recommendations that emerge from this research for conservation and sustainability discourse and practice?

Throughout the development of this repertoire of practice a clear set of strands are consistently apparent in chapters 3-8. These strands weave through the autoethnographic/autobiographical place-practice chapters. At times particular strands are more or less prominent than others but they are always present both driving, and drawing in, place-practice encounters. In no particular order these strands are as follows:

- Embodiment/physicality/emotionality
- Place/placelessness/landscape/living systems
- Practice/craft/creation/expression
- Ethics/sustainability/social justice
- Search for meaning/story/divine discontentment

These strands, concerns or desires, are apparent from my early life through to the present. The weaving, desiring, learning, practice and critical reflection of and on these concerns constitute a deepening of practice. Chapter 3 describes and critically reflects upon the formation of my identity, very much around the themes of place/placelessness, practice, ethics and embodiment. Chapter 4 reflects upon becoming a working adult through learning basic place literacies. Chapter 5 is a re-assertion and exploration of my values through immersion in alternative/sustainability practice and community. Chapter 6 sees a deepening and application of personal and professional practice through a long-term Landcare project at Cemetery Creek. Chapters 7 and 8 are ecopsychological and socially critical reflections upon personal and professional life experiences as one might expect from a person reflecting upon lived experience. This last stage is of a person at a crossroads but also in a position to turn outwards from personal critical reflection, towards communities of practice (Wegner, 1998) in order to offer ideas and leadership based upon long-term experience.

Through the use of this theoretical framework many significant place- practice encounters have been dragged from the dark, from memory, into the light and to attention. These memories of experiences now feel held in the present. Freshly re-invigorated, breathing again, some of these memories have become genuinely inspirational once more. Ideas and ideals of sustainability have been critiqued but they have also been given new energy. Memories, places and practices have been loosened up creating a sense of richness and the possibility of new practices and solutions. I sense that I am operating with more heart and a greater sense of mystery than before this research process started. Conversely, I have far greater confidence in personal, professional and academic stances that I find myself taking.

While writing these concluding sections of this research and carrying out teaching at Southern Cross University, I am project managing Landcare projects (again), and designing and over-seeing Permaculture ('Permablitz' (Edwards & Mercer, 2010) projects (again). I do so happily. I have also rediscovered, and now practice regularly, meditation, yoga and beach running. I also seem to be socialising, again, with hopeful, perhaps naïve, sometimes despairing hippies. *This 10-year research process has been more of a confirmation of identity, beliefs, purpose and practice than a finding of something new.* As such I would argue that this constitutes a deepening of practice. Such a conception would be in line with Hillman's (1996) acorn theory of self-growth in which life's challenge is seen as becoming more oneself.

The focus now turns to arguably the most significant research question: so what? What are the place-practice implications and recommendations that emerge from this research thesis? What emerges from the observation of these encounters, stories and practices?

a) Understanding the inherent beauty and challenge of ethical stance

This thesis has placed a great deal of emphasis upon critiquing discourses of

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sustainability and associated concerns. This is a focus upon what might be thought of as the shadow of these stories, discourses, practices and places. This is to detract from an acknowledgement that sustainability, conservation and associated concerns are primarily characterised and driven by an underlying fundamental ethical stance; that of respect for life (Preston, 2007).

This idealistic stance was, and continues to be, a generational response, of, and to, seminal and inspirational 1970's authors and presenters including Carson (1962), Suzuki (1979), Meadows et al (1972), Schumacher (1973), and Capra (1975), among many others. Since then there have been waves of sustainability and conservation concern (Dowie, 1996; Guha, 2000) associated with left-leaning politics, Feminism, postmodernity, a global green ethic (Havel, 1995), and often by non-western values. This idealistic stance has found expression in alternative towns such as Bellingen in Australia, Totnes in the UK or Ann Arbor in the US. These communities attract and offer alternative sustainability practices that include Permaculture, Biodynamics, seed savers, local food networks, Yoga, Buddhism, Feng Shui, Transition Town, Landcare, Steiner education, solar fairs, Peak Oil seminars, re-skilling workshops and initiatives among other practices. Further, this ethical stance is researched and taught in institutions and courses to be found at, for instance, Social Ecology at the University of Western Sydney and Schumacher College in Devon, UK. These places, communities and educational institutions act as both symbols and reservoirs of ethical stance, idealism and inspiration.

Clearly the greatest expression of an ethical ideal is to put that stance into practice. Gandhi is said to have said 'become the change you want to see' (B'Hahn, 2001) but as has been firmly established in this thesis, practice is complex, ambiguous and messy. Any study of ethics quickly reveals that there are very few ethical stances that are in fact not complex ethical dilemmas (Preston, 1997; Thiroux, & Krasemann, 2007). Nothing is as simple as deontological (non-consequentialist) grand slogans and gestures (Fry, 1994), as so used in sustainability, conservation, generally imply. This complexity does not necessarily become evident in the world of campaigning, lobbying

and environmental education, a realm in which ideals can be kept pure and unsullied by complexity, politics, opportunity, cost, and dilemmas inherent in ethical matters. Any such deontological ethical stance runs the danger of effectively degenerating into fundamentalism (it is the only truth) (Davison, 2008), evangelism (how do we get 'them' to see that this is the truth) and Puritanism (this truth is so important that my/others' feelings should be suppressed). As argued by Shepard (1992), Schama (1995) and Cronon (1996), sustainability and conservation discourse is never far removed from its Christian roots. Ethical impulse and stance are fundamental to the sustainability sector but would benefit from a more thorough grounding in the study of ethics.

