

A Space In-between: Red Rock

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In this paper we explore how we (as white female migrant) can have a sense of belonging in the Australian landscape. We do this as a conversation from the points of view of Laura's work with rural women and Margaret's work with Aboriginal place stories and their intersection at the specific place, Red Rock. Here we focus on the belly of the river estuary, and our material interactions there. We suggest that Red Rock can represent an in-between space in which we can explore different stories of place in relation to what we shall call various theorists of the in-between space—Liz Grosz and Kristeva on the space between language and the body, Carter on the space between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal and Winnicott and Armstrong on the space between self and other.

M: I see myself as a collector of place stories. I am currently working with an archaeologist on an industry collaborative grant with Yarrawarra Aboriginal Corporation collecting and documenting material on five clusters of sites for their ecotourism venture.

L: I am currently working in central New South Wales, where I am interested in the relationship between rural women's productions and their sense of place and community.

In this paper we explore the intersection of race, gender and place in relation to the question 'How can we (as white female middle class migrants) have a sense of belonging in the Australian landscape?' We do this through a conversation.

M: On the estuary at Arrawarra, just south of Red Rock, we walk through a caravan park to get to a shell midden on the other side. In this in-between space where estuary meets sea a small rickety bridge joins, but not quite, the caravan park on the south of the estuary with a small area of littoral rainforest and midden on the other side. The timbers on the bridge are smoothed by sand and salt to bleached driftwood. The spaces between the boards are sometimes as wide as the boards themselves, making visible patterns of light from ripples on the surface of water onto sand below. The boards are different lengths and the bridge goes up and down, higgledy piggledy like something made of beach debris. And it ends halfway, we step off the bridge onto wet wave wrinkled sand of estuary passage, as if the bridge couldn't quite make the effort to get the whole way.

The caravan park is watered and green, geraniums and potted palms, and the owners don't want Aboriginal people walking through. On the other side, just around the bend onto the beach, an overhang of collapsing dune where root systems hold in delicate balance layers of shells, some still packed in thick bundles and some suspended like mobiles on a single thread. Massed turbans, oysters and whelks and a fragment of bone swaying on its fine root hair. It's about bones and bodies, what we eat and place, a kind of time story on display. Shells left from countless people eating on that spot on the edge of the beach overlooking a plentiful rock platform, and the

sea. Tony says Yarrawarra people camped here at high tide waiting to cross the estuary and others say outsiders camped there waiting to enter Yarrawarra territory.

L: What resonates for me is the really physical intimacy of the shells and the sense of past and present connected. It instantly takes me back to the island of Colonsay and the time we found, after a whole holiday searching, an awesome cave where underfoot the midden shells were so deep, so ancient and yet so apparently undisturbed and complete, that it was somehow almost shocking.

The cave was halfway up the cliff hidden by a large boulder and it was only by climbing on top of the boulder and sliding down the back into a very small gap that you had access to the entrance. To what in fact was a series of chambers, each one leading into another, ending in a font-like erosion in the furthestmost wall, where the water seeped through from the hillside above.

I first visited Colonsay after the death of my mother. I went there just to get away for a while, with my little sister and a friend. And in the subsequent visits we made to the island I absolutely fell in love with it. It was on Colonsay that I experienced the most profound desire to belong and yet also the desire to undo what I perceived as the negative, impossible, destructive elements of that yearning.

When we came to Australia and there was the possibility of having forty acres, there was no question of what we'd call it. It had to be Colonsay. Although obviously the buying of forty acres in a post colonial context only doubles the questions.

Recently, trying to flesh out, to ask this question of belonging, I heard from the women of the local Arts and Crafts group that they were going to photograph, paint and draw the old town bridge before it was replaced. Their passion excited me, the fact that they were producing something out of their desire in relation to the bridge. And when the new bridge was named after an Aboriginal woman, Mary Jane Cain, and had it's own community celebratory day there was so much meaning attaching to this site I set up table and chairs, food and drink, under the plane trees next to the bridge and invited women to tell me what they had been recording, what stories they had about the bridge, or what practices they could name relating to that space.

I began to think about the bridge as land-mark, neither dwelling nor landscape but some kind of in-between site bearing traces of a desire for home and belonging in the world. What becomes apparent to me now was how much referencing I was doing to a completely different bridge, a different body of water. And what becomes interesting is what it is, then, that nonetheless intersects productively in these conversations, excitingly, resonating with possibilities. I hear of different women's knowing, the very material details of a body in the landscape, almost ignoring this bridge to walk elsewhere, talk elsewhere, of trees and wildflowers, movement and change, separation and connection, intimately detailed and inhabited.

I for my part am returned to a great iron bridge over the Firth of Forth.

