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# Swamp : walking the wetlands of the Swan Coastal Plain ; and with the exegesis, A walk in the anthropocene: homesickness and the walker-writer

Anandashila Saraswati  
*Edith Cowan University*

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# Swamp

walking the wetlands of the Swan  
Coastal Plain

with the Exegesis

A Walk in the Anthropocene  
homesickness and the walker–writer

By

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**This thesis is presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor  
of Philosophy  
Faculty of Education and Arts  
Edith Cowan University**

2012

## Abstract

This project is comprised of a creative work and accompanying exegesis. The creative work is a collection of poetry which examines the history and ecology of the wetlands and river systems of the Swan Coastal Plain, and which utilises the practice of walking as a research methodology. For the creative practitioner walking reintroduces the body as a fundamental definer of experience, placing the investigation centrally in the corporeal self, using the physical senses as investigative tools of enquiry. As Rebecca Solnit comments in her history of walking, ‘exploring the world is one of the best ways of exploring the mind, and walking travels both terrains’ (Solnit, 2000, p. 13).

The context for my poetic walking project *Swamp*, is a local and global environment undergoing an unprecedented loss of biodiversity, mainly due to the destruction of habitat and changes in climatic conditions (Reid, Partha Dasgupta, Robert M. May, A.H. Zakri, & Henk Simons, 2005, pp. 438-442). The loss of species and ecosystems that have been a part of our earth home results in the human experience of ‘homesickness’ — a longing for the home places that we have known and which have diminished or disappeared.

Before the arrival of the British colonists in 1829, the Swan River and adjacent wetlands were an integral part of the seasonal food source for the original inhabitants, the Noongar (Bekle, 1981). In addition wetland places were, and are, deeply embedded in the spiritual and cultural life of the Noongar people of the Swan Coastal Plain (O’Connor, Quartermaine, & Bodney, 1989).

In less than two hundred years since the establishment of the Swan River Colony (Western Australia), the lakes and rivers of the Swan Coastal Plain have undergone extreme changes, often resulting in complete draining and in-filling of wetland areas as the city and its suburbs spread beyond the original town limits. This re-engineering of the landscape has had a dramatic and detrimental impact upon biodiversity, water quality and the sense of place experienced by residents.

*Swamp* is a project that has three main facets:

- a) a body of original poetry which interprets the historical relationship between the British, European, and Chinese newcomers to Noongar country, and the wetlands lakes of the Swan Coastal Plain. The poetry contained in this thesis is copyright to the author, Anandashila Saraswati (Nandi Chinna).

- b) An essay which contextualises the project within the sphere of walking art, psychogeography, and the philosophical idea of ‘Homesickness’.
- c) A website, [www.swampwalking.com.au](http://www.swampwalking.com.au), which displays photographs documenting the walks I have carried out over the three year period of the project from February 2009 to February 2012.

The exegetical part of this project looks at the notion of ‘homesickness’ as a philosophical condition that can be seen as a motivating force in the practice of writing on walking. I use Debord’s theory of the *dérive* as a starting point for my walking methodology and examine nostalgia within the Situationist International (Debord, 1958) and subsequent psychogeographical movements. I also investigate the role of homesickness in the work of other writers who walk and who write about their walking practice.

Finally I discuss homesickness in the epoch of the Anthropocene (Crutzen & Schwägerl, 2011), the era in which the earth’s biosphere is characterised by human interventions which have changed the meteorological, geological and biological elements of our earth home. In the Anthropocene, the wilderness view of nature needs to be re-evaluated. I posit that walking is a way of reconnecting with the physical landscape and building relationships with small wilds that exist in our home places, and that writing about the walking allows these relationships and encounters to ripple out to readers, contributing to and enabling the development of an ethic of care for ecosystems and beings other than human.

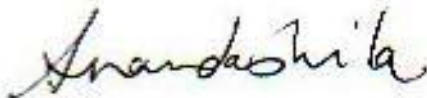
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## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank and acknowledge the Noongar elders past and present upon whose land this project was researched and written. In particular Dr Noel Nannup whose generosity in sharing his knowledge and beliefs has deepened my understanding of Noongar culture and country.

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Thanks also to the Interdisciplinary International Centre for Landscape and Language (ICLL), and The Centre for Research in Entertainment, Arts, Technology, Education and Communication (Createc) at ECU, for symposiums, field trips and seminars which inspired deeper insights on the Western Australian environment and connected me to other artists and writers who engage with the place of Western Australia in their work.

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# Table of Contents

<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>i</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>iv</b>
<b>Table of Contents</b> .....	<b>vi</b>
<b>Index of Figures</b> .....	<b>x</b>
<b>Index of Tables</b> .....	<b>xi</b>
<b>SWAMP</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Disappeared</b> .....	<b>3</b>
Transit.....	4
1871 .....	5
Mud Pie .....	7
The City.....	8
Shoes .....	10
Sinking a Well, 1832 .....	11
Jet d'eau — Eucalyptus Rudis, Flooded Gum. ....	12
Swan River Fish, 14 <sup>th</sup> September 1832 .....	13
Kingsford's Mill in Perth .....	15
The Ghost Road.....	16
Clearing the Swamp .....	18
Njookenbooroo .....	20
Fong Gow .....	25
The Ballad of Catherine Kelly.....	27
The Night Man .....	29
Reclaimed Girls.....	30
The Earth Closet.....	31
Undesirable Characters.....	32
Silent Morning.....	35
Yarning Circle .....	36
The Watermen .....	37
Suicide of an Engineer 1. ....	37
Suicide of an Engineer 2 .....	38
City as Boat .....	40
Riparian Zone, urban .....	41
Electric Creek .....	42

Illa Kuri .....	45
commune bonum: A common good .....	46
Washing Lane .....	47
Hydrology.....	48
Cranes .....	49
Watts Road Lake .....	50
Drain .....	51
The Collector .....	52
The TBM .....	53
The Furthest Shore .....	54

## **Remnant..... 56**

Writing on Water.....	58
A line Made by Walking .....	59
Boardwalk .....	60
Pelicans.....	61
The Swan River Warrior .....	62
Old Bottle Yard .....	63
Cut and Paste Lake .....	64
Mud Man (or how to sleep in mud).....	67
Beautiful Weeds .....	68
How He Became a Poet.....	69
The Mt Lawley Wandjina.....	70
Graceful Sun Moth .....	71
Anima .....	73
Dixon Reserve .....	74
The Spectacles .....	75
Manning Ridge .....	77
Bird Watching White Fella Style .....	79
Anstey Keane Dampland.....	81
Noctuary .....	82
Bibra Lake (Walliabup) Bird Hide, 1 .....	83
Bibra Lake (Walliabup) Bird Hide, 2.....	84
Horse Paddock Swamp.....	85
Bibra Lake Beat.....	86
Night Bird.....	86
Looking for Shirley Balla.....	87
Frog Swamp .....	88
The Fish.....	89
Stones .....	91
Estuary.....	92

<b>Returning .....</b>	<b>94</b>
Dragonfly Lake.....	96
Great Egret Lake .....	97
Campanile Tower .....	99
Foragers .....	100
Champion Lakes Regatta Centre.....	101
<b>Swan .....</b>	<b>102</b>
The Speed of Thoughts.....	103
Point Walter Spit .....	105
Swan River Canyon.....	106
Precipitation Cycles.....	107
The Black Swan.....	109
Gilbert Fraser Reserve, Swan River .....	111
White Swans.....	114
The Eye.....	119
Walters Brook.....	121
Tony Di Cerni Pathway .....	122
Banks to Bardon Pathway .....	123
<b>EXEGESIS.....</b>	<b>126</b>
<b>A Walk in the Anthropocene Homesickness and the Writer-Walker</b>	<b>126</b>
<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>127</b>
<b>Introduction Swamp Walking.....</b>	<b>128</b>
<b>Methodology Poepatetics, a Walking Investigation.....</b>	<b>133</b>
<b>Chapter One .....</b>	<b>138</b>
Pads, Bidis and Roads— .....	138
the Aboriginal Country in which we walk .....	138
1.1 Homesickness and the Swamps.....	144
<b>ChapterTwo Nostalgia and Homesickness .....</b>	<b>151</b>
<b>Chapter Three Homesickness in Psychogeography.....</b>	<b>163</b>
<b>Chapter Four The Long Walk Home —Walking and Writing .....</b>	<b>178</b>
<b>Chapter Five A Walk in the Anthropocene.....</b>	<b>196</b>
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>209</b>
<b>Poetry References.....</b>	<b>212</b>
<b>References Cited.....</b>	<b>214</b>
<b>Complete Bibliography.....</b>	<b>226</b>

<b>Appendix One: Swampwalking.com.au .....</b>	<b>255</b>
<b>Appendix Two: Lake and Land reclamation .....</b>	<b>256</b>
<b>Appendix Three: Tim Grant’s Memory of a Swamp .....</b>	<b>257</b>
<b>Appendix Four: Swamp Images .....</b>	<b>258</b>
<b>Appendix Five: Image Copyright Permissions .....</b>	<b>262</b>
<b>Appendix Six: Information Letter to Interviewees.....</b>	<b>264</b>
<b>Appendix Seven: Consent Forms .....</b>	<b>266</b>
<b>Appendix Eight: Alluvium .....</b>	<b>268</b>

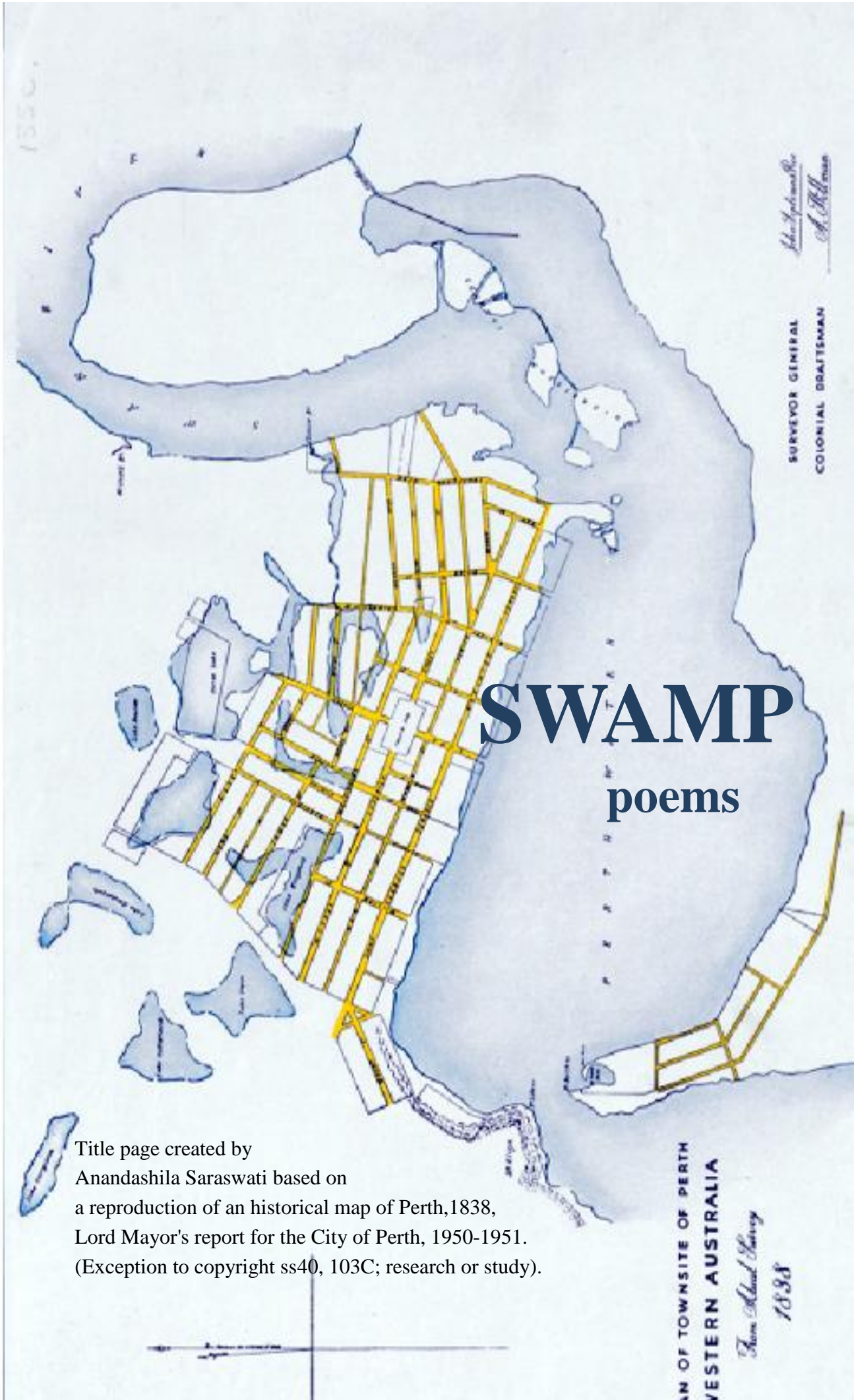
## Index of Figures

Figure 1. Boojoormelup — Lake Henderson 1864.....	3
Figure 2. Perth Railway Station, site of Lake Kingsford, 2009. ....	6
Figure 3. Mounts Bay Road, Perth, circa 1870. ....	9
Figure 4. Metropolitan Street Directory, map 46, 1978.....	17
Figure 5. The Swamp. AB Webb c 1921-22.....	19
Figure 6. Flooding in a market garden beside the Swan River. ....	24
Figure 7. Chinese Market Gardener, South Perth (name not recorded).....	26
Figure 8. Camp at Herdsman Lake, 1904 .....	33
Figure 9. Electric Creek, East Perth, 2010. ....	43
Figure 10. Alfred Stone at Claisebrook 1860-70. ....	44
Figure 11. Cockburn Gateways Shopping Centre, 2011.....	55
Figure 12. Swans on North Lake, 2009. ....	57
Figure 13. <i>Synemon sophia</i> collected on the south coast of WA in 1841.....	72
Figure 14. Drainage compensating basin, Mitchell Freeway Perth, 2011. ....	95
Figure 15. Great Egret, Mitchell Freeway Compensating Basin 2011 .....	98
Figure 16. Black Swan. ....	102
Figure 17. Willem de Vlamingh’s ships with black swans, at the entrance to the Swan River, Western Australia. ....	108
Figure 18. Dredge named the Black Swan, decorated, 1897. ....	110
Figure 19. White Swan in Hyde Park 1914.....	113
Figure 20. White Swans, Fremantle Railway Station .....	115
Figure 21. Western Australian Postage Stamp issued 1884.....	116
Figure 22. Swan Lager Beer Bottle Label.....	116
Figure 23. Satellite view of the Swan and Canning Rivers.....	118
Figure 24. Location of study site. Perth, Western Australia .....	146
Figure 25. Map of the Townsite of Perth, 1838 .....	148
Figure 26. Arrowsmith’s plan of the town site of Perth 1833.....	149
Figure 27. Guide Psychogeographique De Paris.....	166
Figure 28. The magnitude of habitat loss/fragmentation is greater in regions with high maximum temperatures.....	169
Figure 29. Daylighting the Cheong Gye Cheon River, Seoul, Korea. ....	171

Figure 30. Desire Line, Robertson Park, Perth 2010. ....	172
Figure 31. <i>Dérive</i> Smartphone Application .....	173
Figure 32. <i>Drift</i> Smart Phone Application .....	173
Figure 33. Map of Basho’s Journeys .....	184
Figure 34. Thoreau’s Walking Country .....	188
Figure 35. Map of the Town of Concord .....	188
Figure 36. Globaia Map of Global Transport Systems .....	200
Figure 37. Map of Global Suicide Rates, 2011.....	203
Figure 38. <i>Carnaby’s Cockatoos</i> — <i>Calyptorhynchus latirostris</i> .....	206
Figure 39. Map Showing Original Lakes and Land reclamation areas of Perth.....	256
Figure 40. Tim Grant’s memory of the swamp in Dixon Park, Hamilton Hill, 1960s .	257
Figure 41. Robertson Park, Perth, 1860-70.....	258
Figure 42. Drain and general view of reclaimed swamp 1920s.....	259
Figure 43. Building a stormwater drain, Perth, ca. 1906. ....	259
Figure 44. Commencement of Royal Street main drain 1898-1900. ....	260
Figure 45. Millars Dewatering system at an excavation, 1965.....	260
Figure 46. Aboriginal women at Perth, including Fanny Balbuk (far right). ....	261
Figure 47. Laying the Golden Pipeline from Perth to Kalgoorlie .....	261

## Index of Tables

Table 1. Impact on Water Availability — WA, Reduced Inflows to Dams. ....	146
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# SWAMP poems

Title page created by  
Anandashila Saraswati based on  
a reproduction of an historical map of Perth, 1838,  
Lord Mayor's report for the City of Perth, 1950-1951.  
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TOWNSITE OF PERTH  
WESTERN AUSTRALIA  
*John Mitchell Survey*  
1838





It is through the lake system. There is a water serpent down there below which is extremely important and the water on the surface is really the marks where the waugle wither wound his way through and came up after making the streams and the water ways. It's all part of the ecological system to purify the land and the family. Once it was surrounded by waterways and if they fill them up with rubbish then the land begins to die.

Cedric Jacobs

A lake is the landscape's most beautiful and expressive feature. It is earth's eye; looking into which the beholder measures the depth of his own nature.

Henry David Thoreau



# Disappeared



**Figure 1. Boojoormelup — Lake Henderson 1864**

Image courtesy of the State Library of Western Australia, 3451B/1.

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## **Transit**

*Site of Lake Kingsford 2009*

A black transit guard  
asks a white boy for his ticket.

Boy:

*You should show me some fuckin respect  
this is my country.*

Transit guard asks for boy's  
name and address. Boy shakes his finger  
in transit guard's face:

*Show me some fuckin respect  
you are in my country.*

The escalator keeps pouring people  
onto the concourse. They stream  
around this argument and through the tag off gates.

Trains hove into the station and depart,  
their steel parallels laid down  
along the dreaming path of Fanny Balbuk,  
straight down to Claisebrook  
where the channels of ancient rivers  
rush through barrel drains  
to meet *Illa Kuri*, twelve rocks  
standing up near water.

## 1871

The sky is breaking, draining clouds,  
pinging against unfamiliar roof tops,  
insisting its way to the lowest point  
and then raising its skirts higher.

The river washes out of its gash,  
spills from karstic furrows,  
opens the ground in a wide brown gaze.

Fish eggs hatch from muddy nests,  
glaucomic tadpoles make their way across town,  
their frogselves singing from newly formed ponds.

Rows of cabbages and potatoes  
drift from their moorings,  
a flock of great cormorants perched on the fence line,  
sing transformation — farmland to lake.



**Figure 2. Perth Railway Station, site of Lake Kingsford, 2009.**

Picture courtesy of Anandshila Saraswati (Nandi Chinna)

## **Mud Pie**

Water was the first being;  
then alluvium came without trace or mark,  
before kronos when the world  
was still a cold mud pie,  
any event pressed into it  
later read as history.

Cut yourself a piece and bite;  
it'll taste like salt, like bodily fluids,  
sparks will turn in an upward drift  
forming wings, legs, whole arks  
full of species illuminating the night.

Dead for years,  
their lights still flicker  
through the cycle of turning;  
and trick us into believing that we know where we are,  
that all we see passing will return again.



## **The City**

*A great abundance of fresh water of the best quality.*  
(Fraser, 1927, p. 51)

A scratch in the sand reveals fresh inundations,  
mosquitoes are most peculiarly intimate,  
swans can be plucked like black lilies  
adrift in shallow reed beds.

Here is the place to erect a tent,  
stretch linen and rope across  
the littoral where mudflats prevent the ocean  
from swallowing the river.

This could be the future in two dimensions,  
a gaze measured into links and chains.  
Between here and Mt Eliza tendrils of smoke  
smudge the view, springs bleed south  
beneath ink line drawings  
of the imminent, the unborn city.

*I have just returned from (Perth) ... Not a blade of grass to be seen — nothing but sand, scrub, shrubs and stunted trees from the verge of the river to the tops of the hills ... The soil is such, on which no human being can possibly exist. (cited in C. T Stannage, 1979)*



State Library of Western Australia

**Figure 3. Mounts Bay Road, Perth, circa 1870.**

Image courtesy of the State Library of Western Australia, 01673PD  
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*We had an excursion to Perth ... such a comfortless hole. The miserable huts are built of wood on a soil of dark-coloured sand swarming with fleas and mosquitoes.. a more perfect purgatory could not be devised. (cited in C. T Stannage, 1979)*

## Shoes

*George Fletcher Moore's Found Poem*  
(Moore, 1884, p. 29)

No object to steer by  
except your own shadow  
moving as you move,  
perplexing motion.

The leather of boots  
joins the principles of increase and decay:  
cracks open at the toe line,  
splits where the foot compresses,  
each step the parched sole wounds  
back into porous skin.

Lace and tongue returning to soil,  
every two or three weeks  
we wear out a pair.

*There is a great shortage of shoes  
in the whole colony.*

## **Sinking a Well, 1832**

In April the cat lies  
with her back to the fire,  
a sure message from a storm's  
dark morning purring rain  
throughout the day and night.

A scrape in the ground 2 feet deep  
is level with the summer sunk swamp.  
Beneath the ground's skein  
the country tells its story in layers:  
vegetable mould, blue and black clay,  
white or dun clay, buff loamy clay,  
yellow sandy loam, dun loamy sand.

Water at 12 feet,  
brackish but suitable for washing.  
Potable at 16 feet, cool and sapid:  
place lips to the tea stained hole  
and suck.

## **Jet d'eau — Eucalyptus Rudis, Flooded Gum.**

*When the last two trees were struck with an axe, for the purpose of making a boundary mark — a jet d'eau issued from out of a blue gum tree, and continued running without intermission during the time of our stay — a quarter of an hour. This water had a strong chalybeate taste. (Moore, 1884, p. 60)*

A fountain of subterranean creek water  
sieved through stones and gravel,  
pumped through sun punched leaves  
turned in to shade their faces.

Below the surface old rain  
edges towards air, revolves  
on this endless circuit, ferrous  
to an axe's blade, it seeps through canvas bags,  
rusts the cloth of shirts.

In a land with no corners  
the boundaries are alive;  
their bark peels like skin, their sap  
soaks mouths, bites tongues.

## Swan River Fish, 14<sup>th</sup> September 1832

*Fish numerous in the river about and below Perth. I mentioned our having taken 10 000 at one draught of the seine. (Moore, 1884, p. 85)*

Push boat slip in the wake of morning  
stroking rings in a murky surface,  
beneath our longing mullet ride,  
grazing weed in turning tide.