A related deep concern is that the well-being of sustainability activists, educators and practitioners often suffers in the light of simplistic ethical sustainability slogans. As argued previously, these stories themselves are not sustaining; ideas and ideals are just that, and practice is practice. There is only so much that can be done in any given complex situation. For sustainability to work it must be, and be seen to be, enjoyable or at least satisfying in some way. *If any and every action always pales into insignificance in the face of apocalyptic scenarios, then no action can ever be sufficient and no amount of effort enough.* Sustainability activists, educators and practitioners taking this on board are far less likely to suffer 'burnout', disillusionment and depression; all common occupational hazards in this sector.

Above all, this underlying ethical impulse should be respected, guarded and cultivated; this is the well-spring of sustainability. There is something so satisfying about working with people on, say, a Landcare or Permaculture project, who are just quietly doing work purely for its own sake.

b) The need for a critical literacy in stories of sustainability and associated concerns

It is commonly argued that to achieve sustainability (although what that means is often not spelled out in any particular detail), a certain level of 'ecological literacy' (Thomashow, 1995) should be developed. Such literacy is very often conceived in terms of a positivist epistemology of science focusing upon self-evident nature, ecology, or environment 'out there' in a domain other than, and separate to, the human realm. Sustainability, conservationism, environmentalism have existed, broadly, as a set of ideas, ideals, discourse, projects, education programs and campaigns for over 40 years. There is now a need to develop a critical literacy of the stories of sustainability and associated concerns themselves. This literacy, based around critically reflected practice, is required to enable more effective sustainability education and practice.

At the heart of this research, and research methodology, lies a major concern regarding the apparent disjuncture between discourse, language, ideas and theories on one hand and lived experience of practical action and place relationship on the other. This research has confirmed my belief that stories of sustainability and associated concerns tend to strongly repel critique and that practice is undervalued (Raelin, 2007) and obliterated (Cresswell, 2003) as a site of learning.

Fry (1994) offers an incisive critique of many of the theorised tenets of sustainability suggesting that it represents an important but 'troubling' body of work (p. 20). Fry switches focus from the-world-that-needs-saving-out-there to ideas and discourse itself. He goes on to suggest that this body of work is 1) generative of profiles of problems that so often create disablement through fear or fatalism, 2) rests on positivist picturing that carries a great deal of authority and negates uncertainty — 'facts' are loaded with the claim of scientific and deterministic truth when they are often projections, fictions, or abstractions, lifted from their relational conditions, and 3) relies upon gestural rhetoric while slogans and grand goals so often stand in for a detailing of the means of action. (1994, p. 20). Although written in 1994, these concerns remain valid.

This thesis argues that the critique of sustainability discourse is difficult because such discourses have been historically associated with protest, campaigning and environmental education, backed by insufficiently problematised 'science' and simplistic ethical stances. A second significant obstacle to reflection/critique in/of this field is that it suffers at the hands of largely unrecognised and unproblematised Cartesian dualism creating a 'hyperseparation' (Plumwood, 1993) of mind from body, public from private, rationality from emotionality, patriarchy from 'other' and of course humanity from everything else. A third issue that restricts critical reflection of sustainability discourse is the apparent interchangeability of different and rarely defined terms. The terms 'conservation', 'sustainability', 'environmentalism', 'ecology' and 'landscape' are often used interchangeably without meaningful attempt at definition. Far from being 'science'-based, this set of apparently freely interchangeable terms constitutes a semantic, historical, ideological, and ecopsychological labyrinth. Fourthly, dominant narratives that constitute discourses in the fields of conservation, sustainability and so forth are for many people, deeply cherished stories. Such stories of conservation and sustainability (nature, ecology, environment, landscape, wilderness and so on) often tend to be characterised by idealism, romanticisation, and perhaps 'unreconstituted spirituality' (Fry, 1994, p. 20) and can be traced back to the deepest historical, cultural and ecopsychological recesses of the western mind.

As the thesis has unfolded a further factor has been identified that makes this discourse both powerful and difficult to critique. During the last 30-40 years these concerns and this discourse has been repositioned from the margins of protest to becoming an institutionalised (Davison, 2005) dominant discourse (Myerson, 2001). In many places, and for many people, sustainability has become the latest colonising discourse. It has become the latest 'language game' (Baudrillard, 1983; Lyotard, 1984) adopted and traded in to gain, maintain, or deny, social power.

An effective place practice requires the loosening of rigid, clichéd, narrow

discourses and their largely unproblematised economic, social, and psychological underpinnings. The project of sustainability can be confident enough in itself to be able to be subjected to social, economic, psychological and narratological interrogation, but to do this it needs to be re-radicalised. Just because this sector is underpinned by laudable ethical intentionality does not free it from this requirement.

Once place relationship is liberated from this dominant discourse other understandings can come to the fore. Working my way under the discourses, cliché and cultural expectation (Sebald, 1999) of my local place of 20 years inhabitation revealed the shocking emotional confrontation with massacre and genocide of the Gumbaingirr people, the grinding disappointment of settler families, as well as the struggle of 'alternative' migrants looking for the Promised Land. The power of a dominant story of place is such that something as glaringly awful as this can somehow be silenced or numbed.

c) Developing a theoretical framework of place practice

This thesis proposes and develops a framework of place practice. Drawing upon de Certeau (1984), Cresswell (2003) and Cameron (2008) encounters are situated in such a way that fresh interpretations and insights are encouraged. Place practice is designed to overcome identified factors that inhibit critical reflection in the sustainability sector; specifically these are loose, ambiguous and culturally unproblematised terminology, Cartesian dualism, the allure of certain kinds of clichéd story, the undervaluing of practice as a site of learning (Raelin, 2007), the ecopsychological problem of treating the other-than-human as mechanism (Plumwood, 1993) or behaving matter (Evernden, 1992), and lastly sustainability's emergence as a dominant socio-economic discourse.