For me it's the marker, the landmark for my father's and my grandmother's country, a great body of water and all sites along its edge. East at the great estuary mouth Aberlady Port Seton Prestonpens Cockenzie Cramond Queensferry, over the bridge and up the other side Wemyss Elie Anstruther Crail. You could see across the water to the Paps of Fife from my grandmother's house in Edinburgh. Just like a woman's breasts, my grandfather would say. And the inside of the house was forever reaching out to all these other places. My grandmother painted them all, on canvas, paper, great round beach stones, hooked into woollen rugs with a sack-cloth backing—the harbours the boats the salmon jumping upstream at Cramond. You could walk from there right along the coast, right under the huge bridge itself. We'd catch crabs

under the rocks with a bent hook, buy fish straight off the boats and later when I set up my own first household we lived behind the smoke houses on a harbour, and John Brown the fish man. He'd tell me when the herring were going to be ready for pickling. I'd go in for weeks and he'd say not today, not today, I'll let you know. And then suddenly he'd say—today's the day—here they are. And they were just plump, just right.

M: The way you talk about Scotland is so tactile and material but in my Scottish heritage there's such a gap, a longing, represented for me by the Wee Davy story. I had never heard about Wee Davy until just recently.

The story goes like this. My father's mother came to Australia from Scotland as a servant girl and married my grandfather, a Scottish carpenter. Although very poor she still wanted to return to Scotland to give birth to her first baby and when completing the paperwork for travel discovered that Papa had been married before and there was a surviving child of that marriage in Scotland. Nanna visited that child on the Firth of Forth and was persuaded by relatives to bring him back to Australia. Papa was furious and there was 'trouble' and Wee Davy was placed in the Barnardo's Homes, never to be heard of again. He was three.

This story is a kind of promise of connection that is lost; it represents all the loss and for me, a generational cycle of erasure and repression to do with connection to place. A double displacement, there is no indigenous to return to and as a third generation migrant I still bear the burden of guilt for the loss of indigenous in Australia. So there is no choice, I have to flesh out a connection to place here because it's the only place I can. As a child it was in the in-between, the lurky places, that I began to do that, the gully, marginal tea tree scrub in the fifties suburbs of Sydney, mangrove flats on the edge of the Lane Cove River and the beach, that marginal space of pleasure and play where we went for our summer holidays.

I first came to the beach near Red Rock about five or six years ago to stay at Mullaway and do some writing about beach and sea, holidays and pleasure in relation to women's production and that was the first time I visited Red Rock. I was struck very powerfully then, as I have been ever since by how beautiful the place is; when you come up over the rise on to the little beach, a small crescent moon shape edged with dripping silver casuarinas and the liver-coloured red rock at one end, right where the river meets the sea. I felt that it was so powerful that I shouldn't stay there and I wrote at the time 'I wonder what Aboriginal stories are washing in these waves', never imagining that there would be an answer. It was as if Red Rock called me back. Four years later I was approached to become part of the Yarrowarra project.

L: I've been coming to Red Rock to camp at Christmas for about fifteen years. A friend introduced it to me as a very special place where she had been coming since her children were small. They're all grown up and now they bring their own kids. My sister comes all the way over from Adelaide and we set up this campsite where part of the ritual is not only the rewriting or re-affirming of aspects of closest relationships, but also the extension of our respective families with friends, in-laws and visitors. Ever year we have a great big skordalia meal with our camping neighbours. Sometimes we have seventeen or more for this meal so we've started bringing really big cooking pots. Our neighbours make the skordalia sauce in the afternoon—fifteen cloves of garlic or more pounded slowly in a special pestle and mortar with a little boiled potato. We prepare the bread and the vegetables. Crunchy bread crisps on top of the tent or the car roof while we do a really big pot of potatoes and big pot of the freshest beans and

zucchinis we can find. You pile up your plate with warm vegetables, oil, salt and pepper, cooking juices all mixed in, great big hunk of bread and a big dollop of garlic skordalia sauce on top.

And you're really starving. 'Cause you get really hungry at the beach.

M: The thing that made the difference to me in coming to Red Rock was working with Yarrawarra stories. Tony Perkins told me a story of a massacre with a new creation story attached, told by his grandmother who survived the massacre because she was hiding in the bullrushes with a baby.

A local shepherd was killed and a hunting party came to punish the Aboriginal people at their camp at Black Adder Creek. The hunting party herded the people down the river and when they crossed the river some of the people were shot. The rest were then herded all the way down to Red Rock headland where they were forced off the headland into the sea and shot and the sea was red with their blood. But some of the people escaped into an underground cave below water level on the headland and crawled through a labyrinth under the earth until they came up at Corindi Lake, six kilometres south of Red Rock, where they have lived ever since.