Salt diffusing into sweetness  
flutes the river up to Guildford.  
The splash and surge of fish leaping,  
surge into our calloused weaving.

Drawn out of their stroke  
in a tangle of strings,  
tug of air and febrile sigh,  
torn scale and opaque eye,  
  
a silver pile heaped on the bank:  
kingy, snapper, mullet and perch,  
cobblers' blade and dark twist,  
the jagged spines of eel-like fish.

Hand over hand our harvest hauling  
furrowed wave where eggs are spawning.  
We count and stitch our catch in threes,  
fish-shaped lanterns hang from trees.

## **Kingsford's Mill in Perth**

*Mr Kingsford proposes to cut a deep trench and lay a pipe from some lagoons behind Perth, into the town to afford him a good supply of water. (Moore, 1884, p. 185)*

February spikes the afternoon into evening;

frogs entomb themselves

in the peat of the swamp

like an emperor's clay army.

Wedged between god and mortal,

lungs barely whisper,

for months or years in deep meditation

suspending all thought of

caddis fly, mosquito, and spawn.

A percussion of boot steps

wake the sleeping deities;

shovel blades and crow bars

void them through the flume,

churning mill wheels

into their next incarnation.



## **The Ghost Road**

*Njookenbooroo/ Herdsman Lake* (Department of  
Lands and Surveys Perth, 1978)

The cartographer is not a boatman,  
dipping his paddle amongst spinning ducks,  
while companionable swans gaggle  
in the centre of his calculations.

Beyond his sight a swamp harrier quarters the fringes,  
scoping the undulations of sedge and reeds.  
Coots dive and emerge again  
at the opposite end of measure.

A line drawn on water cannot be transcribed  
into chains, perches, miles;  
its equations are dismantled  
by the punting scull of webbed feet.

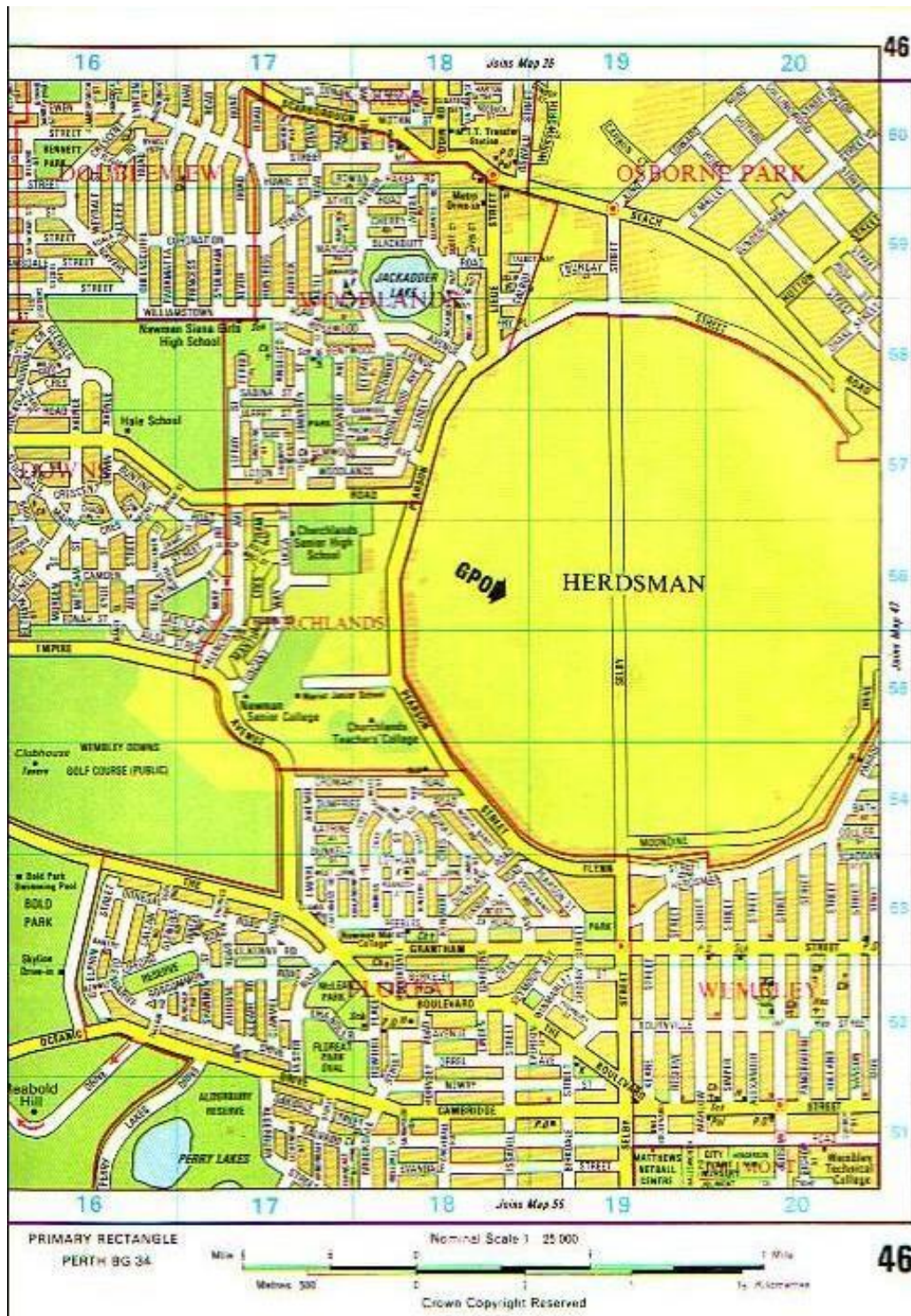


Figure 4. Metropolitan Street Directory, map 46, 1978  
 (Exception to copyright ss40, 103C; research or study).

## Clearing the Swamp

Early each morning you pull on  
mud stiffened pants, scald tea,  
slip back into the hole you climbed out of yesterday.

Yanget and cumbungi  
have grown back overnight;  
severed shoots have crawled out of their roots  
to mock the blade and hand.

Black mud fingers grip your trousers,

drag you in up to your thighs.

Mosquitoes and leeches devour you,

tiger snakes wait coiled,

for a mouse or frog or a hand

grasping a hoe.

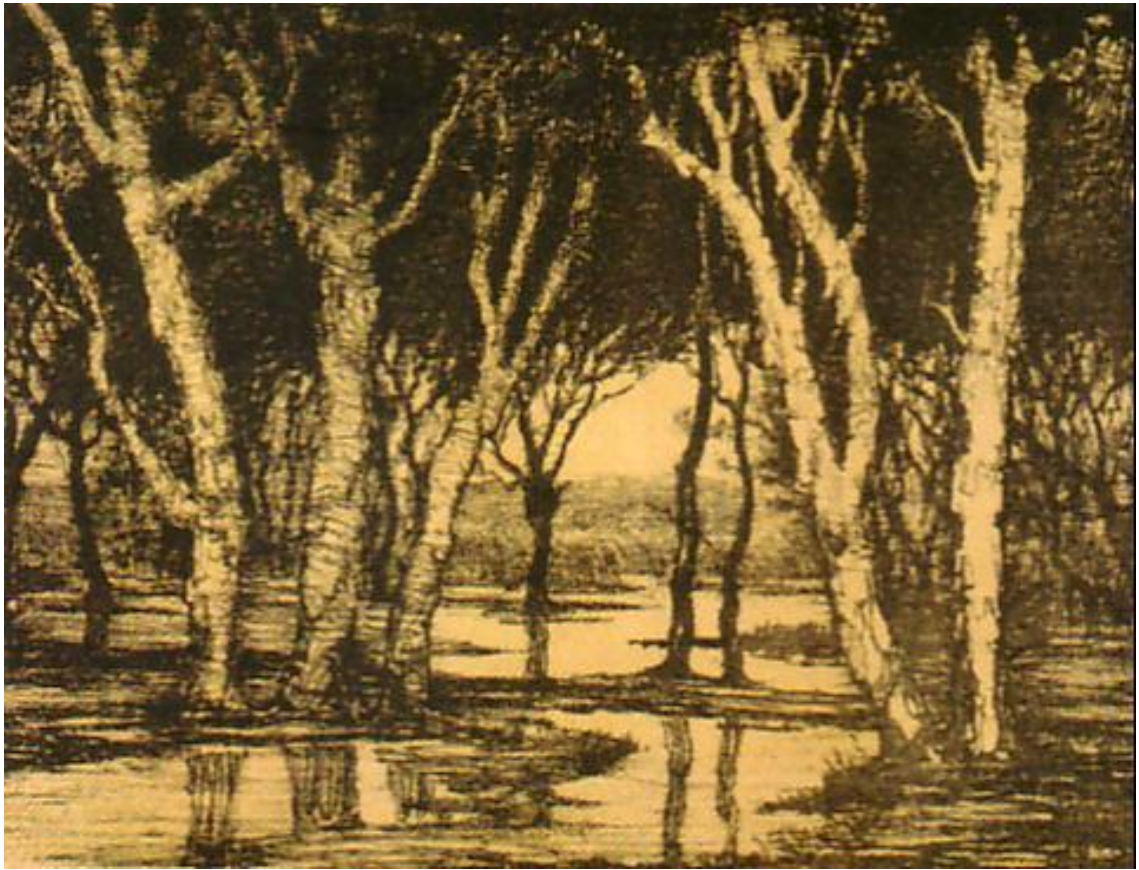
From a venetian island of reeds

something screams.

You drop your shovel,

leaving a pair of mudcaked boots,

in the wake of the brown bittern's cry.



**Figure 5. The Swamp. AB Webb c 1921-22**  
(Exception to copyright ss40, 103C; research or study).

## **Njookenbooroo**

*Mr R. N Stubberfield 1898, gardening and bee keeping; potatoes-12 ton to the acre, lettuce 2-3llbs each. (Easton, 1971, pp. 158-161)*

Eighteen days after hard seeds  
are pressed into the sloe  
string line straight drills of hot  
pink radishes are ready to pull.

Potato hedges wilt at midday,  
resurrect themselves at dusk;  
their bossy white stones  
shove clumpy holes in the peat.

Bees lick pollen  
from stamen to petal,  
and head back to the hive  
fully laden with love.

All night the heads of lettuce  
absorb the moonlight,  
rows of green lanterns  
illuminate the black earth.

*Mr. J.S Collins 13 acres, poultry farm, fifty birds per  
quarter acre,  
flock of 550 laying hens and 1000 pullets. (Easton,  
1971)*

Dawn has barely opened the doors  
of cages before the hens are marching  
with their hard toes out onto the acre.

A scattering of grain, beaks like pincers  
they fossick up the history of the Quaternary  
sediment,  
the skeletons of the food chain, the dormant fleas.

By noon the birds have quarried  
damp lagoons in ground.  
Tossing dirt onto their feathers  
they plant their breasts like speckled shrubs.

And after all the careful sitting  
tiny replicas of the broody hen  
emerge from beneath her wings,  
already full of knowing,  
they are gazing at horizons,  
scratching at the earth.



*16 dairies in Osborne Park, 1913. Fodder grown in swamp. William Edward Robinson "Teddy Bobby", dairyman 1905. By 1931 he had a herd of 180 cattle and ten horses for farm and delivery work.(Easton, 1971)*

A meandering pad from dairy to lake edge  
laid down by the rhythm of udders swinging  
towards feed troughs, buckets, strong hands.

Treat her mean and she'll shit in the pail,  
sing to her and your pasture will return as cream.

In spring a whole new lake is rising:  
lucerne, cape weed and burr.

Camouflaged in white and black  
wagtails hitch rides on bovine backs.

*Three other farmers were the Guelfi brothers who held 7 and 1/2 acres consisting mainly of swamp land in Njookenbooroo Swamp. Their land was very fertile as shown in the results of the 1912 season, when with half the property under tomatoes they sold 800 cases ... plus 5 tons of inferior quality tomatoes to the sauce factories. (Easton, 1971, p. 160)*

Bamboo canes weave a threshold  
along rows of lake bed unused to exposure,  
glinting with black silicone, reflecting  
the green hope of a first season.

Morning and evening and in between,  
workers hawk baskets,  
hands dyed green with leaf dust,  
sweat running green to keep up  
with the ripening. It's tomatoes:  
on bread for breakfast,  
with meat for lunch,  
sauced with rice for dinner.

All night behind closed eyes  
tomatoes are falling, tumbling, rotting underfoot.

In winter time the runnels flow,  
and footprints fill with water.  
Farmers skiff their boat and oars,  
harvest fish in place of verdure.





**Figure 6. Flooding in a market garden beside the Swan River.**

Image courtesy of the State Library of Western Australia, 050007PD  
(Exception to copyright ss40, 103C; research or study).

## Fong Gow

At night I hear a horse galloping through the garden.

Panic needles my ribs, imagining tended rows  
trampled to pieces under its hooves.

When I run out to the allotment  
the vegetables are intact, mutely squatting  
like fat birds in the swampy turf,  
the horse is a shadow dozing in its yard.

In the other country my wife will be planting rice,  
the daughter I begat but have never seen strapped to her back.  
Every five years a visit home and another child is introduced;  
*this is your father.*

Forty five summers;  
I tear strips of bark to shade seedlings,  
shoulder yoke and watering cans;  
the sun bakes the earth into a black scab,  
burning the last traces of Quandong  
from the soles of my feet.

My long queue\* is grey.

All night a horse gallops through the field

of my body, chasing my blood

through arteries and organs,

through the bind of two countries,

careering wildly into dawn.

\*plait



Figure 7. Chinese Market Gardener, South Perth (name not recorded).

Image courtesy of the State Library of Western Australia, 050007PD  
(Exception to copyright ss40, 103C; research or study).

## **The Ballad of Catherine Kelly**

Aboard the Mary Harrison,  
bantling concealed under petticoats,  
Catherine leans against the deck rail,  
up-chucks her guts from the Cape  
of Good Hope to Fremantle.

16<sup>th</sup> of September she crosses the workhouse yard  
to the corrugated privy feeling  
like she's eaten something bad,  
she squats over the pit hole, presses her arms  
into the looming mound of her stomach.

The baby slips

out, a parachutist at the end of their line  
silks furled, umbilical full length  
soundlessly plummeting  
into the soft cushion of human waste  
without one inhalation.

Catherine stuffs her bloody skirts and rags into the hole  
fermented space. Her child has never been.

She returns to the kitchen stove  
wet hands pushing the slump of her belly  
back into its cavity, eyes drowning.

## The Night Man

He leaves my bed around midnight;  
as his body warmth dissipates  
I keep sensing his shape curled into me.  
Around the quiet enclosures of shadow and sleep  
his footsteps fall in sync with horse breath  
and wheel rut, crimping back lane weeds.

I dream him in black and white  
moving through the town  
with his hat rim turned down;  
like a priest he knows too much  
of everybody's business,  
of the intimate secrets that lurk  
inside the hooded cans.

His children rarely see his face;  
before dawn he is back, creaking  
harness and rusted gate, he slips back into  
his body's indent, a faint trace of his night's work  
lingering in the sheets.

## Reclaimed Girls

*By 1898 seventy girls had been reclaimed. (C.T Stannage, 1979, p. 261).*

Children are swelling inside the bodies  
of barefoot girls who leave their tracks in the sand  
up the slow hill to the end of the street.

The distance between birth and birth is a skipping  
game

turning faster and faster, *my mother said that I never  
should*

*play with the gentlemen in the wood ... .*

The sheets are clean, the girls' hands raw,  
buckets spill black water on the floor  
and out into the yard, down the unmade street,

a dark trickle where the sand is so brightly white,  
so over exposed in the brittle light.

## **The Earth Closet**

*By 1971 there were no earth closets left in Perth city.*  
(Easton, 1971, p. 127)

Some days it feels like I'm dying:  
take me down to the back yard,  
my feet soaked in the long grass,  
scents of wormwood and lemon.

Along the rows of gardens  
we're all doing the same parade;  
beginning before dawn,  
a handful of wood ash, one of lime,  
sluice my bloody rags in with the rest.

Water pools against the back fence  
where rhubarb grows so well.  
Our swallowed words rise up  
like undigested bones  
as we line up for our turn  
outside the blistered door.



## Undesirable Characters

*Letter from Mr J.L. Ford to the Perth Road Board regarding a settlement of 'very undesirable characters camped in the swamp further down Guildford Road'. The Maylands Local Board of Health was asked to attend to their removal. (C. T Stannage, 1979)*

The sky is too high and too blue;  
at night southern constellations turn;  
even they don't speak her language as she lies  
beneath the roof of her raw timbered house.

Cold hours descend, diffusing the space  
between air and water. At the end of her garden  
the lake fringe is blurred by green canopies,  
grey bark stripped to the shoreline.

At dawn she can smell wood smoke,  
hear children shout, dogs bark,  
birds whose songs sound as though they're crying.

When there is a knock at the door she sits very still.  
Pretending she is deaf, she imagines 'Mrs Constable  
in her Garden', paints herself into the scene,  
presses hard against the frame.



**Figure 8. Camp at Herdsman Lake, 1904**

Daisy Bates Papers, courtesy of the Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide, MSS 572.994 B32t/Series 9. (Exception to copyright ss40, 103C; research or study).



**Figure 9. Herdsman Lake, 1904**

Daisy Bates Papers, courtesy of the Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide, MSS 572.994 B32t/Series 9. (Exception to copyright ss40, 103C; research or study).



**Figure 10. Camp at Lake Monger, 1923.**

Image courtesy of the State Library of Western Australia. 54500P

(Exception to copyright ss40, 103C; research or study).

## Silent Morning

*Charile Ariti noticed that bird numbers fell dramatically around the end of the 1950's. He judged that this may have been related to the spraying for Argentine Ants. He and others believe the bird numbers today are far less than in earlier days. (Kennealy, 1994, p. 10)*

Without the morning alarm  
of magpie, crow and wattle bird,  
the sun volleys against walls and curtained windows,  
the somnolent dream on in their beds.

Down at the swamp:  
water boatmen don't row their morning regatta,  
dragon flies are not hovering in webless spaces.

Opaline droplets coalesce with water,  
gather in reed beds,  
drift through the wire of chook pens,  
and settle on lawns.

Morning's orchestra is deaf and mute  
bereft of instruments,  
tuned to an inaudible pitch.

## **Yarning Circle**

*Cockburn Wetlands Education Centre, Oct 2010*

We lived in a wet world  
swallowed straight from its sandy chine;  
our underwater visible through  
membranes of pupil and weed;  
our skin as lake, rich, edible, microscopic.  
Beneath aquatic, forgetting being human,  
our fluids were osmosed to pond water.

We grew up that way:  
tadpoles turning into frogs  
turtles on the march in wobbly lines,  
secret clutches of pale green eggs.

We were raised on mud:  
up to our knees, blackening our faces  
we smelt as it smelled, sweet and decomposed.

A swamp harrier hovered above our shoulders,  
its sight line beyond the edges of our world:  
our metamorphosis happened amongst the reed beds,  
our flight so brief and beautiful.

## The Watermen

### Suicide of an Engineer 1.

*Charles Yelverton (CY) O'Connor,  
Engineer in Chief of Western Australia,  
1891 -1902.*

The rider can't be sure  
if it's wailing he hears when he sets the charge,  
lights the fuse and blows a hole in the river's mouth.

He wonders if it's just the westerly  
skirling his ears with salt,  
or water keening through pipes;

or the refrain of a cantus firmus country  
composed by wind and time and people on foot,  
carrying maps in their throats.

Phrases chatter and babble,  
riff, skittle and scat inside him  
as he rides down Cantonment Street;  
heads south along the beach,  
pistol huge and cold in his pocket.

With one last thing to do:

*Put the wing walls to Helena weir at once;*

he drowns the cacophony with a gunshot,

his rider-less horse shying in the tide.

## **Suicide of an Engineer 2**

*Frederick Lawson, the Engineer for  
Metropolitan Water Supply, Sewerage and  
Drainage in Western Australia, 1913 -  
1924.*

His first destiny was to be born number eight  
in a litter of eleven, a small limbed animal  
to creep about the underworld, crouch in culverts  
bewitched by the way water swirls  
from pond to bucket, to rattling pipe,  
spurts from a tap and back again  
anti – clockwise into the unknown.

He imagines gadgets on strings and wires,  
the engine of the earth,  
melting rock and cooling water;  
re-designs streams as brick lined  
barrel drains, sheared up with trees,  
pulsed with a steam driven pump.

In 1916 he tunnels beneath France  
with a hose, a pipehead, and a canvas water bag,  
drags the river to one hundred and ten thousand  
fighting men and eighty thousand horses.  
Pipelines, pumping plant, purifying works and  
reservoirs, change course every morning  
from Villers-Bretonneux  
to the Hindenburg Line.

At the Swan River; he channels effluent into the ocean  
but still it piles up on Burswood Island,  
filters through limestone, gravel and sand,  
and ends up in the body of the fish  
now plated on the Governors table.

Sunday the newspapers are vitriolic,  
as if all excrement somehow emanates  
from the engineer's drafting table.

Early Monday morning,  
his thoughts are awash with estuary.  
On the river flats at Claremont  
his body is a nightshirt detritus  
lapping against the shore.



## City as Boat

A thin skein of sand and limestone  
porous as a sponge, laid down

by shorelines receding and encroaching.

Concrete caulking and steel reinforcement,  
anchor into the rusty belly of an aquifer;

city as luxury cruise liner:

swimming pools, gymnasiums, casinos,  
tennis greens, movie theatres, bars.

The UV index soars and cars spill  
across freeways mirrored in steel and glass,  
buildings shift minutely in the wind.

The city embarks: even the captain and crew  
have no idea of our final destination.

At night passengers are restless in their bunks,  
tumbling into unconsciousness, dreaming the barely  
perceptible sound of water seeping.

## **Riparian Zone, urban**

Where the road's edge laps up  
against curbing, rain moats  
a rapid stream in the curve  
of tarmac, banks up with leaf litter,  
a ragged smear of feathers.

At low points muddy pools  
swirl with plastic bags;  
paper cups plug an iron grate  
in the stygian slit of the drain.

The seed dropped into dust filled-chinks,  
by wind or a passing bird,  
holds moisture long enough  
to unfurl two leaves and be swept away.

The road slithers away from the river,  
hissing into the underground.  
Beyond the difficulties of stopping,  
a duck and her ducklings step  
into a soundscape of roar.

## **Electric Creek**

*Claisebrook/Yoondoorup*

In the streets of Silver City

a naiad has moved into the fountain.

She guards her water well, falls in love

with the ABC radio presenter leaving

the building at midnight, seduces him

with her seed pod lips, her electric creek;

she slips down her architect designed riffle zone,

dowses bronze turtles that march endlessly upstream,

plane tree leaves piling up on their backs.