Place practice is posited as the opposite of, and an unraveling of, Cartesian order. Place practice is a theoretical framework more able to encompass the livedness of all life. This includes the self-making (Maturana & Varela, 1980; Margulis, 1998) sentience, agency, fecundity, wildness, struggle, social positioning, desire and vulnerability. As argued by Carter (2008) in *Dark*

Writing this fluid livedness is not often recorded in our maps, theories and grand narratives of place. Framing the world in terms of place practice sees life processes tending to go on and on, quietly, resiliently. Mundanity is nearly always the issue here, not the drama of a grand narrative. Apocalypse (Hamilton, 2010 and others) is a cultural archetypal story. A practice perspective is, in a sense, more akin to a Zen Buddhist perspective: life and death will go on, in some way or form, and on, and on; people, some people anyway, will go on trying to come to terms with ethical and sustainability issues: always. Their work will go on and on and will never be finished.

By uncritically and continuously telling the worst story ever told — that all life, or all humanity, will end soon and that it will be self-inflicted — Hamilton (2010), and Flannery (2010a), among others, causes a great deal of distress. Conceiving of Earth's ecosystems as weak can only cause people to ecopsychologically turn away from the other-than-human as a psychological place to rest and back towards the human made, controlled, and controlling social world. Isn't that the very opposite of the intention and spirit of sustainability and environmental education?

d) The importance of ecopsychologically re-inhabiting Earth

An ecopsychological approach to understanding place practices emphasises, acknowledges and imagines emotionality, symbols and myths that mediate relationship to and with place, nature and the other-than-human. It trusts that emotionality can be re-invested into the other-than-human not as a sentimentalisation of something weak, but as a visceral fecundity as real and alive and as strong or weak as you or I. This is a profound reversal of Cartesian order, which if unproblematised casts the other-than-human as mechanism (Plumwood, 1993) or behaving matter (Evernden, 1992). This shift offers the possibility of turning back to places, the other-than-human, for deep, almost redemptive, psychological sustenance.

An ecopsychological perspective offers, and requires a psychic loosening

(Tacey, 1995; Hillman, 1995) that allows a rediscovery of latent and forgotten place myths (Illich, 1986; Schama, 1995). Importantly, I would argue that an ecopsychological re-inhabitation of the earth cannot take place until living systems are restored to being seen as strong and provident. Environmental education messages (Palmer, 1998) and processes (McLuhan, 1964) can be seen to be in danger of re-enforcing Cartesian hyperseparation (Plumwood, 1993), through creating fear and disablement (Fry, 1994).

Ecopsychological insights gleaned from Illich (1986), Schama (1995) as well as Chetan and Brueton (1994) reveal the North European Pagan symbolism of resilience of life in the face of life and death. Such myths and symbolism offer a personal sense of sustainability. That these symbols of life are literally rooted in living landscapes, trees and water and so on, in the present, is vitally important. Edenic narratives (Cronon, 1996) of the corrupted Christian (Shepard, 1982; Illich & Cayley, 2004) Promised Land ever denied could be displaced and replaced by re-animation (Hillman & Ventura, 1992) and re-sacralisation (Tacey, 1995) of inhabited present place. Through this ecopsychological approach, and interpretation, place and people can be co-terminously healed (Roszak, 1992, 1995). However, the re-opening of this place relationship can only occur if discourses of sustainability and associated concerns are critiqued.

e) The project of re-radicalising sustainability

There is a need to re-radicalise conservation, sustainability and environmental education. These have moved from generally being subversive and marginalised concerns to being conservative and professionalised (Illich, 1986). A point of choice has almost already passed; this is about conservation discourse as the latest dominant, controlling and Puritanical discourse of places and people. Is this what we 1970's idealists signed up for? In the inspirational and seminal 1970's literature of Capra (1975), Schumacher (1973) and Meadows et al (1972) among others, the problems of sustainability and poverty were seen as a co-terminus 'world problematique' (Peccei, 1977). However, sustainability and conservation can often be seen to

be effectively oblivious to social justice — a concern which is troubling in itself but also because social injustice is, arguably, the root cause of exploitation of living systems, species, and places as well as much of humanity.

As argued previously, the present legitimate and deeply held concern about climate change is a repackaging, a re-bannering, of a previously held collective of social and ecological concerns. Any suggestion that climate change is a problem about something that might happen in the future is an obliteration of practice (Creswell, 2003) and a denial both of existing extensive ecological damage and of attempts by practitioners to resist the damage being wrought. This stance is no denial of climate change; it is instead a charge that present discourses around climate change tend to be naïve and are in need of thorough critical interrogation — something regularly and alarmingly denied. Sustainability, as expressed as conservation, is not new and has plenty of precedent in terms of being conservative, or even deeply conservative. Schama (1995) explicitly illustrates links between Nazi ideology and some of the most thoroughly conservation policies that have ever existed. Similarly, recent writings of Linkola (2009) and Lovelock (2009) display dangerous anti-democratic and social justice-denying sentiment. While authors such as Flannery (2010a) and Hamilton (2010) indulge in Edenic (Cronon, 1996) fantasies and nightmares of the Promised Land and expulsion, global hyper-capitalism ramps up its dynamic of planetary pillage. This driving dynamic of exploitation of people, places and ecosystems is the root cause of sustainability and conservation problems along with climate change. Further, hyper-capitalism neither benefits nor exploits all people equally, so talking in terms of a homogenised humanity, a tendency in much conservation and sustainability discourse, is deeply unhelpful.