The most important thing about this story is that I have never heard a massacre story with a creation story attached. The massacre stories I've heard have only been about the killings, but this is also about the possibility of survival and establishing a new way of life, making a new story of place. Knowing this story has changed my relationship with the Australian landscape as a whole because of the possibilities inherent in the new creation story. Also important is the openness and accessibility of the story because of Yarrawarra's mediating presence as a tourist venture and our mutual work in constructing and documenting the stories. After a ritual feast to mark the beginning of the project, I now feel comfortable to stay at Red Rock.

L: What performs the same function for me is the exchange of food, ritual and performance that is offered in Marie's image of the white tents. Marie remembers a row of white tents on the river front, her family selling bait to the white fishermen, and how at night the campers would call up the men to make music with them in exchange for food and drink.

When we began talking about how to write this paper we decided to go to Red Rock and subsist on what we could forage to record the process of learning about place. We began with the bush food walk that Yarrawarra offers as a guided tour. The boardwalk itself, snaking through the paperbarks, seems to embody the very question of how to proceed through the landscape with care, and desire, and imagination; how to manage desire itself.

We find geebung, sarsaparilla, wild parsnip, roly-poly, wombat berries ...

M: At dawn, all is emptied of colour, little sand island bleached bone, with knoll of silvery grass and dun coloured mangroves. I crouch cool and pale beside the river and six spoonbills stand bright white on sandbank, head still tucked into wing and fine white drifts of mist hover over rim of water.

Sun appears over shadow of small headland lighting gold the trunks of paperbarks around the broad curve of estuary and I am cradled in the big belly of the river widening out into changing shapes of sand and water. Here in this belly curve even the sea sounds round, and high above, fine white seed-head fluff drifts across pale blue sky reflected in new deep green of water.

The sun, now bright and warm, warms my blood and lights up patterns of ripples on skin of sand island and on its edge, broad curves made by water and tide are sculpted into body hollows in rosy golden light. It is dawn when Laura and I go fishing.

L: 'Margaret, Margaret, come here, I've caught a fish'.

I really wasn't totally convinced I had something on the line and then there it was in the shallows, not fighting wildly, thrashing, but just flipping and flopping. I thought I'd got something terribly deformed. For a moment there's no framework. Just something gone terribly wrong, misshapen, not fitting to any category.

And then of course gradually I could see that what looked like a bulbous growth was seaweed wrapped around, and that this deep orange floppy bit was a wide pulsing mouth. When I got it up onto the grass its skin was mottled deep yellowy and olive green. Its body long, eel-like, head huge and whiskered, and once I'd made out its eyes, tiny eyes, that's what made the difference.

M: The octopus was a bit the same, I was pulling out the seaweed on the hook and the octopus must have come with it, because just as I pulled the seaweed out of the water this octopus came out of the water and started running up the pebbles towards me and I stood there shouting 'Laura, Laura, it's an octopus! What will I do with it'. And you said catch it so I caught it with my hands and put it in the bucket and it climbed out of the bucket and started running across the park. And the fellow saying that they catch a few ockies, but he was surprised, and did we catch it on a hook, and we said, not really we didn't really catch it, it caught us. And then he said to turn it inside out, just stick the knife in the back of its head, and cook the legs.

L: In the channel beyond the island is where I'd go at dawn, waiting for the sun to come up and feel myself incorporated, part of the water itself. It's pleasure edged with fear, something to be renegotiated each time as the channel is constantly changing, sometimes wider, faster, deeper.

But on this occasion my sick body needs to be still. Mid morning I wade out to the little island and just lie down in the sandy dune grass amongst the pig-face. It's only when I prop myself awake I realise the sparse little bushes beside me are samphire and seablite, struggling woody stems with plump green and red edible parts, like long thin jelly beans with salt snap.

In the summers Rosi and I went there a lot with the babies. And we would just lie there, wallow really, in the warm wet sand, or propped against the bank while the children played. It was a lovely sort of detached safe place to be, and a place where we had a view on the world, not just because it was a vantage point but because it was a great space for reflection. We'd mull things over, slapping mud on our thighs. When we look at the aerial photos of the estuary, it's just like a huge belly, it sort of swells right there, with such a sense of encompassing.

The belly of the estuary is the place we are drawn to, where we begin and end each day, the necessary ground of our production. It is a place of exchange between tempestuous and dangerous mouth of river, salt and tidal—and still reaches of upper river, quieter fresh water where it winds into mountains. Sand and water channels, little sand island swirling and moving, form and shape always changing, ever becoming. It is the body/belly, Kristeva's semiotic chora, the maternal space of potentiality. What we arrive at is never a fixed point between body and language but the erotic of threshold, a movement between place and production.

M: Midday and low tide. I can see from the little bridge that tide is still out by the raw bright golden colour of seaweed on the very edge of rock platform. Closer, waves are already washing over outer edges where turbans live; thickly seaweeded rocks are pulpy flesh underfoot as everything on edge shimmers and moves. In between each little wave I focus on tiny spaces that open up between thick beds of sea weed, pink pebbled fist-sized rockpools with shells of every size shape and colour, but as soon as my eyes focus another wave comes and all is constantly shifting in patterns of water and light. The image will not stay still and try as I might I cannot see the turban shells that we saw the other day. I despair and then Laura comes along with two in her hand.