She beckons him with the sound of water trickling over stones,

echoing through the Brook Street tunnel.

She utters some Noongar language,

shimmies under the boardwalk beside the café

and disappears into Claisebrook Lagoon.

She desires his child, a partly mortal drop of water,

a creature of the creek but with a will of its own.

With his late night broadcast ringing in his ears

he listens for the sound of fountain spray,  
never knowing by whose grace the creek  
will or will not be flowing.



**Figure 9. Electric Creek, East Perth, 2010.**  
Picture courtesy of Ananadashila Saraswati (Nandi Chinna)



**Figure 10. Alfred Stone at Claisebrook 1860-70.**

Image courtesy of the State Library of Western Australia, 3245B/14  
(Exception to copyright ss40, 103C; research or study).

## Illa Kuri

Gubabbilup

Jamoonobing

Boogoorinup

Goonderup

Gulugulup

Goolyamulyup

Goongarnulynarrimup

Boodjamooling Yandigup

Doordyoogading

Widdogootogup

Gogngoongup

Someone has been sleeping here

on cardboard boxes sodden with overnight rain.

The sacred dreaming trail is lined with pea gravel,  
its edges stained pink with glyphosphate.

Twelve stones remember twelve lost lakes:  
in every photograph of every stone  
the djidi djidi bird flits into the frame.

**commune bonum: A common good**

*The Kennedy Fountain, built 1860 by Governor Kennedy, was Perth's first public water fountain.*  
Interpretive signage, Kennedy Fountain.

Traffic flows around the bay  
in the constant curve of Gooninup.

I am wading and falling through a dry pond  
the plane tree leaves have blown upon,

empty bottles and cigarette packets  
drown in autumn's shedding.

The fountain pool is full of trees  
the copper pipe verdigris,

Swallowed back into the hill  
the chine spouts weeds instead of water.

## **Washing Lane**

*Site of Mews Swamp*

The work is hard;  
it grabs your face and pinches it,  
drags your focus inwards,  
squinting into a mobile phone screen.  
15 minutes of sun on a concrete wall,  
suck down 4 cigarettes.

There's the work,  
there's the thinking about the work,  
and the work about the thinking.

In Money Street a man in a glass fronted office  
leans into his computer screen, the image splits  
and merges: a house, some land, a lifestyle for sale.

Up Washing Lane, two Noongars wander in the autumn sun.  
Cutting back along Money Street, I see them  
like a mirage heading south, barely perceptible  
in the emptiness of the laneway.



## Hydrology

Only the wading birds remember  
the hydrology of the oval.

We walk our dogs, kick soccer balls,  
practice golf swings across this low lying place  
where dawn mist still seeks to connect and transpire.

Its shoreline is pressed beneath  
night soil, fish bones, offal,  
glass and metal, all our temporality.

Underground the tide retreats to the west.

The oval is mown and fertilised.

Bore holes spit rusty mnemonics

early on summer mornings

when the ibis return to probe this dampland

with their sharp beaks.

## **Cranes**

*Fiona Stanley Hospital*

Seven tower cranes  
nest beside the freeway,  
a weft of rooms and holes,  
crenellations in bird space.

From every compass point  
these cranes are a new migration,  
they stalk their quarry, swing  
yellow necks above our transit.

Soon we don't notice them,  
their long legs quickly out-grow banksia woodland,  
cockatoo flight path, the interior  
of the egg within the nest.

Soon we no longer hear the cranes above  
the wailing siren of our own emergency.

## **Watts Road Lake**

*Filled and developed for housing in 1987.*

I watched the heron morph  
from hunter to hunted.

Further along the path, my parents returned  
to find my bike wheel spinning  
on the pavement, my body covered  
in dew, rolled down the grassy embankment  
to the edge of the reeds where the heron's  
flight shadow painted a dark torsade upon the water.

Coming back now; the roads turn in loops  
and end in cul-de-sacs.

The street names are an anamnesis to alluvium:

Old Lake Grove, River Bed Place,

Canning River Garden, Billabong Cove,

Foreshore Entrance, Waterside Retreat.

## **Drain**

*Drain: a continual loss, demand, expenditure. A tube or wick for draining an abscess. A channel or pipe along which liquid drains. SOED*

While rain makes the earth aquatic,  
drowns the slabs of half built houses,  
blurs the horizons of unfinished rooms,  
splatters sewer pipes not yet connected,  
we crawl through a man hole into the underground;

tunnel beneath the embryonic suburb  
where all the nights of the future  
are plumbed to pour away  
from bodies stripped of suits and dresses,  
sweat and love and childhood diseases:  
a cloacae maxima of blood and faeces,  
antibiotics and hormones flushed  
down a splash hole of white.

But for now we are running bent double;  
our screams tear around corners, reach the junctions ahead of our feet;  
we huddle in the halo of our cigarettes, under the s-bend of our echoes,  
our whole lives poised above our heads.

## The Collector

walks the blocks of Northbridge  
eyes down, for a glimpse of the night before.  
Between Newcastle and Brisbane streets,  
a broken chain, a crucifix, the sheen of a small pearl  
embedded in the lip of the street.

His kitchen table bows  
under a wunderkammer of misplacements —  
gold rings and silver bracelets,  
strings of beads, assorted keys —  
so that his house leans south-west,  
its foundations sinking into an arcanum recollection  
of black water and mosquitoes.

He always carries a few reliquiae in his pockets,  
rolls them between thumb and finger,  
the minerals reassuring: he wonders about the owner  
of a garnet earring found outside the Court Hotel,  
imagines the night it was lost.

He curls it in his palm,  
keeps walking.

## **The TBM**

### *The Mitsubishi Tunnel Boring Machine*

Zipped into an orange suit,  
he shifts levers and limbs,  
breathes through a tube and descends  
deeper into the mud where all life  
unfolds inside vaults of limey shell.

All day he gobbles earth and fossil,  
moults tunnel segments like snake's skin.

In the cab his mobile phone  
wears itself out searching for a signal.  
Face lit by torchlight he lunges forward  
forfeiting the surface, the weight of the city,  
he encounters his origin as a single pulse  
thudding inside an airless cavity,  
blood-black, wet and heaving.

## **The Furthest Shore**

I leave this at your ear for when you wake  
from your sleep of a thousand years  
so that you will remember a morning,  
a sunrise and a gulp of air. Your body  
will recall the swing and stride of footsteps,  
will follow these, will know the way.

There will be a faint tune  
above the sound of your breath,  
and the rhythm of your walking.

An arc of light will filter through the green place  
and a voice will sing to you  
across a translucent lake so wide it is impossible  
to see the furthest shore. You will remember  
every verse as if you have heard it before,  
familiar journeys in old cars, cold nights around fires  
with the great art of stars spinning above in slow increments.

All the words translate into one meaning;  
rivers and creeks all flow towards that great lake,  
a multitude of birds arriving.



**Figure 11. Cockburn Gateways Shopping Centre, 2011.**

Picture courtesy of Anandashila Saraswati (Nandi Chinna)



# Remnant



**Figure 12. Swans on North Lake, 2009.**

Picture courtesy of Anandashila Saraswati (Nandi Chinna)

## Writing on Water

First you must wade through the minutiae  
copepods, water boatman, and backswimmers.

You may be bitten by fleas  
reborn after aestivating for two hundred years.

Remember frogs cannot swallow  
with their eyes open so they may not see you coming.

Sift out the sediment. (This can be achieved  
by taking off your shirt and straining the water through the cloth).

There is a lot to know before you can start:

water can kill as easily as quench,

water can be very old;

water makes ink run,

will dissolve paper.

One letter too many or too few

can change the whole meaning.

Until it dries out you may not be able to understand

what water has to say.

## **A line Made by Walking**

*after Richard Long*

$$L = \{\mathbf{a} + t\mathbf{b} \mid t \in \mathbb{R}\}$$

How many footsteps will it take  
to walk a place into the body?

From back door to garden, around each raised bed,  
pressing a pad through harvest and fallow.

Beyond the front gate, countless ambulations  
scorn footpaths, traverse weedy verges,  
pace a cartography of desire  
into the neighbourhood.

How many footsteps will it take  
to trample grass stems, crush flowers  
make a line by walking?

## **Boardwalk**

Walking on water;

under canopies of paper and flower,

reed beds lean with the prevailing wind,

seeds drift west like a plague of insects.

The sound of footsteps on pine boards,

whirr of a camera deconstructing and re-authoring,

the lens seeks movement and finds subterfuge:

rustling and clicking, reed stems seem to turn their backs,

a tree branch quivers, the pond surface breaks all exits.

## **Pelicans**

*Lake Monger/Galup, 1920s*

What is this coming of argent?

A flotilla of flying boats

sailing west to east, dark motif

splashed on their wings.

A navy of craft, noses sharp and unwieldy,

divining rods seeking fish,

each quiver of membrane a knowledge,

each tilt of the eye a GPS:

which lake is brimming with mullet,

which is bristling with guns and spears?

To eat and be eaten is a kind of purpose,

a reason to float with the prevailing wind,

to scupper the surface with a thrumming of wings

to bleach the sky with an eclipse of white.

## **The Swan River Warrior**

*The Skeletal remains of an unknown Aboriginal Warrior found in 2006, 200 metres west of Robertson Park in Carr Street. Noongar Elders decided to relocate the remains to Boojoormelup (Robertson Park) because of its close proximity to where the remains were found. Noongar Elders wish that the warrior's spirit is allowed back into the dreamtime, that the dreamtime spirits will welcome him back home here at Boojoormelup, a listed Aboriginal sacred site. Interpretive signage, Robertson Park.*

An old man in shorts and thongs  
lives in the asylum of the AIDS memorial,  
his turbid hair curls like smoke  
above a nicotine stained beard.

In the afternoon he cooks up a feed on the free gas barbecue:  
kids dart on the tennis court,  
their red and blue shirts flash like feathers  
their cries plummet into the nets.

At the edge of the park the swinging arm  
of a wrecking ball sweeps back and forth  
punching holes into memory:  
some bones in the back hoe bucket  
bound up in sand and funeral ashes,  
shock the workers in fluorescent vests.

The unknown Swan River Warrior  
is re-buried here beneath a marri tree  
where a wattle bird intones its apologue,  
adapts to the base and thrum of combustion engines,  
the thwack of tennis balls  
and shouts of English language.

### **Old Bottle Yard**

Is the grevillea bush dancing  
and singing through the old bottle yard?  
Suddenly New Holland honey eaters  
shoot out from quivering foliage,  
yellow and black missiles  
whistling loudly past my head.



## Cut and Paste Lake

*Lake Monger — Galup*

*Galup*

**Swamp paperbark**, stamens united in bundles. **Swamp banksia**, fine tendrils, densely packed, spirally arranged balls of sophisticated knitting. **Swamp sheoak**, tolerant, thick and fissured. **Flooded gum**, persistent seed pods, wide girth, riparian fringe. **Balga**, peculiar lily, flower compass, nectar drink. **Rushes**, stabilising, breathing stem wave action. **Tea tree**, woody fruit, liberated seed, particles of sun. Stoop amongst the reeds, knees in mud, lips to water. The men and women outside their huts shake our hands, good morning Yellagonga's family. He's an old man with a spear quivering in a spear thrower, until he sees the gun.

*Drain*

1909; an incision into the south side of the lake known as 'drain'; a lacustrine decrescendo into the Swan River.

*Into produce*

Fat cows tread the lake shore into a mine field of hoof holes and twisted ankles. Mud built wedges appear on the soles of boots. The heron amongst the lettuces, the duck between the radish, an unfamiliar green hue meets burnt stalks of sedge and reed. Chong You, Wing Yung and Sin Loong in conical straw hats, step between the rows, dip watering cans and spray the lake back into itself.

*Into park*

20 hectares of squiggling micro organisms, fish eggs, frogs' legs, twigs and duck feathers. The stench of our birth and the bruise of our death; a slick of dark secrets spread across the sand.

### *Chironomids*

Dust bin man, poor old horse, night soil can, poured into the hole where the reed beds sang, into the swamp where the black swans nest. Tadpoles beached and rotting, blood sucking midges plume black clouds into the air.

### *No boating/no swimming*

Regatta white sails, keel deep surging towards the finish I see blue skies with clouds, I see reddish brown like tea without milk, then deeper down the midnight blue, swallow the black mouthful until I am full, losing my voice into a gurgle. I was laughing, I was winning until I was falling. Below the riffled surface they look and look but I am never found.

### *Land fill*

We all went down to the tip, north-eastern side. One point eight metres deep, even my dad was down there on a Saturday with all the other dads. See what we can find: cardboard cutouts from Cadbury's, Letchfords, Sanitarium, we set up our imaginary shops. Then they covered it up with soil, we are walking on it now, all our old rubbish, under this grass.

### *Mitchell Freeway*

The birds are adapting, transposing their songs to a pitch higher than combustion engines. Trees turning back into mineral, sheen on the water as a duck and her surviving duckling pedal the drain. A concrete barrier separates them from mortality. A pelican lands on the freeway exit sign, trembling in the updraft.

*Grave*

A day out with nets and microscopes, hats and shoes and notes from home; an adventure of the invertebrate kind. Before morning tea a child comes running, Miss, Miss!! Scales of silver, scales of gold, a lake-full of fish washed up along the shore.

*Parkland*

All night drains have been feeding in from the east, the north, bringing road wash, buried creek line, compensation basin run off. In the early morning the lake is spat out onto peripheral lawns; subsiding beneath the day's picnics.

## **Mud Man (or how to sleep in mud)**

*Lake Joondalup*

The after party boy has been bouncing  
to Snoop Dog, Fat Joe and Busta Rhymes.  
Yeah it was awesome in the light  
and he's trying to find his way home on hands and knees,  
the short way across the swamp,  
hard then soft, in places like a pie crust  
on the black meat of the water table.

Having drunk all his elixirs, shed his skin  
of t-shirt, his broken rubber thongs,  
asleep neck deep in mud, his beautiful protection,  
remembering his etiology: before he breathed air  
he was a life aquatic, a multicelled equivalent  
almost human, almost reptile.

Dawn brings dogs out barking,  
Joggers and insomniac walkers  
are standing on the shoreline pointing at his head  
above the quagmire, mud caked, simply breathing.

## Beautiful Weeds

The beautiful weeds are blazing on Clontarf Hill;  
yellow, white, cream veined, purple gold.

New Holland honey eaters ruckus  
in the banksia and tuarts,  
and from the summit I can see the islands,  
the big ships chugging into the harbour  
slicing a trajectory across a steel grey ocean.

Behind me the red rooves of houses  
stack east in lines.

Three butterflies are jousting in the bluest air  
dusting their colours onto each other.

What better thing to do with your few days of flight  
than to wing and collide with your attraction,  
to reproduce in the hours you can,  
then exhale and subside onto an undisturbed hillside,  
to lay your exquisite wings down  
in the limestone and grasses,  
down amongst the beautiful weeds?

## How He Became a Poet

(for K.G.)

He grew up on a quarter acre,  
half of which was scrub, encountered  
goannas and lizards in his back yard,  
*wee loo wee loo*, cockatoo's black wings  
swept light from the sky.

When the peat of Herdsman Lake burned  
for days, a cloud of ash shaped like a bird  
drifted across his yard and fell in spirals  
and loops into his cupped hands.

He willed the bones of charred leaves  
to hold their form as they rained about him,  
wished them into feathers and nests.

Fruit trees sling over fences in a maze of back lanes  
where he stalks the rhythm of a phrase,  
walks the words left, right, up or down  
slipping into the pace of syntax.

After forty minutes, no-mind kicks in  
and the poems recite themselves into the iris of his eyes  
travel through his body so that  
they are there nestled in his finger tips  
as he turns the corner for home.

## **The Mt Lawley Wandjina**

*Ron Stone Park*

Through weeks of rain  
the Mount Lawley Wandjina  
survives shivering in the culvert,  
unused to the southern seasons.

Storm water sheers across its face  
scours pores in the concrete,  
blurring the ochres of its eyes.  
Kimberley people long for its return  
to the blue and pindan of its homeland.

Molecule by molecule it sifts  
into the pond where it will  
paint the grey sky red,  
blur the skimming water birds,  
submerge into anaerobic sediment  
in the mud of a stranger's country.

## Graceful Sun Moth

*(Synemon gratiosa)*

The road builders are searching  
verge-side veldt grass and lupins  
for a bundle of eggs and pupa.

Disguised as a piece of sedge,  
the graceful sun moth comes at dawn  
from the base of wallaby grass.

Her camouflage breaks into fractals of sun  
that ignite on stems and seed pods.

Hectare by hectare her world has diminished  
to a grey rectangle on the new highway plan.

She has ten days of autumn  
to find her patch of *lomandra*;  
clouds passing over mime the night;  
she closes her wings, waits for the light.





**Figure 13. *Synemon sophia* collected on the south coast of WA in 1841.**

(Gamblin, Bishop, Williams, & Williams, 2010)

(Exception to copyright ss40, 103C; research or study).

## **Anima**

*It could take a lifetime to study the nature of just one blade of grass,  
the anima in all things. (Nguyen, 2011)*

The Taoist teaches us that clouds prefer endemic vegetation,  
that a tree hears slowly so the best way  
to communicate with it is to plant another tree next to it  
and let them talk to each other.

Not to cut trees in spring when  
birds are nesting, or take eggs from nests,  
the shell being both the container and the context.

Being that anima lives in all things:  
it is wise to form a relationship with your house  
your white goods and car;  
offer them cakes, drinks and prayers.

Trying to get home on a slither of petrol  
I place my palm on the centre of the steering wheel,  
send all my animal body heat into the hard plastic,  
into the engine still purring when I pull into my driveway.

## **Dixon Reserve**

I am a magpie in the mornings,  
winding my tracks into the dawn spoor  
where seagulls, doves and ravens  
have pressed their braille into the sand.

I'm here for the glint, the sharp edge, the stand out  
of colour splashed against limestone and dune.  
My treasures are shards of king brown, the thick skin  
of pickaxe bottles, riffled violet of perfume jars,  
the ragged necks and glinting smiles of corona.

With my bag and my gloves  
I collect blue flowers and windmills  
embedded with the slip of tea, the pattern of a voyage  
rising up through its history, reaching the surface  
jostling for a place with red bull and coke.

The breaking takes place between visits.  
Wings heaving, I rise above the tuarts  
the dunes, the stony track, the small figure hunched over,  
intent on smashing the sun into a kindle of sharp reflections.

## **The Spectacles**

*Beeliar Regional Park*

Down a narrow track fringed by reeds  
a small tiger snake pauses,  
then slips from the path.

Enter as if through a door,  
from electroluminescence  
into penumbral eclipse.

There is the bright world of calescent blue;  
and then there is the swamp.

Viridine herbage wefts  
beneath the pale bark of ti-trees  
leaning against angles,  
a crosshatched trellis of shadows.

Through this, tannin stained water beckons,  
dragon flies hover, djidi djidis whistle  
loud, soft, soft, loud, I see you,  
I don't see you.

My skin is shed out there beyond  
the circling paper barks,  
a skein of shirts and jackets,  
hats and shoes abandoned along with  
my memorised numbers.

Forgetting,  
the ground springs back  
leaving no footprints.

## **Manning Ridge**

*Calyptorhynchus latirostris*, Carnaby

At 6pm

the black birds flew over,  
so low I could see into  
the dark shafts of their eyes.

They were all coming in.

The sky was filled  
with what I had always known.

Then everything began to recede.

I was the last person left,  
the black bird bursting  
inside my chest,  
squalling and flapping against my ribs.

In this moment, my learning was lost.

All the taxonomies,  
the families, the lists of species  
falling one by one  
from the hill of my globe.

More than anything else

I wanted the birds  
as they disappeared over the ridge,  
their cries becoming a part  
of the recording of history.

How difficult a thing  
to turn away from this edge,  
to walk slowly home.

## **Bird Watching White Fella Style**

The power point presentation  
transports us to a shoreline,  
where birds stare past telephoto lenses  
to a point somewhere out of frame.  
Pied oyster catchers plunge their red beaks into mudflats,  
a common noddy wades out of eggshells,  
nestled in a shallow bowl of sand.

(There are many disagreements  
over common and lesser noddies).

At morning tea we perch around the urn,  
pick at plates of biscuits, discuss the sighting  
of a tern, a banded stilt, or a red capped plover.

In the afternoon lined up on plastic chairs  
we are shown how to distinguish  
an eastern golden plover from a hooded plover  
(grey axillaries, dark base of tail).

We learn about the red necked stint,  
which weighs no more than a matchbox  
and migrates south in Siberian winters  
to feed on the Swan Coastal Plain.



Small enough to fit into a wineglass,  
in its lifetime it flies further  
than the distance between the earth and the moon.

The chairs are hard,  
some of the elders nod off,  
their heads tucked into their chests.

As we leave, a wattlebird swoops,  
and snaps an insect,  
turns its red eye on the car park,  
the glistening vehicles,  
the strange flock  
alighting from the building.

## **Anstey Keane Dampland**

A cat strolls out  
of the Anstey Keane Dampland  
as I stroll in. I follow her tracks  
into a pearl grey enfolding  
of tacit sand and griseous branches  
twisting in sodden foundation.

An abandoned stereo system,  
lies half-buried, mute to the scratch  
of worms and beetles  
gnawing through soil and tree roots.

Paw prints lead me  
to an upturned washing machine,  
spilling shirts and trousers, a tiny pair  
of gum boots sprouting gaudy red flowers.

The cats trail ends in a mute hieroglyph  
of twisted fur and splintered jaw bone,  
as wind scrapes through the casuarinas,  
and cars tremble past on Anstey Road.

## **Noctuary**

*Mary Carroll Park*

With forty one hundred lumen of raw bright,  
we scan the sides of the footpath,  
the black water, the swaying reeds,  
the nervous chiaroscuro of tree branches.

In the absence of fur and feather,  
we fix our beams on spider's silk  
grafting street lamps to grass stems.

We turn a green frog to stone  
with the collective shock of our torch lights.

We spot the fugitive mammal, left to roam  
beyond lawn's edge and driveway,  
eyes wide slits in the dark light.

## **Bibra Lake (Walliabup) Bird Hide, 1**

I walk the tarmac and white line  
of a pedestrian's road, gather my harvest  
of plastic and aluminium,

take a short cut through the re-veg,  
a community of canes in triangles,  
architecture of green plastic  
teetering in the littoral zone.

In the distance the tide of traffic breaks  
against concrete kerb and roundabout.  
From the shadowy boards of the bird hide  
wrens and honey eaters strafe from shrub to tree,  
their sharps and flats returning and repeating.

Typha seeds parachute like tiny spiders,  
free-falling along the shoreline, destiny absolute:  
to survive or perish where they land.