Locally, here in Australia, a place characterised by a settler mindset, the implicit underlying assumption of conservation is a darker fantasy: that of not even being here. This is the assumption, perhaps derived from unconscious colonial guilt (Davison & Chapman, 2006), that with a little help places can be returned to something imagined as historical, pure and untouched. This

template of wilderness as idealised uninhabited place is a denial of practice as lived life as well as effectively being genocide.

The choice has just about passed. Using sustainability jargon, one could talk of a 'tipping point'. This choice is between, on one hand, conservative conservationism; a discourse used to control and regulate social behavior, and on the other a sustainability that is explicitly politically informed, forward looking, and one that can be joyous and embodied. This choice can be restated as the processes of exploitative global hyper-capitalism versus creative and embodied expressive inhabitation of place.

f) A craft approach to place and sustainability

This emergent theme is particularly close to my heart, body and hands (Dowling, 2011). A craft approach to place potentially enfolds and addresses many place-practice issues and recommendations as made above. A craft approach to place practice is both practice and motif. Craft is envisioned as radical, political, disruptive and expressive of a deep desire to embody (Crawford, 2009) and inhabit place. It is a particularly potent response to problems of sustainability, apocalyptic warnings, and the problematic, implicit assumption asserted by conservation of the sanctity of wilderness as that not inhabited or touched by humans.

The notion of craft has emerged strongly in association with place practice. Here in Bellingen, as with most places in Australia, Aboriginal crafts-of-this-place have suffered through genocide and barely exist locally. In Devon, the place I first learned crafts, traditional farming is a dying craft; places depopulated, land more often than not now managed vicariously via biocides and machines. However, I would suggest craft can be an expression of a desire for embodied and skilled interaction with place, one that can be denied only in the short term. I would argue that sustainability and conservation work, for instance bush regeneration, Landcare, Permaculture and so on, constitute emergent crafts that mediate intentionality, communities and the

materials of place.

A craft approach to place practice —

a) Focuses upon solutions. Sustainability and conservation are often associated with messages of 'not doing this, not doing that' whereas gardening, taking action, being a practitioner and being a craftsperson is about *what can be done*. As seen through Permaculture, design can (re)make almost anything as long as there is sufficient aesthetic courage. Craft is practice because it is an application of ideas via design to a practical situation. It involves processes of weighing up options, ideas, desired outcomes with imagination, skills, willpower, energy and resources until a singular strategy is applied via craft. This is empowering (Crawford, 2009).

b) Entails working with the materials of place. It is creative, and transformative; shaping materials in a way that requires respect, humility, patience and endurance as well as knowing the limits of self, materials and systems being worked with. Craft creates and promotes an appreciation of energy, physicality and materiality because from a practice and craft perspective you just can't do what you want to do (Pollan, 1997). Bush regeneration is probably the best example of this; this task requires a deeply considered use of energy to achieve often modest conservation goals. Stories of sustainability, conservation and environmental education are generally romantic, sentimental or apocalyptic, giving little or no detail in terms of actions that can be taken (Fry, 1994). However, daily work in the field is rarely anything but romantic.

c) Overcomes disconnection of Cartesianism, fear and guilt. Carrying out craft, for example gardening, is embodied, sensory and emotional. It is a re-inhabitation of place; an intimate mediation and a melding of bodies. Taking action overcomes paralysis of disembodied fear and guilt and builds an appreciation that this is both about acting and being acted upon (Pollan, 1996, 2001). Craft in landscape constitutes re-inhabitation of place, caring for country (Rose, 1996), and *being* place.

d) Is a meditation and grounding, allowing stories to rest. The craft of working place comes around to a silence of 'flow' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991) while action is being taken. In this state, stories of fear, guilt, crisis and demonisation cannot be worked with. Craft opens a space and the possibility of communication with place, the other-than-human, and memories of place (Wylie, 2007). Craft grounds grand narratives and allows country to enter you (Tacey, 1995). Mostly however, craft offers an embodied medium of and for reflection.

e) Has the potential to be equitable. Craft involves re-skilling and empowerment. Place practice has the purpose of sustaining life through embodied relationships as opposed to disembodied consumerism. This is the building of essential social capital (Sennett, 2008). Such re-skilling (Hopkins, 2008) leading to local production is a resistance to global hyper-capitalism — the underpinning dynamic to exploitation of people and places.

f) Has the potential to be creative and expressive. The emphasis of craft is upon creation. Although most conservation and sustainability projects have a narrow set of aims an expressive aesthetic can be explored. This is co-creating the unknown future of places, not stuck futilely trying to make an imagined human-uninhabited pristine future/past.

9.4 A field guide to taking action

The following is a checklist for the practitioner taking action in the field of conservation and sustainability. The intention of this section is to cut through to some basic suggestions that can help overcome blocks to action - to actually implementing sustainability and conservation ideas. This is a sector, as argued in this research, that seems to not easily learn from experience or practice. A final point to emphasise is that it is time to stop thinking that somehow the conservation and sustainability challenge starts 'now': that these

are somehow a new set of ideas and challenges — they are not.

This checklist of place-practice principles is drawn from critical reflections upon my repertoire of practice and the communities of practice (Wenger 1998) this practice is nested within.