Seeing. Anxiety gone, I switch into being in that place and see lots of them, pink, blues, yellows, browns, covered with lichen seaweed and sea growths in tiny under-water hollow. My seeing changes from wanting to consume, to soft vision. Seeing from the heart. All life forms that inhabit this space with me are seen in their belongingness. Each food has its belonging in its particular place: wild parsnip in low sandy heath of wallum, wild asparagus vine in tall leafy bush, fish and octopus in belly of river, seaweed and turbans on rock platform. Learning to see them is learning to be in the place with its skin surfaces, body hollows and curves, nuances of light and movement, and to eat them is to participate in an exchange of flesh.

They are so much like a whole living environment that when it comes to killing them I want to have the water boiling hard and drop them in really quickly so that the moment of dying is small and I think about Shirley saying don't listen to the screams of the pipis when you put them in the pot. I put the lid on and the smell changes from seaweedy to one of boiling meat. Margie says they are ready when the door comes loose and the flesh starts to come out.

You have to pull the flesh out like pulling a plug (a bit like giving birth); there's a slight whoosh and you get a release of liquid, and then the whole lot comes out, elongated and then re-coils. We lay them then on the board and look at their whole form curled up into their little coils and we have to work out which are males and which females. Nan says the ones with the green tail are the boys and you throw the green bit away, and the yellow tails are girls, you can eat all of them.

L: Sorting out which bits to eat is a challenge because they are very foreign and there is nothing about them that is easily identifiable in terms of what you can eat and what you can't, so in the middle of it all we ring Tony again and ask him what you do with all that dark gritty sort of intestinal bit in the middle.

M: We move back and forward in our talk with Tony, Nan, Margie, Shirley. Tony says you can eat it all, just clean all the mess and grit out. Their talk is both very ordinary, and extraordinary in that they are sharing common everyday knowledge of home which has the power of heightening and mediating our relationship to place. It's not that we can't have a relationship to place on our own but we both enter a space of play that enriches the possibilities. Winnicott suggests that it is play in the presence of the other that has transformative potential. Like Carter's space in between where multiple differences in the space between self and other are the basis of new possibilities and Winnicott's space of play, it is this transitional space that enables us to take risks, to move forward. This moving forward is towards a different production: in Armstrong's words, a transformative aesthetics.

L: I love this part because once we have halved a turban down the middle it opens out into a sort of butterfly shape unlike any flesh I have seen before. At first I just rinse the

surface but it becomes three dimensional and instead of washing over the surface I want the water to pass through the tubes and I want to know where the beginning is and where the end is, where its food has come in and what goes out. There are still parts of undigested food apart from obvious sand. Minute but perfect portions of sea weed and even minuscule baby limpets intact. And as the water washes through soft frills of the inner walls bob in and out.

Once I have extracted the last bit of seaweed and grit, it is quite nice then to chop them up finely, making a lovely little pile of diced meat, much more of it than I thought.

Dusk. Colour has faded again on the river, silky black shadows and silver water, silhouette of Laura fishing. Wood for fire in big stacks so I collect bunches of fine dry needles from casuarinas and dry twigs scattered around fireplace. Fire is slow and Laura comes to help, says she is always in favour of small as tiny bundle of twigs and needles flicker alive and make sizzling sounds from still sappy gum. Hot plate warms up, wild parsnip and spinach are placed to boil, patties on to fry, fish in its bundle of foil, and octopus legs sizzle. We eat beside quiet ripple of river as tide comes in.

L: I love the yellow colour, the crispy brown bits of the patties, for appearance. And that sort of crunchy bit of the outside the soft fluffiness of the potato with the little bit of turban meatiness. Just the mildest flavour of the shellfish that was recognisable in the soup. I wonder if we could do it again? We had four big turban shells.

M: About a clove and a half of garlic, a quarter of an onion and a small handful of chopped fresh coriander, about the same quantity of ginger as garlic, and that all chopped really fine and a little shake of turmeric, coriander, and cumin.

L: And then chop the turban meat really fine, making sure to get rid of every last trace of grit. The slowness and care in preparation like a purification ritual, being aware of the sacred nature of eating out of that place, commensurate with its exquisite beauty.

M: As we leave we shine the torch into opaque surface of water and two tiny luminescent orange lights greet us. As our eyes get accustomed to darkness long feelers take form, segmented body and tail, then prawn slowly retreats under its rock, body first then bright orange glow enveloped in darkness.

This paper was written as a twenty minute performance script with a set of 30 slides for the purpose of the ASAL Conference. It is part of a larger work in progress being prepared for publication.