## **Bibra Lake (Walliabup) Bird Hide, 2**

Strips of paper bark, electrical wire,  
the innards of abandoned car seats:  
are these sticks and feathers  
strong enough materials for a poem?

Where to gather filament;  
where best to situate the construction  
to withstand coastal breezes, winter squalls  
and summer aestivations?

What more can I do than lie down  
on the hard boards of the hide,  
and listen while the avian world  
enacts its seasonal knowledge.

How easy it would be to fail miserably,  
to have rain seep through,  
for the twigs and strings to loosen,  
the eggs to tumble; picked up by ravens  
and swallowed whole.

## Horse Paddock Swamp

Drawn down beneath thorns and grasses,  
the lake surface is a scissored patchwork  
of rabbits' desultory graze,

a depth of sediment marinated in lead and zinc,  
chromium and copper. Stick a match to it  
and the whole narrative will burn hot.

A tortoise shell lies in pieces  
like buttons cut from a coat  
worn when the world was damp,  
when you could wade knee deep  
in Horse Paddock Swamp.

## **Bibra Lake Beat**

She walked in accidentally at 11am.

A man at the urinal turned expectantly.

From outside she saw other men furtively

slipping in and out of the ablution block,

a row of dark cars in the car park,

men adjusting their ties,

hands on their belt buckles.

## **Night Bird**

The night I moved on an island of stone

the bird crouched near the bloodied

feathers of its mate.

Tarmac and metal, compressed air

racing at 120 km per hour,

the road is destiny neither of us can escape.

It's too late to stop before I realise

that the night bird has replaced my heart

and lungs with spider's silk and twigs,

has built its nest inside the empty cavity of my chest.

## Looking for Shirley Balla

*Shirley Balla Swamp, Banjup*

Traipsing in search of Shirley Balla:

a bandicoot darts across the path,  
rabbits disappear into shadowy tunnels,  
xanthorhea shed their trunks like jester's frills.

Lost along the firebreaks,

flowers burn like lanterns,  
from the pocked skin of banksia trunks.

A wattlebird moves through its repertoire  
from scream to melody, and Shirley Balla  
is hard to trace without charts or compass, landmarks  
or shorelines to define an edge.

I find her slumped inside a fringe of melaleucas;  
a whole car disassembled in her bed, VB cans  
and Kentucky Whiskey bottles litter her periphery.

Arterial traffic noise situates us in time and space,  
while somewhere beneath my feet  
Shirley Balla clenches her fists.



## **Frog Swamp**

In the dense limbus we lose our way  
amongst papery trees and knee deep grass,

then stumble across a tannin red stage  
draped with melaleuca curtains,

mist falling like muslin from the white sky.

A black swan and five cygnets

appear linked from beak to tail feather,  
moving across the lake like a showground ride.

Our footprints brim over in the dark mud  
and disappear. A frog ensemble  
intones a swamp postlude.

## **The Fish**

### *Kings Park*

1.

The fish coruscates the translucent green  
of the euphotic zone like a torch in the dusk light.

Exactly which ocean it splashes in

I do not know, as all oceans collide

and wash particles of one country

into the orbit of others.

2.

I do not know who caught the fish,

or whether they exchanged its weight for silver.

When the fish and I first met, it was far from home

travelling in a caravan from gig to gig

from town to town like some almost famous rock star.

3.

The sky was clear and moonlight poured

through the knotted lace of trees.

The fish did not feel the cold,

stacked in icy whiteness, wrapped in plastic for hygiene.

4.

I stood outside the caravan in my winter coat.

For ten dollars the fish was mine, hot and oily,  
sprinkled with sea salt.

I carried my fish through the thousands of people  
waiting in the park. The stage lit up.

Everyone began to clap and cheer  
as my fish and I took our places.

## **Stones**

*Herdsmen Lake / Njookenbooroo*

The lake's surface is lightly ruffled  
by a melalueca-sifted breeze,  
by sacred ibis purling white,  
spiritus asper descending.

A chain of dark floating pebbles  
form stepping stones between strandlines  
until the stones upend themselves,  
grow necks and beaks, become swans and ducks.

## Estuary

The history of water lies open  
at page seventeen, discarded on the floorboards  
along with journals, pens and post it notes.

I grab a coat and head to the inlet.

Along the road, two walkers in new rain jackets  
and British accents warn me

there is a terrible odour down there  
they should do something about it, don't bother  
with the scramble to the waters' edge.

I decide to take my chances,  
press on past street trees and lawns  
into dunes grafted with spinifex.

Down on the mudflats scores of wading birds  
tread the line between earth and water,  
mixing the two with their beaks;

swans plunge their hose pipe necks  
into the briny estuary. A small tin boat  
is welded to the grey steel of water.

I wonder if the people in the boat can see me  
squat on the sand, add my scent  
to the smell of life.

# Returning



**Figure 14. Drainage compensating basin, Mitchell Freeway Perth, 2011.**

Picture courtesy of Anandashila Saraswati (Nandi Chinna)



## **Dragonfly Lake**

*South side of Mitchell Freeway*

On the map the freeways are green tubes  
that plait, touch and part. From the ground  
they rise up on muscled thighs like Atlas,  
preventing soil and stars from ever meeting.

All day and most of the night  
traffic spans the fly-overs;  
idling, flicking through radio stations,  
accelerating, braking, winding  
möbius-like along the on-off ramps.

In the freeway compensation basin,  
tadpoles thrash in a viridian crucible  
of seed and egg, fermenting in a cold boil.  
Dragonflies sew food chains across the pond,  
a geometry of light and water.

## Great Egret Lake

*North side of Mitchell Freeway*

The sluice gate is rusted half way open,  
re-vegetation struggles on the upturned bank,  
the tree's rough shape and my shadow  
stare back from a sepia pool.

I am taller, leaner, a cinematic cowboy  
legs astride, poker face, hat looming.

On a raft of leaf and branch  
moored under a leaning flooded gum,  
a great egret steps, painterly, albescent  
in a mood of grey and umber.

Spearing beakfuls of pond,  
she hunts alone; turns to regard  
my camera-holding moment,

until a ripple in the surface catches her eye.

My finger hard on the shutter, a blur of yellow beak,  
lacy scapular, gape sliding fish re-composed in my hands.



**Figure 15. Great Egret, Mitchell Freeway Compensating Basin 2011**

picture courtesy of Anandashila Saraswati (Nandi Chinna)

## Campanile Tower

*Fake Lake, Ellenbrook Housing Estate.*

The eyes of the tower pick out each blade  
in an expanse of closely mown lawn,  
telescope into a neat hedge of bottle brush,  
leer into the shadows of the brick pump house.

A panoptic scope across beds of pansies,  
reveals a pond; reflected disc of hardwalled  
emptiness into which turtles fall, against which  
ducklings bump and drown.

The frame is set, this is the action:  
a woman passes pushing a pram;  
I scribble into a notebook;  
a family of magpies guard the contents  
of an upturned rubbish bin.

Under surveillance there is nowhere to kiss,  
nowhere to piss, no tangled place  
to slouch back into animal.

## **Foragers**

*Reclaimed swamp-Dixon Park*

Through the morning mist the foragers have come,  
human-shaped in winter coats with plastic shopping bags  
billowing like balloons from their arms.

Gathered around the storm water outlet,  
bending and straightening, they harvest  
wild fennel and dandelion,

crush piquant scents,  
while all around them straw necked ibis  
pierce the dissolving frost  
into a chequerboard of dark holes.

## Champion Lakes Regatta Centre

The shoreline is a paisley print  
of three-toed stars floating up  
from a watery universe made here at dawn  
before the car park begins to spill over.  
Two red capped plovers guard the boat ramp,  
black winged stilts pick shallow runnels in the bank.

Bodies pressed into zoot suits plane  
the channel like brightly coloured  
four and eight-armed corixids.

The water surface is a geometric grid,  
two thousand metres, ten rows,  
laced with power pylons,  
reflecting grey bottomed clouds;  
cut it this way or that  
you will come up with the same equation.

# Swan



**Figure 16. Black Swan.**

From *The Visit of Charles Fraser (The Colonial Botanist of New South Wales) To the Swan River in 1827, with his opinion on the suitability of the district for a settlement.* 1906. (Hay, 1906)

(Exception to copyright ss40, 103C; research or study).

## **The Speed of Thoughts**

The dreams of early morning commuters  
cling to their faces, some pressed against  
train windows fogged with fragments of chimera,  
that blur the sharp edges of buildings.

Standing room only, the rest sway,  
eyes drawn into pages of books,  
the soft glow of laptop screens  
the beeping of mobile phones.

Five pelicans glide the surface of the river  
on the same trajectory as the train  
in which people are moving  
faster than the speed of their thoughts,  
towards a city built with thinking stacked high,  
with glass reflecting clouds and flight.

The walk from the station platform:  
is soft on the outside, on the inside  
all bone and sinew moving upright,  
glutinous maximus tuning and stretching.



Roadside gardens alight with small notes of music.

My body takes me through early mornings

clean and brick, cool with sea breezes laden with rain,

laying down thoughts at the speed of walking.

## Point Walter Spit

*Now we toss the sand into the river, now the river knows us,  
now we have stepped towards Noongar country. (Verma,  
2011)*

Lined up along the spit  
we bend into the longshore drift,  
scrape etiolate fingers into the sand,  
rub the wet river bed into our palms.

We are aging now, and dressed in sensible shoes and coats.  
We are longing to know what the river might say,  
or what we might hear if we make this small bow  
kneeling into the lee of the sand bank,  
if we scatter these Aeolian particles into the moving tide,  
and meet them in the returning wind.

Where the fingers have gouged,  
a shell of memory remains in the sand,  
just moments before the next wave  
breaks into that territory where the country  
has met the person for the first time.

## Swan River Canyon

*Australia's largest canyon, larger than the Grand Canyon, lies 45 km west of Perth, carved by the ancient path of the Swan River. (Middleton, 2010)*

Before the river had a name,  
before there was a person to name it,  
it swallowed itself whole, pebble teeth  
and scouring palate eating the miles  
that were not yet miles, excreting alluvium,  
building a country onto the end of its tongue.

Submerged mountains sheer into opaque shafts  
where galaxies of shrimps glow in mobile constellations.  
Deep-sea squid strobe their blue lights.  
Star fish weave themselves into baskets.  
Crustaceous spiders scutter in rock dust.

One hundred atmospheres deep  
crevices wait for creatures not yet invented  
to stumble into them and drown.  
An ocean rising engulfs an intaglio of footprints  
stepped out there when the world was soft,  
before the land became the sea,  
before the bones of the dead  
were reborn as helical shells.

## Precipitation Cycles

*How can I call it mine when its fate is to run through rivers and living bodies. (Kingsolver, 2010, p. 35)*

Weary of packing its bags,  
lugging its suitcases of dust and river  
from harbour to harbour,  
drifting between ocean and continent,  
it falls when least expected, drenches children walking to school,  
arrives in the night to steal the tents and pots and pans  
of people camped in dry creek beds.

Droplets pelt into a mountain,  
bend and twist, pick up mud and deposit it again,  
are dragged together by gravity,  
slapped up against the weight of salt.

They swim into the stomach of a whale  
and are blown out into solar refraction.

Travelling upon the wind road  
they pass in and out of our deepest intimacies.

Turn on the tap  
and we are drinking the urine of dinosaurs.

We are rain walking;  
falling into crevices,  
into the spaces between a life span,  
returning to the sky as we breathe out.



**Figure 17. Willem de Vlamingh's ships with black swans, at the entrance to the Swan River, Western Australia.**

Coloured engraving, derived from an earlier drawing (now lost) from the de Vlamingh expeditions of 1696–97. Date 1726. Artist, Johannes van Keulen. (Wikicommons), (Exception to copyright ss40, 103C; research or study).

## The Black Swan

*By 1876 black swans had almost disappeared from the Swan River. A dredge employed in deepening the river in Perth Water was named 'Black Swan'. (S. G. Taylor, 2010)*

Remove the bar and the ocean washes in;  
silt and fish scales form new archipelagos,  
stones laid like eggs in the soft mattress

of the river bed are dredged up on the banks  
to change the way a river decides  
where it will warp and weft.

We call after the black swan:  
its image remains on beer cans,  
taxi cabs, football guernseys,  
coins, flags, and coats of arms.

The ferry plies back and forth;  
lancing the platinous skin of the river;  
a stone wall seals the terminus,  
where black swans once nested  
like burnt smudges along reedy shallows  
when the river was footpath deep.



**Figure 18. Dredge named the Black Swan, decorated, 1897.**  
Image courtesy of the State Library of Western Australia [230481PD]  
(Exception to copyright ss40, 103C; research or study).

## **Gilbert Fraser Reserve, Swan River**

The wind and I are heading east.

Below in the water all else tumbles west:

fronds of sea grass,

opaque discs of jelly fish

spinning against the pull,

ragged strips of weed,

tiny branches from aquatic shrubs,

all as if caught in a gust,

in a slip stream whirling

beneath my body as I churn

the water, arms like paddle wheels

turning the surface inside out.

The river bed sifts like fine ash.

Just the brush of a finger

will send puffs of fine silt,

spiraling like smoke.

Tendrils of green leaves

escape from their centres,

like an aerial map of a desert town,

all roads leading elsewhere.



I'm trying hard;  
the wind is on my side but cannot save me.  
The dog runs along the shore  
barking at my spouting snorkel.  
I roll in the wash of a boat,  
the river beneath me always  
escaping my grasp.



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**Figure 19. White Swan in Hyde Park 1914.**

Picture by L.E. Shapcott. Courtesy of the State Library of Western Australia, NBHIM00048. (Exception to copyright ss40, 103C; research or study).

## White Swans

In a hot December  
the swans at Fremantle Railway Station  
bake like clay in their nests  
either side of the clock tower.

Diesel fumes and dust stain their red beaks,  
settle on their backs, tarnish  
their white wings nicotine yellow.

In winter, storms scour them clean,

pouring off their feathers  
and down the stone walls  
while we run for the train  
our umbrellas twisting in the wind.

Yearly daubings of white paint  
transform *Cygnus atratus* into *Cygnus olor*:  
six white swans that hiss mutely,  
necks curved, wings raised  
in a threat display.



**Figure 20. White Swans, Fremantle Railway Station**

Picture courtesy of Anandashila Saraswati (Nandi Chinna)



**Figure 21. Western Australian Postage Stamp issued 1884.**  
(Smithsonian Institute, 2010), (Exception to copyright ss40, 103C; research or study).



**Figure 22. Swan Lager Beer Bottle Label**  
Swan Brewery Company (1950). [*Swan Brewery Company beer labels*]  
(Exception to copyright ss40, 103C; research or study).

## The Language of Drainage

*600 drains and 29 tributaries feed into the Swan Canning River Park. (Swan River Trust, 2009)*

The language of drainage

has many translations:

brook into culvert, lake into oval,

creek into drain, wetland into road,

*Do not drink — Do not swim — This water may cause ill effects.*

Seasons and maps of migration

are decoded by the black winged stint

that arrives from the northern hemisphere

to vacuum the detritus of summer evaporations.

The particular cadences of damplands —

rustlings, clickings, squelchings —

are easily deciphered by the swamp harrier

and tiger snake.

Where the history of a creek

meets the future of a river

these vernaculars collide inside the echo

of a drainpipe delivering its conclusions:

arsenic, mercury, lead, pH 4.0.



**Figure 23. Satellite view of the Swan and Canning Rivers.**

Image from wikicommons (Exception to copyright ss40, 103C; research or study).

## The Eye

At night the river hones its craft,  
heaves into the lee side, ticks and groans  
as it scrapes the hulls of vessels tugging at moorings  
and deposits versions of itself  
further and further out to sea.

The woman is night wandering along the river bank;  
lights are extinguished on the million dollar hillside  
but the river is never still, swirling beneath  
its corrugated surfaces, slipping past  
steady bricks and double glazed windows,  
past so many bodies lying prone inside houses  
while the tide enacts its utter tangle  
of broken nets, star fish corpses,  
splintered hulls and unmoored buoys.

She stares across the dark mass of restless water,  
the light on the automated toilet block  
beams constant vacancy from the opposite bank;  
a single green eye blinking  
through a confusion of riparian fringe.



She thinks she hears a boo book owl  
haunting a street tree\  
but it is only a small dog howling  
behind a locked gate.

The rufous night herons shuffle in the pine trees  
uncomfortably close to the eaves of houses  
where thoughts gather, trapped in ceiling cavities,  
isolated from the stars.

She feels the pores of the overheated ground  
opening like manifold breaths inhaling,  
cool air falling into the earth as it turns imperceptibly  
casting light, then shadow into  
the tired crevices of the day.

## Walters Brook

*Walters Brook flowed out of a drain which we walked up as lads. We walked up as far as we dared. They say it ended at Hyde Park. Interpretive signage — Banks Reserve, 2010.*

The sound of rain emanates from drain covers  
and manholes punched into sandy back lanes.

I follow its rumble, from Hyde Park to East Perth  
where it dulls to a muffled mimesis of brook.

Steps in the brick work and a rusting ladder  
lead down a locked tunnel I cannot enter.

I lie on the ground and press my ear against  
the sound of last week's rain; and on a quieter frequency,  
the knocking of a stream against stones,  
footsteps of children on an afternoon ramble,  
the bass notes of frogs, scrape of sediment,  
gurgle as a passer-by stops to quench their thirst.

The brattle of water drums into my body,  
merging with the sound of cars passing.

Walters Brook splashes through a circular grate,  
where a curved moon of sand swirls into the river.

## **Tony Di Cerni Pathway**

A jogger shakes the slats of a bridge  
spanning an oily tannin sheen.

Six large fish curve a silver mosaic  
inside the brown jar of this lake.

A group of Noongars with clipboards in their hands  
stare across to where the river scallops into the bay.

Four white golf balls washed up on the shore  
declaim their provenance;

stolen from Burswood  
stamped into their orbits.

## **Banks to Bardon Pathway**

The balance between remembering and forgetting:

samphire, sheoak, melaleuca;

clicking frogs singing louder

than traffic on Windan Bridge;

a black duck perches on the *Private Jetty* sign,

slur of guano piling up on the boards;

the river sheds waves against ramparts

of stone and sandbags.

Sit here for long enough and the river breathes out.

Small fish leap from gill to ozone,

and it's a long slow sigh from the opposite bank,

salty warm breath tasting of river weed and sun,

of edges and streams all pouring through.

Sit here long enough and I lose my walls,

pylons, bridges, maps and instructions.

The Swan River is a steady gaze

bearing the weight of its biography,

still excavating its future.



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**EXEGESIS**

# **A Walk in the Anthropocene**

**Homesickness and the Writer-Walker**

## Abstract

The context for my poetic walking project *Swamp* is a local and global environment undergoing an unprecedented loss of biodiversity, mainly due to the destruction of habitat and changes in climatic conditions (Reid et al., 2005, pp. 438-442). The loss of species and ecosystems that have been a part of our earth home results in the human experience of ‘homesickness’ — a longing for the home places that we have known and which have diminished.

In this paper I discuss the notion that nostalgia and the recent neologism ‘solastalgia’ (Albrecht, 2008) are conditions that form part of the structure of a larger philosophical condition of homesickness. I go on to argue that homesickness can be seen as a motivating force in the practice of writing on walking. I examine the practice of walking as a method of pacing out a new paradigm within the strictures of the constructed society, and as a way of creating works of art which address the sense of loss and disconnection with species other than human, as well as the need to reconcile oneself to the inevitability of loss.

I use Debord’s theory of the *dérive* as a starting point for my walking methodology and examine nostalgia within the Situationist International (Debord, 1958) and subsequent psychogeographical movements. From the *dérive* I develop a definition for my own walking practice: ‘poetpatetics’, the act of walking and writing poetry.

I also investigate the role of homesickness in the work of other writers who walk and who write about their walking practice. The genre of writing on walking is a broad field (see Solnit, 2000), so I narrow my scope to those writers and practitioners who use walking as a method to encounter and engender an intimacy with their local environment, and whose work explores the relationship between human and non-human ecosystems.

Finally I discuss homesickness in the epoch of the Anthropocene (Crutzen & Schwägerl, 2011), the era in which the earth’s biosphere is characterised by human interventions which have changed the meteorological, geological and biological elements of the earth. In the Anthropocene the wilderness view of nature needs to be re-thought and I posit that walking is a way of reconnecting with the physical landscape and building relationships with the small wilds that exist in our home places.



## Introduction

# Swamp Walking

Walking; putting one foot in front of the other, poising the weight on one foot and then tilting the body forward with the other foot, swinging this foot in front of the body and placing it on the ground in front of you to prevent falling. Walking reconstructs Galileo's pendulum, the legs move through time and space, marking the movement over grass, stones, hills, and through wind which is air moving through space. I walk slowly and time dissipates to the stillness of my breath wrapping around me in tight coils. As I pick up speed, time gathers to meet me, rushing around the curvature of the Earth.

For the creative practitioner walking reintroduces the body as a fundamental definer of experience, placing the investigation centrally in the corporeal self, using the physical senses as investigative tools of enquiry. The walker uses the body as a 'divining rod', pacing through time and the city, noticing what demands to be noticed, and stitching together maps which link sense perceptions with histories in order to build a greater dimension into the narrative that defines place. As Rebecca Solnit observes in her history of walking, 'exploring the world is one of the best ways of exploring the mind, and walking travels both terrains' (Solnit, 2000, p. 13).

Over the last couple of years I have been wandering the wetlands of Perth: those that remain on the surface as well as those which have been suppressed under the construction of the city. Walking the shores of Perth's lakes becomes a heterodoxical activity when we consider that most of these wetland lakes are now buried beneath the roads and buildings of the metropolitan area. The walks are semi-planned but also retain a loose openness to following lines of attraction, distraction and repulsion. The over-arching purpose of this walking has been to explore the relationship between people and the wetland environments of the Swan Coastal Plain through the practice of what I call 'poepatetics,' the poetry that arises through the act of walking.

In order to find the lost wetland lakes, I lay a new map of Perth over old maps, maps which are even just plans of the city-to-be. Here the soft blurred shapes of lakes, the traced outline of phantom water bodies are just visible beneath the surveyor's straight lines and grids. Once I have reached a site, I abandon the guide book and the map and allow myself to be drawn by the contours, access paths, holes in fences, public art and interpretive signage. By things that catch my eye or things that repel my eye; by hunger, thirst and tiredness, and by the desire to remain open to observing and interacting with whatever I encounter. The

walking has culminated in three project streams: a collection of poetry that articulates the walking experience and the historical relationship that the newcomers (colonists) developed with Western Australian wetlands; a website which displays photographs of the walk sites ([www.swampwalking.com.au](http://www.swampwalking.com.au)); and this essay, which seeks to contextualise the poetic project of *Swamp*.