How to take action:

- 1) Just start. Don't wait (long) for experts, information or resources.
- 2) Be idealistic. This work is about the ethical principles of respect for life and the importance of caring relationships.
- 3) Exercise goodwill. This feel-good element is what gathers support. Further, what is done should be done for its own sake i.e. out of love.
- 4) Be optimistic. Don't underestimate what can be achieved and what potential place craft can achieve.
- 5) Engage (with) other people. Work as a team. It's the only way.
- 6) Observe practices that you can see already occurring. Learn from these and replicate where appropriate. Resist unrealistic, utopian and untested aims.
- 7) Become a skilled craftsperson.
- 8) 'Solutionise'! Look forward, and be expressive, creative and playful in design.
- 9) Engage with small practical projects in the place that you are in. Allow them to become emblematic of the success of practical action. Such successes help overcome uncertainty, distance and powerlessness. They often offer an eco-psychological healing of place and

person/people.

- 10) Practice fields of care. Watch your energy levels in relation to your practice, project and place. Don't underestimate the physicality required.
- 11) Commit to keeping it going and growing. Then re-commit. Again and again.
- 12) Be brave, take small risks and then observe results. Taking action is complicated, fraught and risky that involves opportunity cost whereby achieving one outcome often involves the denial of another. Further, taking action always involves dealing with the unknown and is generally more complex than talking about issues or campaigning.
- 13) Don't work with hate, crisis, fear or guilt. This won't work. These emotions and stories are unsustainable to the practitioner.
- 14) Treat practice as a touchstone to intentions, theories, and stories. The process of critical reflection upon practice is vital to keeping sustainability vital.
- 15) Become conscious of *being* place; don't think in terms of 'environment'.
- 16) Become critically literate in stories of conservation, sustainability, environment and place. Be aware that there are many stories of place that are contested and that have some degree of applicability. Be particularly aware of the social/psychological polarisation of communities.
- 17) Become aware of the political psychology of conservation messages; of disempowerment of people through being made to feel fearful, guilty, overwhelmed, belittled or useless. Resist becoming evangelical and the

associated Christian heritage of conservation and sustainability discourse of moral superiority, outrage, and demonisation.

- 18) Be aware of the potential controlling psychological/social role of the narrow orthodox discourses of crisis, including the spectre of eco-fundamentalism becoming totalitarianism.
- 19) Know that ecological health and social justice are, and must be seen to be, co-terminous.
- 20) Know that there are far, far bigger forces than you caring for life on Earth. Overcome Cartesian order. Observe wildness in everything. Become unsure who/what has agency. Be humbled.
- 21) Be prepared for the shadow of the land. Don't let romantic notions and stories disguise grief, sadness held in the landscape; don't let them disguise the wildness and inhospitality of many places.
- 22) Consider replacing conceptions of conservation and sustainability with that of 'craft' of being '(in) place'. This can be both practical and metaphoric.
- 23) Repoliticise the conservation and sustainability project. What is it anyway? And whose?
- 24) Enjoy! Be deeply, deeply moved by the specialness of working with life, and living systems.

I hope that this checklist helps or inspires practitioners in some way. Clearly, it is not intended to be definitive, but organic, flexible and able to be added to and altered. It does, however, reflect key principles of my place practice, as they have emerged through this research process.

9.5 Contribution to the field

This research represents a contribution to its field of inquiry by addressing the question of what can be learned from the disjuncture between discourse and practice in relation to sustainability and associated concerns. Having taught, researched and practiced in this vital but 'troubling' (Fry, 1994) field for over 30 years I had arrived at a cross-roads of uncertainty and frustration. The uncertainty was born of an accumulation of complex experiences very few of which had been subjected to any thorough reflective process. The frustration was twofold; firstly, of hearing a range of professionals, academics and others talking uncritically about sustainability issues saying the same things time and again, and secondly, sensing this endlessly recycled discourse jarring against these same accumulated but not fully articulated experiences. These matters are deeply important to me. They have shaped my life. So, this thesis is about me learning from my practice.

To contain the complexity (Holling, 2001), messiness (Rootes, 1999; Diani, 1992, 1995) and wickedness (Rittel & Webber, 1973; Ludwig, 2001) inherent in practice Schon's notion of a repertoire of practice was used. This is a clear sounding idea: one that gives messiness, complexity and 'wickedness' a conceptual container. However, in various publications, Schon also talks of the 'swamp' of practice (Redmond, 2006). According to Schon:

In the varied topography of professional practice, there is a high hard ground where practitioners can make effective use of research-based theory and technique, and there is a swampy lowland where situations are incapable of technical solution. The difficulty is that the problems of the high ground, no matter how great their technical interest, are relatively unimportant to the client or to the larger society, whilst in the swamp are problems of greatest human concern (1983, p. 42).

Schon's work does, however, come in for critique. Canning (2009) takes issue with his use of metaphors; Saltiel (2006) argues that his work is 'conceptually

thin', while Ixer (1999) and Erlandson (2005) suggest that Schon's approach is overly individualistic. On the other hand, (2009) Dewey (1933) and Brookfield (1987) among others offer strong conceptual frameworks in support of Schon's approach to learning through reflected practice. Clearly, some researchers are more comfortable with unpredictability and the ambiguity of life than others. Despite possible concerns about the robustness of knowledge derived from such a reflective research process it is important to keep in mind that, in line with Schon, it is in these metaphoric swamps where most can be learned. Life is full of 'wicked' problems; however, given the western aversion to swamps, fecundity and body (Shepard, 1982; Illich, 1986), perhaps the metaphor of swamp can be reframed to wetlands; key places of biodiversity and life-making, yet so difficult to inhabit or manage.