To find the theoretical purlieu for this project I look to notions of home, nostalgia and homesickness and how these concepts inform the relationships between people and places. I investigate the role of homesickness in the work of other writers who walk and who write about their walking practice. I examine the work of writers and practitioners who use walking as a way of encountering and apprehending the places that they walk in, and who create work which is attentive to the relationship between human and non-human ecosystems. In the main these writers are Bashō, Henry David Thoreau, Mary Oliver, Gary Snyder and Guy Debord.

In chapter one I provide the geographical and historical context for this thesis by discussing the site in which the research took place, the Swan Coastal Plain in the south west of Western Australia. I explore the notion of the multiple historical narratives that necessarily occupy a colonised space and the challenges that this kind of history poses to the walker-writer in undertaking walking and writing as research. I examine evidence of the existence of Aboriginal paths, or *bidi*'s that typified the Swan Coastal Plain at the time of British arrival in 1827, (the actual colony of the Swan River Settlement began in 1829), and how these paths made by walking provided a template for modern transport routes. I then provide an account of the human relationship to water and wetlands from Noongar times up to the present, relationships which drive the poetic narrative of the *Swamp* project, and inform the themes of homesickness and solastalgia that are elaborated upon in this exegesis.

In chapter two I examine the historical connection between nostalgia and homesickness and suggest that homesickness can be regarded as a philosophical condition which contains the impossibility of a return home. Home here is not simply referred to as a place, but it is the locus of a fractured subjectivity that longs for a return to oneness. From birth to death home is the body with its blood, bones and organs, and home is the place in which the body exists within the greater home of the earth. I discuss how the concept of home and the sense of place the term home evokes have been central to both the loss of wetland environments and to homesickness—the desire to re-trace or return to a temporal and spatial place.

Chapter three turns to psychogeography and nostalgia/homesickness within both the historical and contemporary psychogeographical movements which Bonnet sees as 'an arena

of conflict between two important and unresolved strands within radicalism: the use of the past to critique industrial modernity and the suppression of nostalgia' (Bonnett, 2009, p. 45). In modernism, post modernism, and particularly Marxist revolutionary theory, nostalgia has been negated as being backward looking, irrational, and emotional. Marx declares that:

the social revolution of the nineteenth century cannot draw its poetry from the past, but only from the future. It cannot begin with itself, before it has stripped off all superstition in regard to the past. (K Marx, 1852, p. 11)

I argue that psychogeographical movements arise out of times of great social and physical changes and that the psychogeographer today is responding to the crisis of climate change and global loss of biodiversity. Nostalgia and homesickness have been, and continue to be, in this post-capitalist, post bio-diverse world, positive forces in psychogeography, in that they allow past, present and future to be on a continuum. Nostalgia insists that any so called 'new' society must — socially, ecologically and geographically — arise out of this continuum.

Chapter four examines the motivations behind the practice of walking and writing. I suggest that it is the philosophical notion of homesickness, a longing to feel at home which is not related to a particular place, but rather to what Mary Oliver calls 'a longing for whatever supersedes, if it cannot pass through, understanding (Oliver, 1998, p. 22), which drives the work of the writer-walkers such as Bashō, Thoreau, Mary Oliver and Gary Snyder. For the writers discussed in this chapter, walking and writing can be seen as an attempt to articulate their philosophical homesickness through the practice of walking in the world, whether that be in a vast wilderness area or in the microcosm of a city park, and also through the act of writing down their walking. A fundamental quality of the 'act' is that the actor can be held responsible for it (Evans, 1996, p. 1), thus within this act of walking and writing, or poetpatetics, is contained the ethics of walking in the field of the 'other'.

Chapter five elaborates upon the central concerns of this project. *Swamp* is a local narrative with global themes. The short history of European 'homemaking' on the Swan Coastal Plain has led to most of its wetlands being drained, filled in or otherwise destroyed (Jennings, 1996). The Western Australian Environmental Protection Authority estimated in 2004 that 80 percent of wetlands on the Swan Coastal Plain have been lost and that most of the remainder have been heavily modified. Fifteen percent of the remaining wetland areas retain high ecological values (Environmental Protection Authority, 2004, p. 2). Being both aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems, wetlands are one of the most biodiverse environments on the planet (Mitsch & Gosselink, 2007). In addition, the region of this project, the south-western corner of Western Australia, is internationally recognised as one of the world's

biodiversity hotspots (N. Marchant in Scott & Negus, 2002 Foreword). Since colonisation less than 200 years ago, 95 percent of the north-eastern side of the Swan Coastal Plain has been cleared of native vegetation for rural and urban development (Department of Water, 2009, p. 42), and this clearing is continuing today on the southern and south-eastern edge at the rate of two football fields per day (MacLaren, 2011). As a walker-writer navigating this space of loss associated with wetland environments there is a sense that what I am seeking is disappearing before I can complete my lines and stanzas, and that in place of swamps and streams, I am articulating a language of drainage.

I discuss ecological homesickness in the epoch of the Anthropocene, the era in which, Crutzen argues, we are now living (Crutzen & Schwägerl, 2011). Globally the detritus and end products of our human homemaking project have reached critical levels in the waters, soils and atmosphere of our earth home. The Anthropocene is defined as the new human-dominated period of the Earth's history, a period in which human activity has altered the earth's biology, chemistry and geology, changing the way carbon and nitrogen circulate between land, sea and atmosphere, resulting in most of the planet's ecosystems being affected in some way by the actions of our species (Crutzen & Schwägerl, 2011). In *Openings, a Meditation of History, Method and Sumas Lake*, Anne Cameron suggests that whilst many people are aware that global environments are facing unprecedented degradation, a deeper, more important issue is the 'real human capacity to forget a disappeared environment' (Cameron, 1997, p. 94). When a landscape such as the Swan Coastal Plain has been so thoroughly altered and re-engineered, the flora, fauna, lakes and rivers that connect people to the history and stories of a place are easily forgotten. Cameron argues that 'perhaps one purpose of history is to make people miss what they haven't experienced and to help them understand where they are'. It is in this spirit that I have utilised the methodologies of the Situationists who developed psychogeography, harnessing in particular what Bonnett describes as an 'uprooted nostalgia: a free-floating sense of loss that presents permanent marginality' (Bonnett, 2006, p. 23), and what Albrecht calls 'solastalgia,' the homesickness induced by radical change in a home place (Albrecht, 2008). I do so in order to address the loss of the wetlands of the Swan Coastal Plain as a metaphor for wider global losses of environments and the non-human life that has disappeared with them.

Finally, I conclude that there is a philosophical condition which drives the practice of the walker -writer, a malaise which I call homesickness, a longing to find oneself at home in the world. The embodied act of walking invites an encounter with the physical world, and an opportunity to make connections with living environments outside the writing room. In this sense walking can be seen to be driven by the enigma of homesickness, which is a need to

find a home in the world and a longing for completeness that is ultimately irresolvable. The impossibility of this drive is expressed in Thomas Berry's *The Dream of the Earth*, when he asks;

tell me a story of the river and the valley and the streams and the woodlands and wetlands, of the shellfish and finfish ... tell me a story of where we are and how we got here ... a story that will be my story as well as the story of everyone and everything about me, a story that brings together the human community with every living being in the valley. (T. Berry, 1990, p. 171)

In his longing to be one with his home place Berry is yearning for a unity with nature that is not possible. It is not possible for a person to know the story of 'everyone and everything about me'. This absolute, essentialist idea of knowledge negates the reality that as humans there will always be the other, that which is outside our knowledge or control. Walking and poetry are sympathetic to each other in that neither of them seek absolutes but both ask questions, both are on their way, heading towards something. Poetry is not about the pursuit of proof but assumes the 'burden of the mystery'

(Hirsch, 1999, p. xiii). James Tate says of poetry that:

what we want from poetry is to be moved from where we now stand. We don't just want our ideas or emotions confirmed. Or if we do we turn to lesser poems which are happy to tell you killing children is bad, chopping down the rainforest is bad, dying is sad ... good poetry doesn't offer simple solace or poetic medication, it opens up the senses, disturbs, questions and challenges. (cited in Astley, 2004, p. 18)

In this way poetry and walking are concomitant; they are both about movement, challenge, the opening up of the senses, the surprise of the road, and the encounter with that which is outside our ability to predict or to know. John Berryman wrote of his 'Dream Songs': 'these songs are not meant to be understood, you understand, they are only meant to terrify and comfort' (cited in Hirsch, 1999, p. 5).

The poeapatetic project of *Swamp* engages with the cultural history of human relationships with wetlands, and then goes out wandering, seeking encounters with the non-human inhabitants of the swamps. Through walking the writer comes to know the world beyond the objective and the constructed. The walker-writer walks to salve a deep philosophical yearning for home, and through walking finds moments of ontological beingness in the corporeal knowledge and physical encounters experienced during the walking. In attempting to interpret and bear witness to the lived experience, the walker-writer continues on their journey towards home via the complexities and limitations of the written word.

## **Methodology**

### **Poepatetics, a Walking Investigation.**

I shall never understand, how it can be called a pleasure to hurtle past all the images and objects which our beautiful earth displays, as if one had gone mad and had to accelerate for fear of despair. (Walser, 2012, p. 27)

How does a poet ‘do’ their research? Unlike statistical or quantitative studies which measure and compare, or scientific enquiries which study data sets and control groups, the poet is concerned with relations, ambiences, connections, and how things that have happened in the past resonate with the present and inform the future. Poetry contains both rational and irrational elements. For Hirsch, poetry shoulders ‘the burden of the mystery’ (Hirsch, 1999, p. xiii) and can be at once illuminating yet casting its own shadows. Poetry perhaps offers another, deeper perspective upon sets of events which situate us in time and space and helps us to understand where we are. Cooperman reflects that ‘in leading us ever on and in, a poem clears a space for contemplation and action; it gathers utility as a vehicle of imminent clearing’ (Cooperman, 2001, p. 181).

In order to undertake a poetic, investigative, historical study of the wetlands of the Swan Coastal Plain (SCP) I found it necessary to immerse myself in the subject of enquiry in every way possible. The methodology I used consists of two main practices:

- a) the study of historical texts, maps and records, historiography, interviews, artifacts and art works that have been written and made about the development of the SCP, as well as ecological and biological data on the wetlands and their inhabitants. A comprehensive list of these textual sources is listed in the bibliography;
- b) the physical act of walking the traces of lost lakes, and the shores of remnant lakes.

From March 2009 until March 2012 I undertook a series of walks in and around Perth’s drained and buried wetlands as well as those remnant wetlands which still exist and which offer a reference point to the swampy history of the Swan Coastal Plain. I walked twice, often three times per week in the first 18 months, which reduced to two walks per week in the latter half of the project. I wore out two pairs of walking shoes and made a significant impact upon a third pair.

I chose the sites of the walks by examining maps of Perth dating from 1838 (Department of Lands and Surveys, 1838) onwards, including a 2001 map which details

hydrological changes since colonisation (Bowman Bishaw Gorham, 2001), and Perth street directories dating from 1955 to the present day. I charted my walking journeys by comparing these historical maps to current maps. For example the poem 'Ghost Road' was imagined by following a map of Herdsman Lake dating from 1978 which shows the continuation of Selby Street through the lake bed of Herdsman Lake (Department of Lands and Surveys Perth, 1978, p. map 46). The poem is an imaginative attempt to follow the trajectory of this historical map in the present day when the proposed road alignment is now underwater.

In the spirit of the psychogeographers, the walks were planned in as much as the starting points were defined; but I also maintained an openness which allowed me to stumble across the unexpected; (Walter's Brook flowing beneath back lanes, it's sound and smell emanating from an open drain vent), to change direction if the terrain dictated it, to follow birds, and paths made by walking, to have encounters with people and wildlife, and sometimes to wander too far and too long resulting in sore feet and weary countenance. My walks were most often conducted at a slow pace, and could more be described as a ramble, amble or as it is beautifully expressed in Noongar language, a 'yannow; to saunter; to walk; to move slowly along' (Moore, 1884, p. 82). Where possible I used my bicycle and/or public transport to reach the beginning of my walks, and this too became part of the journey, across the country of my enquiry, to the historical country beneath.

My research tools were my body and my imagination. I tried as much as possible to use all my senses in my enquiry. Walking also involved sitting in places and engaging in deep listening, exploring the layers of sound from the loudest to the barely perceptible. It involved tasting plants, water and air, touching these same; noticing wind currents, movements of birds and people, and all the colliding and conflicting sensations that the body experiences in an environment. I recorded my observations in a series of notebooks, and I used these notes to later inform the poems I wrote. I carried a camera and took many photographs which I also used to jog my memory when back in the writing room. It is these photographs which I have displayed on my website, [www.swampwalking.com.au](http://www.swampwalking.com.au).

The production of the poems in this work are closely related to the walking practice in that it was the physical experience of the places I walked in that really provided the basis for many of the pieces. Even the historical poems which of course were not directly experienced by me, were informed by my walking knowledge of the terrain and my intimacy with wetlands that exist today. These walks in wetlands provided me with a way of imagining how things were for the newcomers who came to encounter, misunderstand and ultimately destroy most of swamps that they encountered on the Swan Coastal Plain.

The interviews that I conducted with Noongar people and other residents of Perth who have living memory of historical wetlands also informed the poetry and the exegesis. The poems ‘Silent Morning’, ‘Yarning Circle’ (Sallur, 2011), ‘Hydrology’(Egan, 2010), ‘Watts Road Lake’ (James, 2011), ‘Cut and Paste Lake’ (Nannup, 2010), and ‘How he Became Poet’ (Gillam, 2011) were all informed by interview material. The interview material used specifically in the exegesis is in chapter four on page 188 (James, 2011; Sallur, 2011), however the interview material also served to inform the themes of the exegesis; loss, homesickness, solastalgia, and the challenges of living in the Anthropocene.

As a theoretical starting point for my walking I turned to the Situationist International, psychogeography and Debord’s theory of the *dérive*. The idea of the *dérive* (drift) as espoused by Debord seemed a theoretical fit for my urban walking practice. Situationist psychogeography was characterised by the practices of the *dérive*, *détournement* (turning around), mapping, and constructed situations, with the main product of these theories and practices being the creation of manifestos (Debord, 1955b).

The *dérive*’ is translated literally as ‘drift’, or what Bonnett calls ‘politically purposeful drifting’ (Bonnett, 2009, p. 47). Sadler describes the *dérive* as a kind of ‘heritage survey’ in which the *dériveur* drifted towards older neighbourhoods trying to record disappearing places, attracted not to traffic-dominated streets but to the ‘still pool and backwaters of the city’ (Sadler, 1998, p. 61). The *dérive* is an activity in which one or more walkers discard their usual purposes for being in a space and simply walk through designated areas, observing environments and interactions (Debord, 1958, p. 2). A *dérive* could have a duration of days, weeks and even months of wandering the streets and alleyways of the city seeking what Ivan Chtcheglov called ‘forgotten desires’ (Chtcheglov, 1953, p. 3).

Wood describes the *dérive* as ‘a mode of experimental behaviour linked to the condition of urban society: a technique of transient passage through varied ambiances’ (Wood, 2002, pp. 186,187). The *dérive* returns the body to the investigation of space. It is what the body sees, hears, smells, tastes, touches and intuits which make up the substance of the inquiry. Walking gives the city back to the pedestrian. Unconstrained by the limited parameters which constrict vehicles, the walker transgresses the dominant narrative of the city and enters the topographical country that the city is constructed upon.

I use the theory of the *dérive* as a methodological starting point for my urban wanderings, and elaborate upon the Situationists walking practice in chapter three, however this project is not wholly about psychogeography. At the centre of this project is the idea of home, homesickness and the walker-writer. I question whether there is an intrinsic



homesickness driving the walker-writer to walk and to create pieces of writing about the walking. I explore the philosophical notion of homesickness in depth in chapter two. When I examined my own motivations for writing about the lost lakes of Perth I came to see that my forays in the city and the resulting poems were motivated by a sense of grief over the loss of local and global ecosystems and the escalating rate of species extinctions. The black birds that fly overhead as I walk — the Carnaby's cockatoo and the forest red-tailed cockatoo — are two such species that, due to land clearing and climate change, are predicted to become extinct within the next 50 years (Vivian, 2012). The wetlands that remain as remnants on the Swan Coastal Plain are disappearing as my pen scrawls across the page, due to continuing urban development, altered hydrology and climate change (Kauhanen, Chambers, & D'Souza, 2011).

Accelerating changes in climate, compromised ecosystems and diminished biodiversity present human beings with a period of great uncertainty and instability. Casey's *earth*, that 'stands under the movements of our bodies' and Husserl's 'basis body' upon and within which all other bodies dwell, is no longer 'the guarantor of all that we do on it' (Casey, 2004, p. 262). The parameters of earth and land are in flux, blurring the threshold between land and water and between climatic zones. The walking project is an attempt to find a horizon within this dialogue of loss, and within the altered geography of local and global environments.

To define my walking practice I constructed the neologism 'Poepatetics' or the poetry of walking; ('poe' from poesis or making; patetics from peripatetics or walking, travelling; a person who walks and travels about (Brown, 2002)). More simply put, poepatetics is 'making from walking'. Poepatetics has a long history reflected in the poetry of Matsuo Bashō in the seventeenth century through to Wordsworth, Dickens, Whitman, Thoreau, Wallace Stevens, Robert Walser, and more recently W.G. Sebald, Rebecca Solnit, Mary Oliver and Gary Snyder. It is not possible within the limited scope of this project to explore each of these writers fully, thus in keeping with the themes of this work I focus on Matsuo Bashō, Henry David Thoreau, Mary Oliver and Gary Snyder, who are all walker-writers whose work reflects the drive of homesickness for the wild, and for beings other than human.

Poepatetics is a combination of three disciplines; the observed phenomema, the subjective bodily experience, and transcription of both the tangible and enigmatic into text. Poepatetics is succinctly expressed in the work of Matsuo Bashō the seventeenth century Haiku master and walking poet when he wrote; 'learn about pines from the pines, and about bamboo from the bamboo' (Bashō, 2000, p. 33). The walker learns about the world through the physical movement of the body and the temporal-spatial subjectivity of conscious intention. The walk is essential to the creative process, both as a lyrical meter, a bodily

metronome, and as a way of perceiving the writer's connection and relation to the world in which they live. As poetatetics practitioner Robert Walser exclaims in his short story 'The Walk':

Walk ... I definitely must, to invigorate myself and to maintain contact with the living world, without perceiving which I could not write the half of one more single word, or produce the tiniest poem in verse or prose. Without walking, I would be dead, and my profession, which I love passionately, would be destroyed. (Walser, 1982, p. 86)

# Chapter One

## Pads, Bidis and Roads—

### the Aboriginal Country in which we walk

It is through the lake system. There is a water serpent down there below which is extremely important and the water on the surface is really the marks where the waugle wither wound his way through and came up after making the streams and the water ways. It's all part of the ecological system to purify the land and the family. Once it was surrounded by waterways and if they fill them up with rubbish then the land begins to die. (Cedric Jacobs cited in Laurie, 2003)

I am following a Wetlands Heritage Trail map through North Perth. I cross an oval where the walls of the Albert Street pumping station and the bases of silver-barked tree trunks are stained red with the mineral residue of underground water. A group of magpies are contrasted bright white and black against the dazzling green of the grass. A rusting sign alerts me to the presence of the water I am seeking: 'WATER Main Drainage, Danger, Keep Out. No Entry. Authorised Personnel Only'. I have arrived at Danjanberup or Smith's Lake, a small re-created wetland which is part of the drainage system of North Perth. I decide to sit and have my lunch at a wooden seat near an interpretive sculpture. A large piece of limestone has been carted to the spot and an interactive soundscape has been installed inside the stone, inscribed *Water words within/ wait to whisper*. The water words are programmed to whisper in several languages: Noongar, Noongar English, Chinese, Chinese English, and English. I press the brass button but the stone has fallen into disrepair and remains silent. No water words will whisper to tell me where I am in time and space.

What is it like to live in a world that is built on top of another world, the underlayer of which remains unacknowledged, except in tiny gestures, in simulacra? JM Arthur notes that Australia did not exist before it was spoken in English and that 'in a colonial situation, love of a place is always problematic' (Arthur, 2003, p. 4). When tracing the psychogeographical history of sites in Australia, what ley lines do we follow; what artefacts and stories do we find in a place where, if we are speakers and writers of the English language, the lacuna of what we don't know is a vast eclipse shadowing that which we do know?

This chapter sets the scene for the project of *Swamp* by examining the history and ideology of rivers and wetlands in the Noongar county in which this poetic work and exegesis were researched and written. I explore the history of Aboriginal walking tracks in Western Australia, (*bidi's*), and how the existence of these pathways assisted the British newcomers in

their explorations of the country. I discuss the notion that for the contemporary Australian walker-writer, the walking exploration is undertaken in an environment that lies heavily upon a historical country which was traversed and mapped in a language other than English and that embodies the names and stories of Noongar people and culture. The walker-writer in this sense is walking a path containing two very different histories. In sub-chapter 1.1, I discuss the subject of water in Perth and elaborate upon some of the historical incidences and circumstances which have contributed to the significant changes in the relationship between people and water on the Swan Coastal Plain; in other words how the ‘wet place’ of Perth has been transformed into the ‘dry place’ that we experience today. I conclude this chapter by introducing the term ‘homesickness’ as a way of describing the sense of loss experienced by people when their home places are irrevocably altered and often damaged beyond repair by human re-engineering of the landscape.

Attwood observes that ‘the boundary between fact and fiction is extraordinarily fuzzy, especially in regard to history’ (Attwood, 2009, p. 237). He recalls comments made by Mark Twain, who visited Australia in 1895. Twain noted that Australian history was ‘the chiefest novelty the country has to offer ... It does not read like history, but like the most beautiful lies’ (Attwood, 2009, p. 238). The narrative of Australia, a place that has only been in existence for a little over 200 years, has been created in a language which evolved in another continent, with a vocabulary for the geography of the northern hemisphere. English is the dominant language with which the walker-writer explores the psychogeography of the Australian experience, a language which is not always easily attuned to the nuances of the land in which it has come to be spoken.

As stated by Noongar Elder Cedric Jacobs, for the Noongar people, the original inhabitants of south Western Australia, the wetlands and waterways of the Swan Coastal Plain are imbued with sacred meaning. They are deeply embedded in the creation story of the Waugle and thus are places that are observed with extraordinary reverence. Wetlands were important campsites in the seasonal migration of Noongar people, providing abundant food and water resources (Bekle, 1981). I have interviewed Noongar elders and others about the wetlands and have read materials published on this topic, and many Noongar people have been most generous in sharing much of their traditional cultural knowledge. However, there are histories that have been lost and there are aspects of Noongar heritage that for reasons of cultural law are not able to be shared with newcomers (Garlett, 2010). Thus there are chunks of the traditional story of this country that are not available to me as a non-Aboriginal newcomer. The space of my *dérive* is therefore a space between my English language knowing and, in Noongar terms, my not knowing the stories connected to particular places

(nor where I can and cannot go and what I should or should not do). I step out on the surface of the country, the re-engineered and ‘re-imagined’ (Wood, 2002, p. 2) place that is laid over the Noongar country beneath.

Anne Cameron suggests that it is the ‘real human capacity to forget a disappeared environment’ (Cameron, 1997, p. 94) that is at the heart of complacency about the degradation of our natural environments. When a landscape such as the Swan Coastal Plain has been so thoroughly altered and re-engineered, the flora, fauna, lakes and rivers that connect people to the history and stories of a place are easily forgotten. Cameron argues that ‘perhaps one purpose of history is to make people miss what they haven’t experienced and to help them understand where they are’ (Cameron, 1997, p. 94). The word ‘remember’ is derived from the root *memor*, meaning mindful, and *member*, meaning body part or organ (in plural, ‘the body’), or *membrum*, meaning limb, member of the body (Harper, 2011). This etymology affords us a notion of the body as holding awareness and recollections, and the practice of walking as a bodily act of mindfulness.

Noongar Elder Dr Richard Walley suggests that a way to remember or re-instate Noongar country in the new place of Perth is through the plants, birds and animals. He argues that when native plants, birds and animals are allowed space to exist in the Perth metropolitan area Noongar country and culture become a living entity because that culture is so intimately connected to and drawn from the natural environment (Walley, 2009). When walking on the Swan Coastal Plain the sound of wattle birds, magpies, ravens and cockatoos connects us to the soundscape of Noongar country. The smell, touch and sight of native plants, such as peppermint trees, dryandra, tuarts, bankias and melaleucas, teach us some of the sensory stimuli of Noongar country. The now rare site of a mammal such as a possum or quenda, link us to where we are in time and space and to the place that is so resonant in the remnants of natural vegetation and wetlands that survive amongst the built up city and suburbs.

One of the ways in which I have tried to address the lack that opens up between the old country and the new in my poepletic practice is through the walker’s engagement with flora, fauna and bird life and the languages that they speak. I have attempted to listen, smell, taste, touch and observe these Noongar ‘relations’ (Pettersen, 2011) in order to re-member that I am walking in Noongar country.

The myth of Terra Nullius affords the impression that the first Europeans and British who saw and walked upon the country that was to become Australia encountered an unmapped, uncharted terrain, devoid of signs of human habitation. This idea is sometimes still given gravitas in the present as is indicated by an article in the *Weekend Australian*, January

14-15, 2012, in which Patrick McCauley writes ‘before European settlement the land that was to become Australia had not been mapped and it had no name ... There was no farming and compared with European standards life was short and brutal’ (McCauley, 2012). In fact, when the first Europeans arrived in the Aboriginal territories they were to colonise, they found in many areas networks of narrow tracks through the terrain, walking paths used by Aboriginal people in their daily and seasonal movements. These tracks connected camps and neighbouring groups and led to places of cultural significance, and social and economic importance. These tracks also defined boundaries of each clan’s traditional estates. Often these paths were conveniently used by early settlers and became the routes for roads and highways (Wet Tropics Management Authority, 2010).

In Western Australia tracks created by the Noongar people were also used by the early settlers to explore the land and these routes formed the basis for roads, many of which still follow similar alignments. Many traditional areas of importance to Noongar people are now the location of town sites, Perth itself being but one example (Collard, 1994, cited in Coode & Irvine, 2004, p. 16).

In *Fire and Hearth, a study of Aboriginal usage and European usurpation in South Western Australia*, Sylvia Hallam writes about the use of fire by traditional Aboriginal people to modify the landscape, one aspect of which was to allow for movement through the karri and jarrah forests. Her research shows that some areas of forest were burnt while other areas were left dense and were used less (Hallam, 1975). Hallam’s discussion of Aboriginal use of fire in Western Australia provides many examples of Aboriginal pathways, particularly around swamps and watercourses, which were followed and used by the European colonists. She cites the explorer George Grey, who on one of his journeys in Western Australia describes ‘swamps producing yun-jid, a species of typha, served by well established paths and supporting abundant populations in clusters of well built, clay plastered and turf roofed huts’ (Hallam, 1975, p. 12). Grey wrote that ‘these superior huts, well marked roads, deeply sunk wells and extensive warran grounds all spoke of a large and comparatively speaking settled resident population’ (Grey, 1841, pp. 12-38). John Bussell, in south Western Australia, records walking through ‘fields of grass where native paths, which traversed these lawns in every direction, gave us easy walking (Bussell 1833 cited in Hallam, 1975, p. 25). George Fletcher Moore, in his *Descriptive Vocabulary of the language in common use amongst the Aborigines of Western Australia*, lists three separate words used to describe paths:

Kungo — a path; a beaten track, Gongan — a sandy district; the easiest road, or usual path, and Bidi — a vein; the main path or track, pursued by the natives in passing from one part of the country to another, and which leads by the best watering places. (Moore, 1884, p. 45)

Today Moore's Noongar path names can be translated to the roads which lie over Aboriginal paths as: small suburban road (kungo), main road (gongan), and highway (bidi).

That Europeans used Aboriginal tracks to traverse their new home is mentioned by Western Australia's first Surveyor General John Septimus Roe. When travelling in the south-west of the state he noted, 'tracks and fires of natives were numerous ... we followed a beaten track of the natives behind the sea-coast hills' (Roe 1852, 15). Dale and Moore when travelling to explore new territory east of the Darling Range followed 'a native path leading up the hill' (Moore, 1884, p. 67). In the Eastern Goldfields, early sandalwood harvesters followed Aboriginal trails out into the harsh desert country, paths laid down by the feet of Aborigines moving between wells and soaks. Settlers and gold miners then followed in the path of the sandalwooders consistent with the pattern of development from Aboriginal path to European road (Hallam, 1975, p. 76).

Henry Bunbury, a Lieutenant stationed in Western Australia between 1836-37, records many 'bidis' in his exploration of the Leschenault area. He and his party followed Noongar tracks along the estuary and followed a 'well beaten path to a native crossing place' (Bunbury, 1930). They continued on along another 'good native path' and became lost in an 'infinity of paths through thick Spearwood Swamps' (Bunbury, 1930). A Noongar guide then led them along another 'well beaten path; to Capel' (Bunbury, 1930). In his reminiscence *Winjans People*, Jesse Hammond describes 'all through the south west there were pads of natives, like cattle pads and just as plain' (Hammond, 1980, p. 18).

Hallam notes that Noongar walking tracks ran from Perth to North Fremantle, across the Swan River, out to Bibra Lake and down to Rockingham, Mandurah and Pinjarra. Two tracks crossed the river near what is now the causeway, to the Canning River and again out to Bibra Lake. Tracks also led to Kelmscott and down to the southern regions of Bunbury and Busselton (Hallam, 1975, p. 67). Colonists depended on these tracks and cleared areas to travel through unfamiliar and often heavily wooded areas and to explore new territory. Hallam comments that, through firing the country and the construction of tracks, Aborigines opened up the landscape for Europeans to enter, to make farms and find water sources, and she concludes that:

the European communities inherited the possibilities of settlement and land use from Aboriginal communities but in doing so they robbed these communities of the land which they had mapped out with patterns of their existence. (Hallam, 1975, p. 65)

From these accounts we are afforded the impression of a country that was well mapped with familiar and often used pathways between sites of importance to Noongar people, sites

that were used time and again in their seasonal migrations from coast to hills and back again. It was a country that was interspersed with open grasslands often near water sources, which were created by Noongar firing patterns, and wells dug by Noongar people in their travels. To the present day explorer these accounts describe a country mapped by walking, a complex interweaving of routes and paths made by pedestrians in their daily and seasonal activities and in the enacting of personal and cultural lives. In those parts of Australia where European culture dominates (largely coastal and fertile areas) these ephemeral tracks made by walking, and thus reflecting the spatial and temporal lives of Aboriginal people, have been erased by the economic activities of the newcomers. But many of these routes, as is evidenced by Hallam's research, have been utilised and expanded into roads and highways along which our busy motorised lives rumble. What lies beneath are the sandy tracks that facilitated the mobility of Aboriginal life, another country, another language and a well-walked map written in another language.

In some places Aboriginal paths are being revived and used as sites of cultural strengthening and exchange. *Katitjiny* is a Noongar word meaning 'place of learning'. *Bidi Katitjiny* is a walking trail through the Piney Lakes reserve in the City of Melville. The trail follows a path which has been used for thousands of years by Noongar women for food gathering, the cultural education of children, and women's cultural business (Verma, 2011).

The site of Perth itself, with the river on one side and the chain of swamps to the north, was an area much frequented by Aborigines. European settlement concentrated near estuaries in part because of the necessity of river transport and in part, Hallam suggests, due to the already established 'pads' or network of paths and tracks which led to water sources. This assertion is confirmed by Noongar Elder Dr Noel Nannup who observes that many sites used by the newcomers follow the trajectory of past Noongar usage. He describes Kings Park in Perth as an example. Gooninup (Kings Park) was used by Whadjuk Noongar people as a meeting place, a place for ceremonies, weddings, and gatherings of people from neighbouring districts. Kings Park is used for these very same purposes today (Nannup, 2008).

The fact that wetland sites were at the centre of this network of pathways was not closely interrogated by the newcomers to Western Australia. The wetlands were places of abundance to Noongars who lived off the water birds, frogs, gilgies and plant foods so prevalent in the swamps. George Grey's exploration party barely survived and almost starved to death as they passed by the swamps north of Perth (Hallam, 1975, p. 77).



From a place dissected and mapped by walking tracks, the settled terrain of Australia has become dominated by sealed roads which privilege the motor vehicle over the pedestrian. Consider the song/map of the Angurugu of Groote Eylandt:

I've trodden/ on the path/ the narrow path./ Ant path/ red ants/ meat ants/ tiny ants/ parrots screeched/ flying low over their ant friends./ Ant paths/ ant tracks./ Wind striking grass/ parting grass./ rustling./ My grandfathers wind./ tiny ants' wind./ thin ants' wind./ the west wind has veered away. (cited in Rose, 1996, p. 12)

It is difficult to imagine such a description, with its intimacy and interconnections, being possible when travelling through an environment in a car. It is easy to imagine the ants squashed, the parrot as road kill, and the west wind simply a vibration on the duco.

For the Australian writer-walker, the terrain traversed is embodied with ephemeral traces, shadows, hints, and fragments of stories. To encounter a present day cityscape that is built upon the networks laid down by the feet of Aboriginal people is to step in the space between an old world and a new, and to experience the joins and interstices where these worlds connect. My poetic project *Swamp*, follows the trajectories of some of these old walking tracks, and seeks to re-member and incorporate this history into the present day experience.

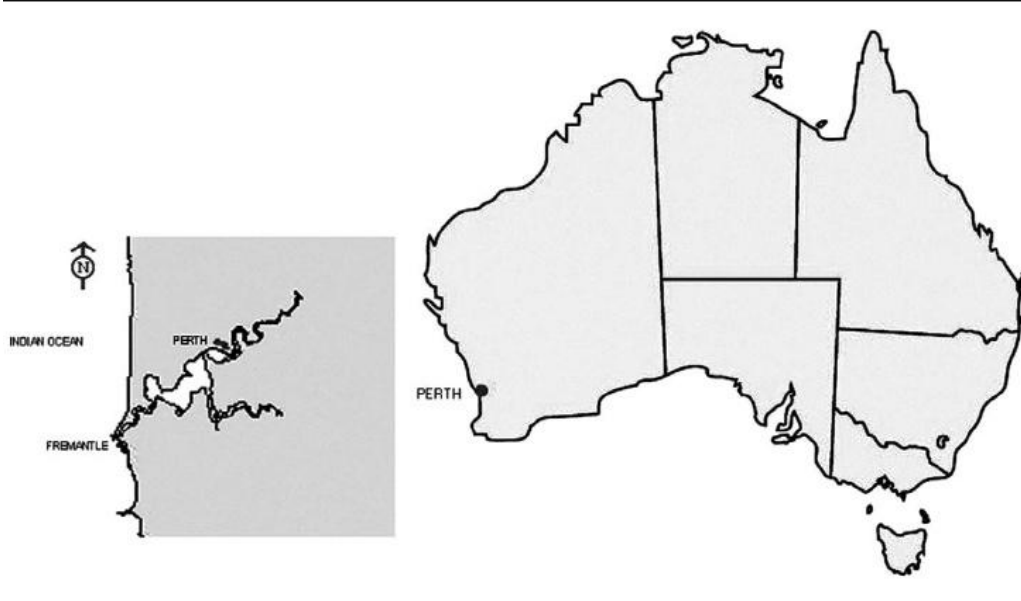
## 1.1 Homesickness and the Swamps

When I began the project of walking the lost wetlands of Perth I was motivated by three factors. The first was an encounter with a map of Perth drawn in 1838 which showed the presence of a chain of lakes just north of the city of Perth. Laid over the top of these patches of blue was the street grid of North Perth and Northbridge. To examine this map was like looking at a diagram of some other place, another city, surely not Perth where water is hard to find and is definitely not fresh and blue-coloured. Looking into the grid and reading familiar street names placed like bridges over water bodies was a disorientating experience. I felt the need to investigate this 'other place' that existed in the history and below the ground of the Perth that I knew in 2009.

The second factor was the actuality of present day Perth, characterised by drought and water restrictions. The majority of Perth's potable water is drawn from underground aquifers, the Jandakot and Gnangara mounds. The remnant wetlands are surface expressions of these aquifers and are thus affected by increasing water extraction (Department of Water, 2009). The remainder is drawn from dams and desalination systems. Australia's first desalination plant at Kwinana south of Perth opened in 2007. The plant uses reverse osmosis to turn

seawater from Cockburn Sound into nearly 140 megalitres of drinking water per day and supplements the Perth metropolitan area water supply (Sullivan, 2007). Another extensive desalination facility at Binningup near the southern city of Bunbury came on line in August 2011.

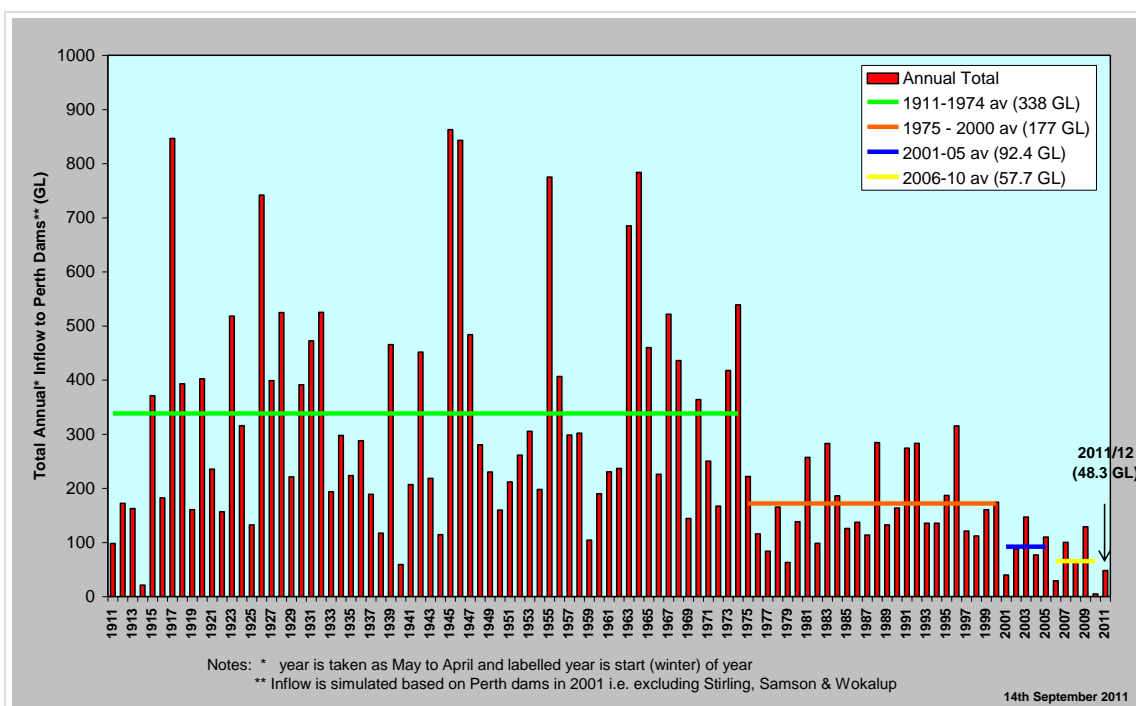
The third factor was a condition that I call ‘homesickness’. As a resident of the Swan Coastal Plain for twenty years I, like many others I spoke to, was beginning to experience an almost crippling sadness for the place that was disappearing beneath the expansion of ‘booming’ Perth. Richard Offen, executive director of Heritage Perth comments that; ‘wealth from Western Australia’s mining meant that it could afford to knock-down and rebuild Perth’s inner-city suburbs ... A lot was destroyed in the 70s and 80s – which was what town planners were doing all over the world’ (Preston, 2013). Since the 1970’s mining booms have enabled the massive upward and outward growth of the footprint of the Perth metropolitan area, resulting in the loss, in increments, of wild places; banksia bushlands, backyard eucalypts, crown bush lands, even so-called ‘bush forever’ sites and areas that have been put aside as ‘offsets’ against other developments (MacLaren, 2011). The losses also include wetlands, those traditionally maligned swamps which have been used as rubbish dumps, drained, filled and built upon, despite their status as one of most biodiverse habitats on the planet (Giblett, 1996). Analogous with the disappearance of these habitats is a growing list of absences and extinctions of the species that inhabit them (National Land and Water Resources Audit’s Biodiversity Working Group). Seeing those old maps filled me with a deeper sense of melancholy, deep enough to inspire me to embark upon this three year poepletic endeavour. The poetic project of *Swamp* is driven by homesickness for the natural world, for interactions with species other than human, and for the ‘real’ of the country upon which the city is constructed. It is an attempt to re-inscribe the lost wetlands into the continuum of the narrative of Perth’s history, and to acknowledge the values of those wetlands that remain.



**Figure 24. Location of study site. Perth, Western Australia**  
 Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics and MapInfo Australia (1994).  
 (Exception to copyright ss40, 103C; research or study).

**Table 1. Impact on Water Availability — WA, Reduced Inflows to Dams.**

(Tracking of inflow early in the century is done based on the same number of catchments that exist today to provide a viable comparison) (R. Humphries, 2011), (Exception to copyright ss40, 103C; research or study).



In 1827 fresh water was available from the Swan River above Heirisson Island, and from creeks, springs and lakes in and around the town site. A map of the area made by Captain James Stirling and botanist Charles Fraser in 1827, notes ‘abundance of fresh water ... many fresh springs ... river water fresh here’ (Stirling cited in Morel-Ednie Brown, 2007, p. 10). Since the drought of 1974–75, rainfall in Perth has been declining, culminating in the driest year on record in 2010 (D. R. Humphries, 2011). In 2007 the then Federal Minister for Environment and Water Malcolm Turnbull described Perth as the ‘canary in the climate change coalmine’ (Sullivan, 2007).

The transformation of Perth from a wet place to a dry place has had many contributing factors, a major one being the drying climate. Equally significant is the relationship between people and water. One of the reasons Captain James Stirling and botanist Charles Fraser chose the site of Perth was the presence of an abundance of fresh water. Fraser wrote in his 1827 journal that ‘I was astonished at the facility with which water is obtained on this apparently sandy spot, for, on digging two or three feet, we found abundance of the finest Water I ever tasted’ (Fraser cited in Morel-Ednie Brown, 2007, p. 7). By 1878, Army Medical Surgeon Major Johnston was reporting that ‘the inhabitants of Perth are literally living on a dunghill and their drinking water is polluted by sewerage’ (Hunt, 1980, p. 15). By 1897 an editorial in the *Morning Herald* was complaining:

the people of Perth are at the present time drinking what may be regarded as a solution of faeces ... They are drinking liquid filth, and it is not to be wondered at, therefore, that irritative diarrhea and other states of ill health should be so excessively common as they are. (cited by Hunt, 1980, p. 45)

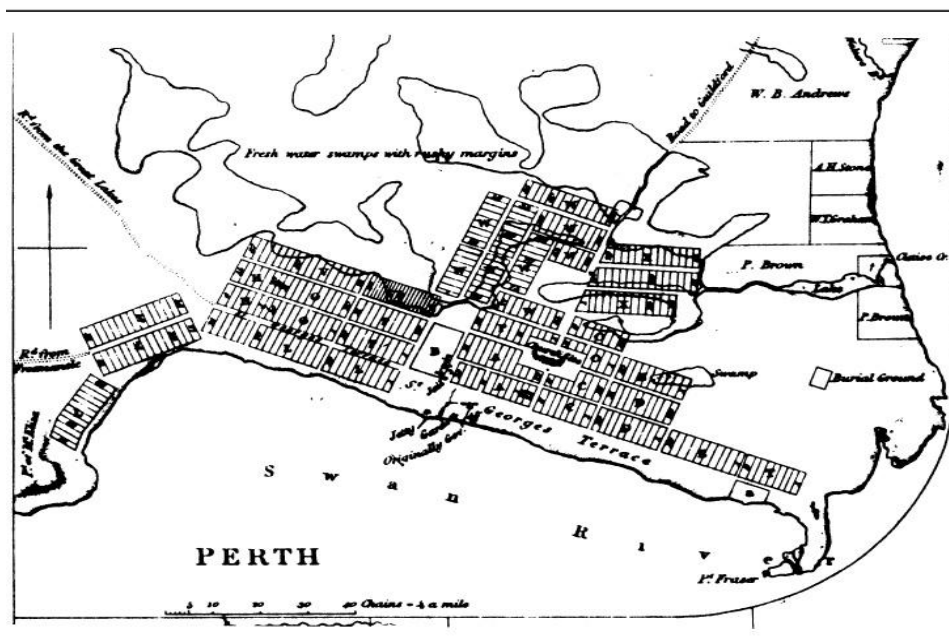
Michael Cathcart documents the systematic fouling of fresh water sources in Australia by the British colonists in his book *The Water Dreamers*. He describes the first British people to arrive in Australia as ‘wet country people’ (Cathcart, 2009, p. 8). Water, rivers, streams and rain were endemic to the reality and the psyche of Europeans. When they arrived in the ‘dry country’ of Australia they had limited ways of responding to the nature of Australian rivers, creeks and wetlands. Moreover, in their home country of England the abundance of water had not led to a respectful relationship. By the time the First Fleet left for Sydney Cove in 1788 the Fleet River was already fouled with the detritus of London and had become a stinking sewer, the repository of human waste and dead bodies. In the area surrounding the Fleet, plague and disease were rife, causing a doctor to write in 1560, ‘there died most in London and were soonest afflicted’ (Ackroyd, 2000, p. 557). The Fleet was bricked over in 1732 and remains as a storm water sewer. Other rivers in London which have been buried and diverted

into drains include Stamford Brook, the Wandle, Counter's Creek, the Falcoln, the Westbourne, the Tyburn, the Effra, the Walbrook, Neckinger, the Earl's Sluice, the Peck and the Ravensbourne (Ackroyd, 2000, p. 555).