Perhaps the most wicked problem of all for the western mind is that of Cartesian dualism. Cartesianism is, arguably, an attempt to make knowledge 'clear'; privileging rationality, predictability, linearity and progress; banishing the uncertain; but in doing also 'obliterating practice' (Cresswell, 2003). However, that is being over-generous; because as argued previously, Cartesian order effectively exists as colonial processes of 'hyperseparation' (Plumwood, 1993) of the female, emotional, embodied, other-culture and other-than-human life and lives from social power, expression and representation. As argued by Orr (1992), it is this very form and regulation of knowledge and relationship that is the creator of sustainability problems and yet the sustainability sector, and sustainability discourses are in general, dominated by unproblematised Cartesian modernist, positivist 'science'. Any dismantling of Cartesian order allows for the conception of strong Gaia (Lovelock, 1979; Kirchner, 2002): intelligent, feeling and purposeful. However, such a dismantling of Cartesianism re-invites expression from all the banished knowledges and relationships exiled from this colonial order. Place practice is posited as it's opposite: an unraveling of Cartesian order. *Place practice becomes the livedness of all life*, of self-making (Maturana & Varela, 1980; Margulis, 1998) sentience, agency, fecundity, wildness (Evernden, 1992) and resilience of 'ecosynthesis' (Tane, 1995; Holmgren, 2002),

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physicality, struggle, social positioning, desire and vulnerability. As argued by Carter (2008) in *Dark Writing*, these are often not recorded in our cognitive maps, theories and grand narratives of place. These are fluid processes of movement and memory: the ordinary but remarkable in-betweenesses of living.

According to Alvermann (2000) autobiographic research represents a way of researching different kinds of knowledge. Research characterised by personal signature also offers the possibility of taking the reader to new places of sympathy. I am reminded of the principle character in *Kesey's Sometimes a Great Notion* (1964), a text encountered in Chapter 6. The reader finds him or herself sympathising with a character, his situation and concerns in a way that one would not expect. In a similar way I hope that the reader is perhaps more capable of sympathising with a research and practice position that is often critical of stories of sustainability, which are for many people, often highly cherished and alluring personal, archetypal and social stories.

The use of Sebaldian black and white images is another strategy to loosen the power of these alluring stories. They create a dissonance of senses and evoke mood and atmosphere (Wylie, 2007) of place. They haunt me, the writer, and pull me back from sliding into Cartesian order. They also remind me of key personal images and symbols (Camus, 1994; Dirkx, 2000); in my case symbols of gardens, moors, Celtic landscapes, family, churches and special and spiritual family places. They remind me of the struggle involved in lived life and to not let this story become too disembodied. Lastly, they are an expression of particular places: *country*, Devon, Singapore, Bellingen, Cemetery Creek and others, and a reminder that places such as these live through us.



9.6 A new image

In line with the Prologue and thesis in general I now return to an image and to a recent 'Permablitz', held at the local public primary school; an event that I helped design and supervise.

Permablitz

I turn up early but already Lena is there with other helpers. Over the weeks, since we came up with the Permablitz design, she has networked and charmed almost all the required materials for the project. There are piles of soil mix, hardwood 'fines' mulch, enormous hay 'rounds', bags and buckets of compost (made with different recipes), timber as well as hundreds of plants and seedlings.

It's been windy and raining all night but this morning it's perfectly cool and sunny. Before long, school children and their parents, and other volunteers are turning up with tools in hand. What shall we do? They ask. The day before a few of us had marked out the 'Mandala' garden design on the doomed lawn, so I direct volunteers to various tasks as indicated on the ground. The most specialised element in the design is a hardwood timber edge that needs to be dug into the ground and secured with pegs and batten screws.

Before starting I had recognised this as the one job that could hold all other work back. But

my fears are allayed by two tradesmen who turn up with toolkits in hand 'sure, no worries mate, we can do that', and they do.

In goes the timber, the cardboard and paper to suppress the old lawn; down go two types of mulch depending upon whether the area is path or garden bed; in goes several cubic metres of soil mix to make raised garden beds. I suggest to Lena that we have morning tea early if only to slow the work down! At a delicious supplied morning tea people eat and drink and listen to a few of us talking about food sovereignty and Permaculture ... and then we get back to the project, planting out all the donated plants and seedlings.

Volunteers leave, but others turn up and join in. There are so many volunteers that other garden beds are then Permablitzed. And then the energy moves to quality control and tidying; a few people take it upon themselves to go around checking and fixing anything that is not quite right. Adjoining lawns are raked and leftover materials are given back to the volunteers.

Wow, what a day! What else would you want to be doing?

9.7 Opportunities for further research

Clearly in such a wide-ranging and trans-disciplinary project many themes, issues, dilemmas and stories and practices are touched upon but not thoroughly pursued. Of all the possible research themes that could be pursued, two in particular emerge from this place-practice research project.

Firstly, the theme of learning from long-term sustainability practice should be further explored. In line with the premise and finding of this thesis the under-valuing and under-articulation of practice is both a problem and an opportunity for the conservation and sustainability sector. It is my expectation that by carrying out a series of focus groups followed up by unstructured interviews that practice-based insights will emerge. This research could be applied across the range of alternative/sustainability practices identified through the thesis. This research would aim to bridge the disjuncture between practice and theory that I have argued characterises the conservation and

sustainability sector. Critical reflection upon practice is vital to keeping practice updated, flexible and adaptive to changing challenges, resources and ideas.