**Figure 25. Map of the Townsite of Perth showing lake system, 1838.**

Courtesy of the State Records Office of Western Australia. 3868/288 (Exception to copyright ss40, 103C; research or study).



**Figure 26. Arrowsmith's plan of the town site of Perth 1833.** (Morel-EdnieBrown, 2009). (Exception to copyright ss40, 103C; research or study).

Cathcart discusses the fate of the Tank Stream at Sydney Cove, the presence of which was a defining reason for Phillip to choose the site for the location of Sydney. The Tank Stream was an important campsite for the Eora people as it was a source of fresh flowing water. The new colony of Australia set up on its shores with the Governor on the eastern banks and soldiers and convicts on the west. Despite Governor Phillip's efforts to demand a green belt along the banks of the stream, within seven years Sydney's drinking water was fouled by activities along the waterway such as tanneries, pig keeping, slaughterhouses, brewing and the discharge of sewage (Cathcart, 2009, pp. 28-35).

Thus it was the relationship between people and water which defined the outcome for the Tank Stream. The 'wet country people' effect was repeated across the continent (see Cathcart 2009), not the least in the project area of the Swan Coastal Plain. Anna Cuippa, in her historical geography of the Bayswater area, investigates the 80-90 percent loss of wetlands in the City of Bayswater. Bayswater is situated on the banks of the Swan River north-east of the city of Perth and in its pristine state the area was a landscape of swamps and lakes which supported a great biodiversity of bird, fish, plant and micro life. By 1964, 200 000 hectares of swamp land on the Swan Coastal Plain had been drained and filled in and most of the wetlands in the Bayswater area had been lost. Those wetlands that remain have been greatly modified and compromised (Cuippa, 2003, p. 12).

Cuippa reiterates Cathcart when she comments that 'early settlers brought with them a sense of place that derived from their European homelands' (Cuippa, 2003, p. 16). George Seddon describes a sense of place as showing 'most clearly in the way the community feels about and uses the landscape' (Seddon, 1972, p. 262). In the case of European settlers in Australia, an inability to understand and appreciate Australian land and water scapes led them to try to recreate a sense of place as they knew it in their homelands. It is partly a matter of nostalgia and homesickness for the familiar that has resulted in the reimagining and re-engineering of many Australian places, to the great detriment of the people, plants, animals and birds which inhabited them as their home places prior to colonisation.

My poeapatetic project, *Swamp*, is a response to the continuing loss of wetlands on the Swan Coastal Plain and the loss of wetlands world-wide (Leahy, 2008). To remember the water/mudscape that once identified the Swan Coastal Plain as distinct from anywhere else in the world can help 'to make people miss what they haven't experienced and to help them

understand where they are' (Cameron, 1997, p. 94). Homesickness drives this impulse to make new maps, to leave the designated footpaths and follow lines of longing, to discover the poetry inherent in the walking environment, , and to restore the human body into the landscape of desire.

In this chapter I have discussed the historical context of the site in which the *Swamp* project was researched and written. I have illuminated some of the evidence of the existence of a complex network of Aboriginal pathways that defined the movement of Noongar people through their country, and shown that these paths inform some of our major road transport networks today. I have discussed some of the issues confronting the walker-writer in traversing the terrain of a colonised landscape in which different cultures and histories vie for space, and have provided some background into the history of water on the Swan Coastal Plain, a narrative that informs the poetic aspect of this thesis, and is the underlying basis for my exploration of homesickness in the context of changing ecosystems and environments. In chapter two I develop the discussion of home and homesickness and examine the historical links between nostalgia and the philosophical idea of 'homesickness'. I look at the presence of nostalgia and homesickness in Abrahamic religious teachings and then move to the notion of the 'earth as home' through the work of Thomas Berry, Wallace Stevens and Waldo Emerson. Albrecht's 'solastalgia'(Albrecht, 2005), is a neologism which links nostalgia and homesickness to the sense of loss associated with the human re-engineering and reconstruction of landscapes and ecosystems. It is homesickness for the wilds lost beneath the construction of the city that drives the poepletic project of *Swamp*.

## Chapter Two

# Nostalgia and Homesickness

Nothing destroys antiquity like energy; nothing blots out the old like the new. (Mrs Cook cited in Ackroyd, 2000, p. 549)

One of the most eloquent testimonies to place's extraordinary memorability is found in nostalgia ... we are in pain (algos) about a return home (nostos) that is not presently possible. It is not accidental that 'nostalgia' and 'homesickness' are still regarded as synonyms in current English dictionaries. (Casey, 1987, p. 201)

British poet Herbert Read writes that 'man is born homeless; and the search for home 'creates him and destroys him hour by hour' (cited in Tindall, 1991, p. 213). In this chapter I examine different notions of home, and how the search for the place of home, or the sensation of feeling at home is a driving force in human trajectories. I explore the historical links between nostalgia and the philosophical idea of 'homesickness', and look at the presence of nostalgia and homesickness in Abrahamic religious teachings. I discuss the concept of the 'earth as home' through the work of Thomas Berry, Wallace Stevens and Waldo Emerson, and finally, I identify how Albrecht's 'solastalgia' (Albrecht, 2005), relates to the walking-writing project of *Swamp* in that it describes the sense of loss associated with extensive changes in ecosystems and environments.

Nostalgia and homesickness were once conditions inextricably linked, which over time have become pathologised and separated into two distinct concepts (Sedikides, Wildschut, Arndt, & Routledge, 2008). In modernism, post-modernism, and particularly Marxist revolutionary theory, nostalgia has been negated as being backward looking, irrational, and emotional. Marx declared that:

the tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living ... The revolution of the nineteenth century must let the dead bury their dead in order to arrive at its own content. (K Marx, 1852, pp. 1-2)

Yet for writers and thinkers who walk/ed as their political and artistic methodology, and who write or wrote about walking, in particular Bashō, Thoreau, Mary Oliver, Gary Snyder, and Guy Debord, home, and the homesickness experienced in the search for home, is central and is used to make sense of human interaction with places as being on a continuum.

The idea of home, that which is longed for, provokes a multitude of interpretations. Our most significant and persistent home is the body itself with its blood, bone, sinew and organs



that quietly pump and surge within us, those elements of ourselves that are with us from birth and remain our fixed home for the duration of our lives. The body as home is of course subject to its environment, adapting over time to changing living conditions and cultural expectations. The trend for scarring, branding and tattooing the body, which dates back to ancient Egypt (Swift, 1999), is known to be carried out for a number of reasons, including to provide magical protection, to connect with the Divine, to act as a permanent talisman and as something which cannot be lost (Hemingson, 2001). The current trend in western culture to inscribe the body with words and images can perhaps be attributed to a need to initiate the signifier in a world where the metaphor has been replaced with the simile of simulacra. Permanent body inking etches the body with something immutable which contains personal and/or cultural meaning. The tattooing of post codes and national flags is a case in point, providing a site of intersection between the body and place.

After the body, there are the buildings we live in, our houses, apartments or other forms of dwelling in which we physically reside. And there is the place in which the buildings exist, the neighbourhoods, towns, and the watersheds or bioregions that we inhabit. Kirkpatrick Sale defines the bioregion as our 'life territory' (cited in Giblett, 2011, p. 242). Berry describes the bioregion as 'an integral community of all the geological as well as the biological and the human components' (T. Berry, 1990, p. 176). The bioregion does not follow the arbitrary lines of political borders but is a 'geomorphological and biological region ... which sustains our life' (Giblett, 2011, p. 239). All of these bioregions meet up at some point, and contain edges which connect to form the whole earth home, which James Lovelock describes as 'a single living entity capable of manipulating the earth's atmosphere to suit its overall needs and endowed with faculties and powers far beyond those of its constituent parts' (cited in Kotler, 2012, p. 16). Lara Sewall's idea of home is that we do not only live on a planet but that we are residing 'within the biosphere', those regions of the earth's crust and atmosphere occupied by living organisms (Sewall, 1995, p. 212).

Home as physical place has come to represent, at least in western cultures, the bricks and mortar of a building that is possessed (financially and psychologically). The impossibility of this building acting as a 'true home', or final destination, that which is desired, imagined, and worked for, and which fulfils both the metaphysical and physical yearning for home, is reflected in the current penchant for renovation and renewal. The building that one calls home is never satisfying. Once attained it must be continually changed and reconstructed to suit the ever changing vicissitudes of psychological space and fashion. The tossing out of the objects from within the home, such as furnishings and white goods (verge collections), and the demolition of interiors to continually upgrade with newer and better fittings, suggests that the

notion of the house as home is ultimately lacking and incomplete. Rob Sitch's 1997 film *The Castle* both parodies and celebrates the site of house as home in Darryl Kerrigan's suburban house built on a toxic landfill, beneath power lines, and directly adjacent to an airport runway, which Darryl (Michael Caton), sees as his 'castle' (Cilauro, Gleisner, Kennedy, & Sitch, 1997). The allegory of home celebrated in *The Castle* is the aspiration of the working man, the 'Aussie Battler' who stands up against the forces of government to defend his house/home. In reality only 17 percent of the world's population have access to the possibility of ever borrowing the money to obtain a mortgage (Reynolds, Pidcock, & Pholeros, 2012), and having a mortgage does not guarantee that an individual's home is, or can remain, their castle.

In the USA as a result of the Sub-Prime mortgage collapse, the bricks, timber, glass and steel that represent home for a multitude of people, have in many cases become abandoned shells which are slowly disintegrating and eventually being demolished and placed in landfill. McNeil describes the phenomena of events in Contra Costa County, California, where across the abandoned suburbs, wildlife has moved back in to the neighbourhood. Hordes of bats have colonised the roof spaces of empty houses, eventually causing the collapse of ceilings and walls. After local councils installed mosquito fish in formerly chlorinated pools to control mosquito larvae, backyard swimming pools have evolved into thousands of small wetlands attracting ducks, frogs and great blue herons, (McNeil, 2009).

The physical parameters of house as home are mutable and changeable, creating an insecurity which belies the idea of a home being a place that is 'owned'. Levinas comments that home as dwelling occupies a privileged place but is not an ultimate end. He writes that 'the privileged role of the home does not consist in being the end of human activity but in being its condition, and in this sense its commencement' (Levinas, 1995, p. 152). For him the dwelling represents an interiority which separates the dweller from the elements of air, soil, trees, rivers and the road itself, and in this way the locus of buildings and interiors disconnect us from the greater region in which we reside (Levinas, 1995, p. 157). As I will discuss in later chapters, this separation of the dweller from the earth place of the dwelling results in a disconnect from the impact the dweller has upon the earth as well as a catalyst for the homesickness of the dweller.

The contemplation of home also invokes an internal dimension within the unconscious, as a yearning to return to oneness, a deep seated drive which propels human beings to seek certainty in an existence which is fraught with change, uncertainty and lack of control. Freud describes this longing to return to something familiar or 'homely' as an unconscious desire to return to one's first home, the body of the mother. Return to the mother's body as a home

represents an impossibility, and is a repressed desire which is also horrifying and uncanny. The mother's body represents the beginning of, and the first home of all human beings, yet to re-enter this beginning would be *unheimlich*, or akin to entering a kind of haunted house. Freud writes that 'love is home-sickness'; the *unheimlich* is what was once *heimisch* or familiar, and is the token of repression (Freud, 2012, p. 4). The longing for a 'return' identified by Freud is also at the basis of the Abrahamic religions, as a desire to return to God from whence the believer was created. It is this unconscious drive which is homesickness, a longing for unity, completeness and belonging in a psychological and spiritual, as well as a physical place.

The rapid pace of change in the environment of our earth home is a disturbing element in the current milieu, and the ecological consequences of constant renewal are denied by capitalism and the aspirations of comfort and fiscal wealth that drive our economies. Nevertheless, out there beyond the perimeters of the back yard and the city limits, habitat loss and a changing climate present a compelling threat to our physical earth home, and in this reality is a growing sense of loss that permeates human existence. Nostalgia and homesickness are experienced in response to loss of habitats and the non-human organisms that inhabit them. Nostalgia and homesickness have been an unsettling aspect of the agenda in the radical politics of the Situationist International (SI) and subsequent groups which have evolved from the SI platform into the 1990s and the present psychogeographical movements (Bonnett, 2009). The term psychogeography was developed by members of the SI, an artistic and political avant-garde movement which emerged in Paris in the 1950s. I will discuss the nostalgias of the Situationists in chapter three.

The present chapter re-unites nostalgia and homesickness in the neologism of 'solastalgia' (Albrecht, 2008), and examines how the concept of home and the sense of place the term home evokes have been central to both the loss of wetland environments which have been buried beneath the re-engineered landscape, and to the longing to re-trace or return to the home place which existed prior to alterations in the landscape that were driven by a desire for a certain concept of home.

Historically the notion of nostalgia has been inextricably linked to homesickness and it is instructive to examine the history of homesickness and nostalgia to understand how these terms are relevant within the context of the continuum of environmental change. Homesickness is a concept once thought to be part of the medicalised condition of nostalgia. The word homesickness derives from a translation of the German 'heimweh', 'Heim' meaning home, and 'Weh' meaning woe or pain (Harper, 2011). In the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary nostalgia is still cited as having connections to the German translation of 'heimweh' (Brown, 2002), yet

in common use the two have been separated over time, homesickness being linked to a particular place, usually the place of origin, and nostalgia to a longing for objects, time periods, and people as well as places. Sedikides et al. argue that by the late twentieth century homesickness and nostalgia were no longer considered to be aspects of one condition. They define homesickness as a kind of separation anxiety which can be experienced when leaving one's home, and nostalgia as 'a sentimental longing for one's past' (Sedikides et al., 2008, p. 304). The term nostalgia can be traced back to Homer and his Greek wanderer Odysseus whose journey home took ten long years. Although offered sanctuary and immortality by the nymph Calypso, Odysseus remembers his love for his wife Penelope and declares, 'I long for my home and to see the day of returning' (Homer, 1900, pp. 78-79 book V).

Nostalgia is a compound word made up of the Greek word *nostos* meaning return, and *algos* meaning pain. Thus nostalgia is translated literally as an 'acute longing for familiar surroundings, or severe homesickness' (Brown, 2002). The diagnosis of nostalgia was first used by the Swiss doctor Johannes Hofer in the seventeenth century, and was considered to be a medical condition that was confined to people of Swiss origin. The disease was first observed in Swiss mercenaries working away from their home country in the armies of European monarchs. Symptoms included anorexia, prolonged bouts of weeping, and irregular heartbeat. As a medical condition the symptoms were attributed to particularly Swiss causes, such as the persistent ringing of cow bells in the Swiss mountains as well as differences in atmospheric pressure (Sedikides et al., 2008).

During the nineteenth century nostalgia moved away from its link with homesickness into the realm of psychiatry and was considered a repressive compulsive disorder. Symptoms of nostalgia as a psychiatric disorder included anxiety, sadness and insomnia, manifestations which later came to be considered as belonging on the spectrum of depressive disorders (Sedikides et al., 2008, p. 304).

The definitions of nostalgia and homesickness in the field of psychology and psychiatry are medicalised and reductionist and do not account for the spiritual and religious connotations of the conditions. Nostalgia as homesickness is referenced in the Bible as a longing for oneness with God, or as a strong desire to be in the 'true' home of heaven. The holy scriptures of all three Abrahamic religions are characterised by contemplation and perhaps even a longing for death in order to return to God from whom the believer is separated by their physical body. Corinthians II, 5:8 states: 'thus we are full of courage and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord' (Corinthians, II, 5:8 "King James Bible," 2010). In Genesis 3, Adam and Eve are expelled from the Garden of Eden:

so the Lord God expelled him from the orchard in Eden to cultivate the ground from which he had been taken ... By the sweat of your brow you will eat food until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you will return. (Genesis, 3:19 "King James Bible," 2010)

Homesickness for God in heaven is intrinsic to the Abrahamic tradition. In the Gospel of John, 14: 1-3, we are entreated:

do not let your hearts be distressed. You believe in God; believe also in me. There are many dwelling places in my Father's house. Otherwise, I would have told you, because I am going away to make ready a place for you. (John, 14, 1:3 "King James Bible," 2010)

In Judaism the notion of 'Olam Ha Ba' is described as meaning that:

whatever is good in this life is said to be even better in the World to Come ... a single grape will be enough to make a flagon of wine (Ketubbot 111b), trees will produce fruit after one month (P. Taanit 64a), Israel will produce the finest grain and wool (Ketubbot 111b), and women will bear children daily and the trees will produce fruit daily (Shabbat 30b). (Pelaia, 2012)

As in all the Abrahamic religions, if one lives by the rules and ethics of the religion in one's earthly life they will be allowed to return to their true home in the kingdom of God. In Judaism of course the issue of the homeland has a fraught and prolonged history which is still unresolved today as violence over who has the right to live in Israel continues. Jewish poet Else Lasker-Schüler expresses her grief at being away from the Jewish spiritual homeland of Israel:

### My People

The rock is crumbling  
From which I spring  
And sing my hymns to God. . .  
I hurl myself from the path  
And skid all inward-coiled  
Far off, alone over wailing stone  
Down to the sea.

So far have I drifted  
From my Blood's wine-press.  
And yet, the echo resonates  
In me still ... (Lasker-Schüler, 1913)

In Islam the passage 'inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji'un', from the *Quran*, Sūrat l-Baqara, verse 2:156, translates as 'who, when a misfortune overtakes them, say: surely we belong to God and to Him shall we return' (Dukes, 2012). In Abrahamic religions it is the

*forgetting* of God that is sinful, and it is in the *remembering*, in the constant reminder that God created them and to Him they must return, that the believer is afforded the everlasting refuge of God: ‘therefore remember Me, I will remember you’ (Koran 2:152 cited in Dukes, 2012, p. 1).

The Spanish fifteenth century mystic, Roman Catholic saint, and Carmelite nun Theresa of Avila wrote of her longing for heaven: ‘O my delight, Lord of all created things and my God! How long must I wait to see you?’ (Hess, 1998, p. 143). Later the seventeenth century French mystic Jeanne-Marie Bouvier de la Motte-Guyon, commonly known as Madame Guyon, expresses a homesickness for death when she writes to a terminally ill friend, ‘I am very happy for you. I could envy you. Death helps to draw away the veil that hides infinite wonders (Guyon, 2001, p. 77).

John Donne who was the Dean of St Paul’s in the Church of England as well as a poet, wrote that ‘it is our job to make a home in this world while remembering that home is not here’ (Winebrenner, 2007). In his poem ‘Hymn to God my God, in my Sickness’ Donne questions where his true home may be, *Pre februm febris* — through the straits of fever, to the east, referring to the medieval geographic belief that Paradise was located where Jerusalem now stands:

Since I am coming to that holy room  
Where, with thy choir of saints for evermore,  
I shall be made thy music ...

Whilst my physicians by their love are grown  
Cosmographers, and I their map, who lie  
Flat on this bed, that by them may be shown  
That this is my southwest discovery  
*per fretum febris*, by these straits to die,

I joy, that in these straits, I see my West ...  
What shall my West hurt me? As West and East  
In all flat maps (and I am one) are one,  
So death doth touch the resurrection.  
(Donne cited in Harmon, 1992, p. 143)

Clearly then, homesickness as simply a longing for one’s place of origin is a shallow reading of the term. Homesickness can be seen as a driving force propelling the individual away from their place of birth or homeland in a longing for death in order to find solace in God and heaven. In his treatise on faith C.S. Lewis reunites homesickness and nostalgia in describing the deepest of homesicknesses, the longing to be with God. He comments:

Apparently, then, our lifelong nostalgia, our longing to be reunited with something in the universe from which we now feel cut off, to be on the inside of some door which we have always seen from the outside, is no

mere neurotic fancy, but the truest index of our real situation. And to be at last summoned inside would be both glory and honour beyond all our merits and also the healing of that old ache. (Lewis, 2001, p. 41)

As an alternative to these religious longings Robert Aitken describes the Zen Buddhist kōan as ‘an expression of harmony of empty oneness with the world of particulars’ (Aitken, 1984, p. 197) and comments that the practice of Zen teaches us to ‘dwell nowhere, and bring forth that mind’, meaning that the practitioner dwells in the steadiness of the mind in meditation (Aitken, 1984, p. 157). This kind of teaching is close to the practice of walking, in which the walker dwells in no particular place but remains open to encounter the place they are walking in, experiencing moments of ‘being’ at home in the landscape. The Zen kōan is also cognate with the essence of poetry, which does not hold absolute fixed meaning, but which is able to sit with uncertainty. Elder comments that more than any other form of writing ‘a poem becomes a place as well as a proposition ... the poem can at once be the landscape into which a reader enters and a landmark to which he can return’ (Elder, 1996, p. 211). In this sense walking and poetry are both movements towards a ‘home’, not as a promised land, but as a place of inhabitation, with the walker’s body breathing in, hearing, seeing, touching and being in the physical home of the earth, and the writer and reader of poetry entering into the landscape of the poem in which they recognise not an absolute truth but a reflection of their own experience of loss and uncertainty. Poepatetics embodies the place of the walk and the written interpretation of the walking experience.

In the novel *Steppenwolf*, Herman Hesse steps away from the idea that our only home is in heaven with God, and suggests that perhaps home can be found in the living, in art, music and poetry, and that these expressions of ‘true feeling’, along with the saints, are where human beings can find the antidote to the ache of homesickness. Hesse writes:

Time and the world, money and power belong to the small people and shallow people. To the rest, to the real men belongs nothing ... It’s what I call eternity ... The music of Mozart belongs there and the poetry of your great poets. The saints, too, belong there, who have worked wonders and suffered martyrdom and given a great example to men. But the image of every true act, the strength of every true feeling, belongs to eternity just as much, even though no one knows of it or sees it or records it or hands it down to posterity. In eternity there is no posterity ... It is the kingdom on the other side of time and appearances. It is there we belong. There is our home. It is that which our heart strives for ... And we have no one to guide us. Our only guide is our homesickness. (Hesse, 2001, pp. 173-80)

‘The kingdom on the other side of time and appearances’ is not in this case the Judeo-Christian notion of heaven, but a place that an artist can reach through their art practice, a place ‘which our heart strives for’. This is not a place that has been mapped out by any text or religious

teaching as there is ‘no one to guide us. Our only guide is our homesickness’ (Hesse, 2001, p. 180). Hesse introduces the idea of homesickness as being a guide, something akin to a drive that we follow. Longing for home, either as a physical place or as a philosophical state of mind, impels spiritual and artistic endeavour, and can imply leaving one’s home in order to find one’s home as in the spiritual afterlife or, in the case of the writer-walker, setting out on foot in an attitude of openness to encounter the lived experience.