A second research project that emerges from this research focuses upon a craft approach (Pollan, 1997; Sennett, 2008; Crawford, 2009) to conservation and sustainability. During this thesis craft has emerged as an apt way both literally and metaphorically to advance but also ground conservation and sustainability. In a sector dominated by grand (Gare, 2001) and Edenic (Cronon, 1996) narratives, a craft approach offers a touchstone as to what can be realistically achieved. Further research, again, could be comparative across different conservation and sustainability practices. Because the literacy of craft is to some extent tacit (Polanyi, 1967) and intuitive (Schon, 1987) research methodologies would need to be able to record insights from craft. Possible methodologies might include use of images, film footage, poetry, and artistic representations. Insights from this research possibility would further explore the finding that a craft approach to conservation and sustainability is appropriate, informative, and useful and satisfying in supporting people to move from a position of idealistic concern to one of taking effective action in terms of conservation and sustainability.

9.8 Final words

The driving force of much of the personal side of this exploration was seen, via Cave (2001) and Auden (1941), as a divine discontent. This was identified as coming from various migrations at sensitive times of my life leading often to a sense of exile. Senses of connection and disconnection have run through my life and continue to do so. As argued by Cave and Auden this can be seen to be the soul-touching event that gives purpose and direction to a person's life.

I would suggest that at the heart of many people lives, especially if they are following their passion in some way, is something that is all at once a serious problem, a deep hurt, a driving interest and a source of deep, deep joy.

This is not something that can be researched away or resolved through autobiographic writing. Divine discontent *is* the source of desire, creation, exploration and ethical practice. That's life. How else could it be? How else would one want it to be? Without it, we will settle for anything.

The findings of this thesis; the arguments made about sustainability, conservation, place and particular places may challenge some people. Some of the points made, particularly in relation to climate change, as well as Landcare, bush regeneration, Permaculture and so on, are not common and may be seen by some to be controversial or even heretical. These are conclusions that I have come to through critical reflection upon my practice. Clearly, I expect these may come to change through time, through a continuing life-long process of critical reflection and of course depending upon personal, professional and academic experiences encountered.

And finally; I refuse to live a disembodied life.

Personal Chronology

1961 – Born in West London, UK.

1963-9 – Move to Devon in farming land and community.

1970–5 - Living back in West London, UK but visiting Devon regularly.

1975-9 – Move to Singapore. Spend five years there but also travel widely including returning each year to Devon, UK. During this time attend the United World College of South East Asia. There introduced ideas and reading — Gandhi, Tolstoy, Eastern religions, Capra, social theory and conservation.

1979 – Move to Sydney, Australia. This is an exilic and liminal experience of landing in a very different place. Ideas from UWC fermenting and offering solace.

1980 – Move to Bedford, UK. Finish high school and Gandhian philosophy developed and then eclipsed by interest in Paul Foot-inspired socialism in context of start of Thatcher era.

1980 - Live in Devon working as a farmhand.

1980 – Move to Sydney, Australia. This is an exilic experience again.

1980-82 – Study Politics and Earth Sciences at Macquarie University. Leave after two years, disappointed, disillusioned and in debt in the context of conservative Sydney.

1983 – I find new inspiration in working as a builder's labourer and then market gardener.

1984/90 - Landscape design and construction contractor in Sydney. Attend

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TAFE Ryde Horticulture to get a trade qualification. Combining physicality, commerce and aesthetics in suburban Sydney.

1990 – We move to Bellingen, Mid-North Coast of NSW, Australia; an alternative, country town.

1990/4 – Landscape garden design and construction combined with Permaculture. First reading, then workshops, then set up Permaculture group and carry out projects, then contracting and teaching. This is also an immersion into the suite of 'the alternative'. Yoga, mediation, Zen practice, New Age, Feng Shui, biodynamiaics and general sustainability culture.

1994 – First teaching experiences — horticulture, landscaping, Permaculture and ecotourism. Working with groups (often disadvantaged) to combine theory, active education and creation of practical projects.

1994/Now – First of many years of Landcare projects including — Cemetery Creek, Bellingen with trainees, youths, volunteers and contractors. Working with a wide range of people, putting ideals into practice. Participate variously as a volunteer, contractor, project manager and Chair.

1997/Now – Study coursework for Master's in Social Ecology at University of Western Sydney. I am inspired by new connections, theories, connections and texts including Hillman, Illich, Schama, and Capra (again). Then study for PhD, also through UWS, in critical autobiographical research into *Situating Place Practice*.

2000/2002 – Create and run a series of Ecopsychology workshops and participate in Sense of Place Colloquium at Recherche Bay, Tasmania.

2003/Now – Employed at Southern Cross University teaching and researching poverty issues, social sciences, ethics, and sustainability. Also teaching horticulture and conservation at North Coast Institute of TAFE.

2006/9 – My Grandfather and Grandmother pass away in Devon, UK. The farm is sold. The apparent end of this place and farming in my family leaves me reeling.

2007/Now – Transition Towns and associated interests become prominent in Bellingen. Work regularly as Permaculture designer and consultant (again).

2010 – Combine research through University of Western Sydney, teaching at Southern Cross University, Permaculture design and Landcare project supervision.

List of Images

All images were sourced from my personal collection. They were taken either by me or by close family or friends.

Chapter 1 – Introduction and Research Methodology

1. Tree planting at Cemetery Creek 2001

Chapter 2 – Theorising Place Practice

1. Orchids growing on Red Cedar in Bellingen 2001

Chapter 3 – Sowing Seeds of a Divine Discontent

1. 'Easterntown' farm, Meeth, Devon. View of the buildings from the North. Winter 1975
2. Storm over Dartmoor, Devon. Taken from Bassets Cross 1995
3. Walking with Gramp through 'Easterntown' farmyard
4. Me sitting on a Tor, Dartmoor. Taken by Emily Hurford 1979
5. Twisted branches of *Angophora costata*, Castle Cove 2004
6. Student in Bedford, UK 1980
7. Gazing over the mid-North NSW coast 1986

Chapter 4 – Learning Gardening Craft

1. Market gardening in glasshouses, Warriewood, Sydney 1983
2. Paving and landscape construction, Killarney Heights, Sydney 1985
3. Finished bush garden with path, Elanora Heights, Sydney, 1988
4. Wildflower field, Devon, UK 1986
5. Walking through rainforest Thora, NSW 1988
6. Birdsnest Ferns in the canopy in rainforest, Thora 1988

Chapter 5 – Alternative Town Promise

1. Flying Foxes at Bellingen Island, 1992

2. Zen Master Hogen Yamahata, 1995
3. Never Never River, 1996
4. Promised Land forest, 1995

Chapter 6 – Landcare at Cemetery Creek

1. Early design discussion for Cemetery Creek. Bellingen Park, 1994
2. Cemetery Creek early works, 1996
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Chapter 7 – Ecopsychology and the Divine

1. Hawkesbury Campus, Richmond, NSW, 1998
2. Mutton-bird Island, 2004
3. Carved Granite Cross on Dartmoor, Devon, UK. Taken 1998
4. Two churches near Glastonbury Abbey, UK 1996
5. Yew trees among graves. Glendalough, Eire. Taken 1996
6. Kylemore Abbey behind deciduous trees, Eire. Taken 1996
7. Figure of Christ on Mountain behind Kylemore Abbey, Connemara 1996
8. Volunteers at regenerating Cemetery Creek 2003
9. Brush-cutting new Landcare site 2001

Chapter 8 – Critical Perspectives: Loss and Re-emergence

1. Walking along abandoned railway to Lloyd's Siding, Cascade, 1997
2. Lloyd's Siding Cascade, 1997
3. Devon Winter hedgerow trees, 2008
4. Me sitting on a Tor on Dartmoor, 2008
5. Snake Wall, Never Never, NSW, 2004

6. Stone sculpture, Never Never River 2007
7. Stone sculpture, Never Never River 2010
8. Rainforest seed collecting, Promised Land 2003

Chapter 9 – Conclusions

1. Stuck in Cemetery Creek mud 1998
2. Winter sun over Dartmoor 2008

Species List

Bee *Apis mellifera*
Black Cockatoo *Calyptorhynchus lathami*
Dog *Canis lupus familiaris*
Dolphin *Delphinus delphis*
Eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster*
Flying fox *Pteropus poliocephalus*
Lapwing *Vanellus miles*
Night jar *Caprimulgus europaeus*
Rat *Rattus norvegicus*
Sparrow hawk *Accipiter nisus*
Swamp snake *Hemiaspis signata*
Tawney owl *Strix aluco*
White naped crane *Grus vipio*
Woodlark *Lullula arborea*

Angophera *Angophera costata*
Apple *Pyrus malus*
Asparagus *Asparagus officinalis*
Bangalow palm *Acrhontophoenix cunninghamiana*
Basil *Ocimum basilicum*
Black current *Ribes nigrum*
Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*
Blue quandong *Elaeocarpus grandis*
Brush box *Lophostemon confertus*
Cabbage *Brassica oleracea capitata*
Camphor laurel *Cinamomum Camphora*
Cheese Tree *Glochidion ferdinandii*
Chestnut *Aesculus hippocastanum*
Citrus *Citrus limon*
Clematis *Clematis vitalba*
Coachwood *Ceratopetalum apetalem*

Coastal Banksia *Banksia integrifolia*
Coral tree *Erythrina x sykesii*
Crepe myrtle *Lagerstroemia indica*
Cycad *Macrozamia communis*
Date palm *Phoenix dactylifera*
Elephant ears *Colocasia esculenta*
Eucalyptus *Eucalyptus spp.*
Guoa *Guioa semiglauca*
Hawthorn *Crataegus phaenopyrum*
Holly *Ilex aquifolium*
Hoop pine *Araucaria cunninghamii*
Honeysuckle *Lonicera periclymenum* Linnaeus
Heather *Calluna Vulgaris*
Jackwood *Cryptocarya glaucescens*
Lantana *Lantana camara*
Lebanese cucumber *Cucumis sativus*
Lomandra *Lomandra hystrix*
Leopard tree *Caesalpineia ferrea*
Lilly pilly *Syzygium species*
Madeira vine *Anredera cordifolia*
Mulberry *Morus rubra*
Oak *Quercus robur*
Paperbark *Melaleuca quinquenervia*
Paspalum *Paspalum wetsteinnii*
Paw paw *Carica Papaya*
Peppercorn tree *Schinus molle*
Pittosporum *Pittosporum undulatum*
Plane tree *Platanus x acerifolia*
Potato *Solanum tuberosum*
Privet *Ligustrum sinense*
Raspberry *Rubus idaeus*
Red currant *Ribes rubrum*
Red cedar *Toona ciliata*

Sally wattle *Acacia melanoxylon*

Sandpaper fig *Ficus coronata*

Sorrel *Rumex acetosa*

Strawberry *Fragaria virginiana*

Tomato *Lycopersicon esculentum*

Tobacco bush *Solanum mauritanium*

Tradescantia *Tradescantia alba*

Tree fern *Cyathea australis*

Tropical chickweed *Drymaria cordata*

Tulip *Tulipa species*

White current *Ribes rubrum*

Yew *Taxus baccata*

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