In the work of American theologian and environmentalist Thomas Berry, homesickness is linked with earth and the natural world. Berry’s essay ‘The Meadow across the Creek’ describes an experience he had as a twelve year old child. He had travelled with his father to a new block of land onto which the family was going to move. Below the block was a small creek and meadow. Berry describes the scene thus:

It was early afternoon in May when I first looked down over the scene and saw the meadow. The field was covered with lilies rising above the thick grass. A magic moment, this experience gave to my life something, I know not what, that seems to explain my life at a more profound level than almost any other experience I can remember. (T. Berry, 1993, p. 1)

Berry explains that his experience of the meadow has become a kind of centre, a point from which all thought and action are measured and judgments made:

Whatever preserves and enhances this meadow in the natural cycles of its transformation is good; what is opposed to this meadow or negates it is not good ... It is also that pervasive. It applies in economics and political orientation as well as in education and religion and whatever. (T. Berry, 1993, p. 3)

In this instance the encounter with a place in all its complexity leads to an inner transformation which Berry claims has influenced all his actions in life. For Berry it was not simply the place, but the moment occurring within the place which offered some kind of ethical understanding:

It was not only the lilies. It was the singing of the crickets and the woodlands in the distance and the clouds in an otherwise clear sky ... I seem to come back to this moment and the impact it has had on my feeling for what is real and worthwhile in life. (T. Berry, 1993, p. 1)

This experience enabled a realisation about the interrelatedness of ecosystems that led to the development of a particular way of being in the world. Berry concludes, ‘the universe is a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects’ (T. Berry, 1993, p. 5).

American poet Wallace Stevens expressed a similar desire to find home in nature, commenting that, ‘I long, not for Cuba, but for a cottage say, in Sweden, or a lake, surrounded by dark green forests in which all the trees talk Swedish’ (Voros, 1997, p. 61). Voros describes Wallace



Stevens as ‘precociously attuned to a sense of loss associated with love of a landscape’ (Voros, 1997, p. 26). This was a source of despair for Stevens and is one of the driving themes in his poetry. When he lived in New York, he wrote mainly about his memories of New Jersey landscapes. When he did write about the city, his focus was not upon the peopled cityscape, but upon the wind, birds, flowers, and the minutiae of the small park he walked through on his way to work (Voros, 1997, p. 31). Stevens’ homesickness is apparent in his poetry:

Without this bird that never settles, without  
Its generations that follow in their universe,  
The ocean, falling and falling on the hollow shore,  
Would be a geography of the dead. (Stevens, 1955, p. 304)

Ralph Waldo Emerson also looked to nature as a source of knowledge and longed to move closer to its mysteries through learning its different dialects. For him:

Nature is a language and every new fact one learns is a new word; but it is not a language taken to pieces and dead in the dictionary, but the language put together into a most significant and universal sense. I wish to learn this language, not that I may know a new grammar, but that I may read the great book that is written in that tongue. (Emerson, 1959, p. 190)

Emerson describes his creative process as a return to nature: ‘my book should smell of pines and resound with the hum of insects’ (Emerson, 1841, p. 2). For the person who wishes to ‘learn the language’ of nature and biodiversity, who finds solace in the interaction with beings other than human, the feeling of homesickness is an ever deepening experience as extinction rates escalate and habitats decline. Our home places are changing at an accelerated rate, as they are sold, flattened, rebuilt and re-landscaped and rendered unrecognisable. Not just cities and buildings but rivers, hills, trees and lakes have been and continue to be redirected, removed or buried. In the case of the wetlands of the Swan Coastal Plain, it is mainly through Noongar cultural knowledge, historical records and street names that we can orient ourselves to the natural landscape that is buried beneath roads, buildings and freeways. For those people whose spirituality and culture is embedded in landscape, these dramatic changes ensure the impossibility of ever returning home in the sense of connection to place.

In 2011 the global human population reached seven billion and United Nations forecasts suggest the world population could hit a peak of 10.1 billion by 2100 (Cole, 2011). With increasing demands for food, water and housing these projections will have a dramatic impact upon biodiversity and non-human habitat preservation. There may turn out to be 10 billion humans and very few other species. Increasing human populations ensure that homesickness for landscapes is not only cogent in the lives of indigenous peoples but for many non-indigenous people also. For any of us at anytime, anywhere in the world, our home places can

be re-configured by forces out of our control. The disorientating effect of the displacement and replacement of elements in the landscape, be they natural or built, evokes the feeling of homesickness without ever having left home.

In order to describe the kind of grief associated with the relationship between environmental change, ecosystem collapse and human distress, Professor Glen Albrecht of Murdoch University in Western Australia has coined the neologism 'solastalgia'. Solastalgia is based on two Latin roots, 'solace' and 'desolation', ending with the suffix, algia (Albrecht, 2008). In creating the word 'solastalgia' Albrecht reunites homesickness and nostalgia. Solastalgia describes a manifestation of psychic or existential distress caused by environmental change, such as mining or climate change, a kind of homesickness people may experience through having their home irrevocably changed around them (Albrecht, 2005).

Albrecht developed the term solastalgia when working at the University of Newcastle. He was contacted by a great number of local people who were deeply concerned about the impact of open cut mining on the landscape of the Hunter Valley. Albrecht theorises that people in the Upper Hunter were 'suffering from both imposed place transition (place pathology) and powerlessness (environmental injustice)':

The people I was concerned about were still 'at home', but felt a similar melancholia as that caused by nostalgia connected to the breakdown of the normal relationship between their psychic identity and their home. What these people lacked was solace or comfort derived from their present relationship to a 'home' that was being desolated. In addition, they felt a profound sense of isolation about their inability to have a meaningful say and impact on the state of affairs that caused their distress. 'Solastalgia' was created to describe the specific form of melancholia connected to lack of solace and sense of desolation in the everyday and lived experience of people within their 'home'. The English language lacked such a concept. (Albrecht, 2008)

Whilst it may not always be helpful to name or pathologise a condition, perhaps having a specific term for the melancholy associated with environmental destruction can enable us at least to speak more clearly about the phenomenon. Albrecht himself acknowledges that the existential experience of solastalgia is not a new proposition and can be traced back to indigenous peoples being dispossessed of their lands. Yet with the dramatic increase in habitat losses and species extinctions over the past decade the term is gaining greater relevance.

Solastalgia has its semantic origins in nostalgia, solace and desolation. Solace is derived from the Latin verb solari (noun solacium or solatium), meaning to relieve distress or to offer comfort or consolation. Particular environments may offer solace. Thomas Berry's 'meadow' obviously provided a deep solace which influenced him throughout his life. If a person seeks

solace in a place that is being destroyed, then they in turn suffer a lack of solace (Albrecht, 2005).

The other root word in solastalgia is desolation, which has its origins in the Latin *solus* (noun *desolare*) meaning devastation, deprivation of comfort, abandonment and loneliness. Albrecht suggests that the term solastalgia also has a ‘ghost reference or structural similarity’ to nostalgia which relates it back to place (Albrecht, 2008).

Solastalgia then is the ‘pain or sickness caused by the loss or lack of solace and the sense of desolation connected to the present state of one’s home and territory. It is the lived experience of negative environmental change. It is the homesickness you have when you are still at home’ (Albrecht, 2008).

Home is situated in our bodies, our families, houses and our bioregions. We all call this planet earth home and yet we seek a sense of ‘coming home’ in religion, spirituality, materialism, art and nature. It is the *idea* of home as somehow being a place of wholeness and completeness, and the impossibility of such, that can be said to be one of the human drives. The current rate of environmental change in our earth home provokes solastalgia, a form of homesickness related to the loss of environments and ecosystems. Solastalgia and homesickness inform my poepletic investigation into the wetlands of the Swan Coastal Plain. In the next chapter I argue that for the Situationist International (SI) and the practitioners of the next wave of psychogeography in the 1990s, nostalgia and homesickness presented a site of struggle as well as a creative impetus. Bonnett states that ‘the surge of interest in the Situationists in a period dominated by conservatism is certainly telling’ (Bonnett, 2006, p. 40). I posit that, like the psychogeographers of the Situationist International (1955–1972), one response to the homesickness evoked by environmental change and habitat destruction is a return to the corporeal experience of the body in the environment.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Homesickness in Psychogeography**

Whoever sees the banks of the Seine sees our grief; nothing is found there now save the bustling columns of an anthill of motorised slaves. (Debord, 1989, pp. 44-45)

The psychogeography of the Situationists arose during the 1950s, a post-war period in which there was acceleration of urbanism throughout European countries. The Situationist International (SI) was a collective of activists and artists which had its roots in the political left, Marxism, and the Lettrist International. However the SI pulled away from existing leftist models; their theory of Urban Geography declares that in the search for an alternative societal structure ‘aesthetic and other disciplines have proved blatantly inadequate in this regard and merit the greatest detachment’ (Debord, 1955b, p. 1). The SI response to the perceived inadequacies of existing systems of thought was to turn to the street and the ‘observation of certain processes of chance and predictability’ (Debord, 1955b, p. 1).

In this chapter I examine how nostalgia and homesickness were a site of both creativity and disturbance within the SI. Bonnett describes this tension as the contradictory relationship between ‘an attachment to the past and an ultra-radical desire to commence a new society’ (Bonnett, 2006, p. 23). I discuss how the ‘real’ of nature is replaced with the image, or signifier of nature through Debord’s theories of psychogeography, the *dérive* and the ‘spectacle’ (Debord, 2002), and Baudrillard’s ‘simulacra’ (Baudrillard, 2008). I then explore the idea that homesickness was intrinsic to the SI movement, to the renewal of psychogeographic practice in the 1990s, and how it continues to be a defining factor in the psychogeographical turns of the twenty-first century.

Guy Debord describes psychogeography as ‘the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals’ (Debord, 1958, p. 1). Debord uses the word ‘geography’ which Benhart and Margin define as the study of location, place, human-environmental interactions, movement, and regions (Benhart & Margin, 1994, p. 11). The word ‘geography’ has Greek origins and its literal translation is ‘earth describe-write’ — to describe and write about the earth (Harper, 2011). The word ‘psychogeography’ thus involves the study of the psyche, the emotions and behaviour of people in response to their environment. Bonnett describes SI psychogeography as being about ‘spatial practices designed to confuse and re-imagine

everyday space' and 'drifting; a transgressive wandering around and through the many barriers, forbidden zones and distinct atmospheres of the city' (Bonnett, 2009, p. 47).

A word of caution about the term psychogeography is needed at this point. Debord himself notes that the term 'retains a rather pleasing vagueness' and can thus be applied to any situation which reflects a spirit of discovery (Debord, 1955b, p. 1). The variety of projects claiming to be psychogeographic reflects the broad scope of the terrain. The modern psychogeographical movement is largely a contested space with practitioners more or less faithful to Situationist ideology arguing for a position in a theoretical framework which in itself is wide ranging and non specific. However, the central concerns in current practice, such as reclaiming city spaces for people, and a preoccupation with tracing the geography of city sites to determine how this geography influences the construction of cities and the way people live in them, are drawn directly from SI theories (Debord, 1957). My poetic project *Swamp* connects with the aspects of psychogeography that are concerned with retracing the shadowy contours of natural phenomena, such as rivers and lakes which have been diverted, filled in, and built over as the modern city's demand for space gallops across the landscape (A. Duncan, 2009; S. Duncan, 2010).

Central to Debord's theories is the notion of what he called the 'spectacle', later to be expanded by Baudrillard as 'simulacra', which is defined as the replacement of the real with a sign or simulation of the real (Baudrillard, 2008). It could be said that psychogeography arose in parallel to the spectacle, a phenomena in societies which are 'dominated by conditions of production, and where life is presented as an immense accumulation of spectacles. Everything that lived has receded into a representation' (Debord, 2002, p. 8). One of the reasons that psychogeography was attractive to activists and art practitioners during the 1990s and has again been renewed in the current milieu is that the spectacle has continued to grow and possibly exceed anything Debord and the SI could have imagined. We now live in a world of spectacle and simulacra that is breathtaking in both its range and audacity. How would Debord and his Situationist colleagues have reacted to the idea of Christmas in the city of Dubai situated in the sandy Arabian desert where:

As soon as your flight lands in the wonderful emirate, you'll be completely astonished by the transformation of Dubai. This Islamic state is now brimming over with Yule trees imported from European countries, gala decorations, fluffy snow and all the traditional colors associated with Christmas ... Dubai, despite being an Islamic emirate with its own local festivals like Ramadan and Eid, takes delight in celebrating Christmas through shopping discounts, special events, hotel deals, parties and mass prayer. (*Dubai Travel Information and City Guide, 2011*)

Sally Breen describes Dubai as a place that exists on a ‘borrowed temporary landscape where the vision of the city overwrites its own history and geography’, and that the city is constantly immersed inside its ‘own creative act ... its technocratic vision of consumption and play (Breen, 2008, p. 213).

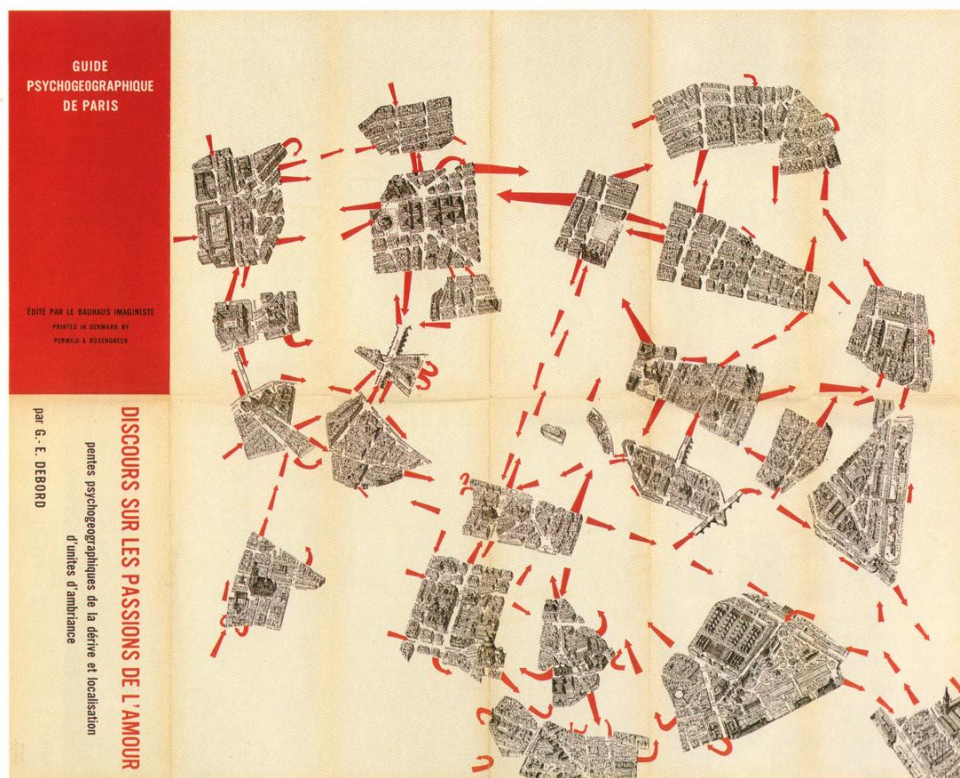
In the same vein visitors to the Nevada desert town of Las Vegas can experience the ‘streetmosphere’ of simulated Venetian Grand Canal Shoppes where Italian *commedia dell’arte* troupes entertain shoppers, and every morning and evening a parade of gondoliers march through the mall, serenading the crowds on the pavements. If this is not of interest, then visitors can visit simulations of the Eiffel tower, the pyramids, the lost world of Atlantis or stay at Caesars Palace Hotel. Casino developer Steve Wynn describes Las Vegas as ‘what God would have done if he had the money’ (Breen, 2008, p. 215).

What would Debord have made of the computer game ‘Second Life’ in which players invent personas for themselves and mimic the capitalist agenda by buying simulated real estate, clothing and accessories; or reality television in which scenarios are scripted to appear ‘real’? The spectacle that positions people as consumers and /or spectators is thriving in the twenty-first century and the cost of these simulations is accumulating in the atmosphere, the water, and contributing to the global demise of ecosystems and biodiversity.

Debord utilises Marx’s ‘fetishism of the commodity’ (K Marx, 2000, pp. 438-442), to describe how the real world is replaced by a selection of images which represent particular ideas of the world which at the same time come to be regarded as the epitome of reality (Debord, 2002, p. 19). He writes that the alienation of the spectator is underpinned by ‘the fact that the individual’s gestures are no longer his own; they are the gestures of someone else who represents them to him.’ (Debord, 2002, p. 16) The spectacle is represented as loss in as much as the real is absent and a loss of quality exists in all forms of spectacular language from the glorification of objects to the regulation of behaviours. The commoditisation of the world results in people’s estrangement from each other and from the things that they produce with the result that ‘the spectator does not feel at home anywhere, because the spectacle is everywhere’ (Debord, 2002, p. 16).

In the society of the spectacle historical time has been transformed into a kind of no-time/ no-when and space into a no-where/everywhere generic place (Debord, 1973). The spectacle removes individuals and communities from the production of culture and renders them as spectators in their own lives. The spectacle has its own constructed narrative which demands consumption of products and wipes out the local in favour of the universal. Debord’s revolution attempts to reintroduce historical time. For him, ‘in the demand to live

the historical time which it makes, the proletariat finds the unforgettable centre of its revolutionary project' (Debord, 1983, p. 143).



**Figure 27. Guide Psychogéographique De Paris. (Debord, 1955a).**  
(Exception to copyright ss40, 103C; research or study).

Since Debord wrote *Society of the Spectacle* in 1967, the effects of the growth model of commodity consumption as an economic system has had increasing ramifications for the earth upon which these activities are effectuated. Debord's alienation is experienced as a fractured connection with natural ecosystems and with the resources which sustain human and non-human life. His 'spectacle as loss' is encountered as a lacuna in the natural spaces of the world, a depletion of habitats and an increasingly long list of species extinctions. Andrea Cohen eloquently expresses this loss in her poem 'After Reading Juarroz':

All day the tree  
has been falling  
from its fruit.

The sound is terrible.  
It's the part  
even hardened reporters  
leave out of the story.

The fruits roll  
into the ditch.

Even the wind,  
even the flies  
in their sorrow,

will not touch them. (Cohen, 2010)

During my *dérives* around the traces of Perth's swamps I constantly encountered the spectacle/simulacra at work in the form of wetlands' memorial sculptures complete with brass turtles, lizards and birds, which represent the absence of living waters, or a few sentences engraved on a plaque alerting passers-by to the fact that a wetland or stream once existed here underneath this road, oval, or housing development. Twenty five kilometres south east of the city of Perth in the location of Wandi, suburban developers have razed hundreds of hectares of banksia woodland, one of the most biologically unique ecosystems in the world. This development promises 'nature and city in perfect balance' and is named 'Honeywood Estate' (Satterley, 2011). Nearby at Harrisdale the same developers have recently bulldozed equally large swathes of melaleuca wetlands, another of the planet's most biologically unique ecosystems, destroying the habitat of many species of water birds, and subsequently naming the housing estate 'Heron Park' (Satterley, 2011).

In Debord's Paris in the 1950s the spectacle could be seen in the post-war reconstruction of the city in which roads and cars were prioritised over pedestrian and community open spaces, resulting in movements such as French Nouveau Realism turning their attention to everyday life, space, and mass culture. The SI took up this theme with their methods of *dérive* and *détournement* on the streets of the city. Simon Sadler states that their principle for the reorganisation and restructuring of cities was to let the residents of the city decide what kinds of architecture and spaces they wanted to live in and the ways in which they wanted to live. Letting the citizens of the city work out their own systems and communities was thought to be a way to revolutionise everyday life by collapsing the powers of state, bureaucracy and capital (Sadler, 1998).

In the last decade of the twentieth century across Europe and the United States a renewal of local psychogeography groups occurred in response to post-capitalist collapse, Thatcherism, and the rise of political conservatism and neo-liberalism which was creating an increasingly alienating landscape of automation and surveillance. Perhaps the cultural



landscape in Britain in the 1990s can best be summed up by Patrick Keiller in his publication *Robinson in Space*:

It is certainly easy to find a disconcerting aesthetic in the post-conservative landscape, especially in the country. The windowless sheds of the logistics industry, road construction, spiky mobile phone aerials, a proliferation of new fencing of various types, security guards, police helicopters and cameras, new prisons, agribusiness, UK and US military bases, mysterious research and training centres, 'independent' schools, eerie commuter villages, rural poverty and the country houses of rich and powerful men of unrestrained habits are visible features of a landscape in which the suggestion of cruelty is never very far away. (Keiller, 1999, p. 211)

Bonnett argues that since the 1990s, psychogeography has moved from being an inherited Situationist practice to one that has been reinvented and to a certain degree re-imagined in the context of the time in which it is being practiced but also in ways that are in keeping with the 'changing nature of the relationship between radicalism, history and geography' (Bonnett, 2009, p. 47).

In the twenty-first century the psychogeographic movement encounters the simulacra of a world in which the real of nature is more and more replaced with the image or the sign of nature. In the city of Tokyo cuckoo calls and bird chirpings are broadcast during the 'WALK' interval at pedestrian crossings (Office of Research Development and Technology & Office of Safety, 2003). In Lancaster California, the mayor has proposed the broadcast of bird chatter from loudspeakers on Lancaster Boulevard. The mayor asserts that there is scientific evidence to show that listening to birds singing makes people happier (Associated Press, 2011), yet never mentioned is the possibility of the 'real' birds which could offer this service. Nature documentaries afford the impression that the wild is still out there, vast and unassailable, though reports and statistics reveal otherwise (How, 2010; Reid et al., 2005). The relationship between current climate, climate change and habitat loss on plants and animals on a global scale has entered a kind of vicious circle. Habitat clearing across the globe is a major contributor to the warming climate which in turn is threatening the survival of a significant number of non-human species (Mantyka-Pringle, Rhodes, & Martin, 2012b).

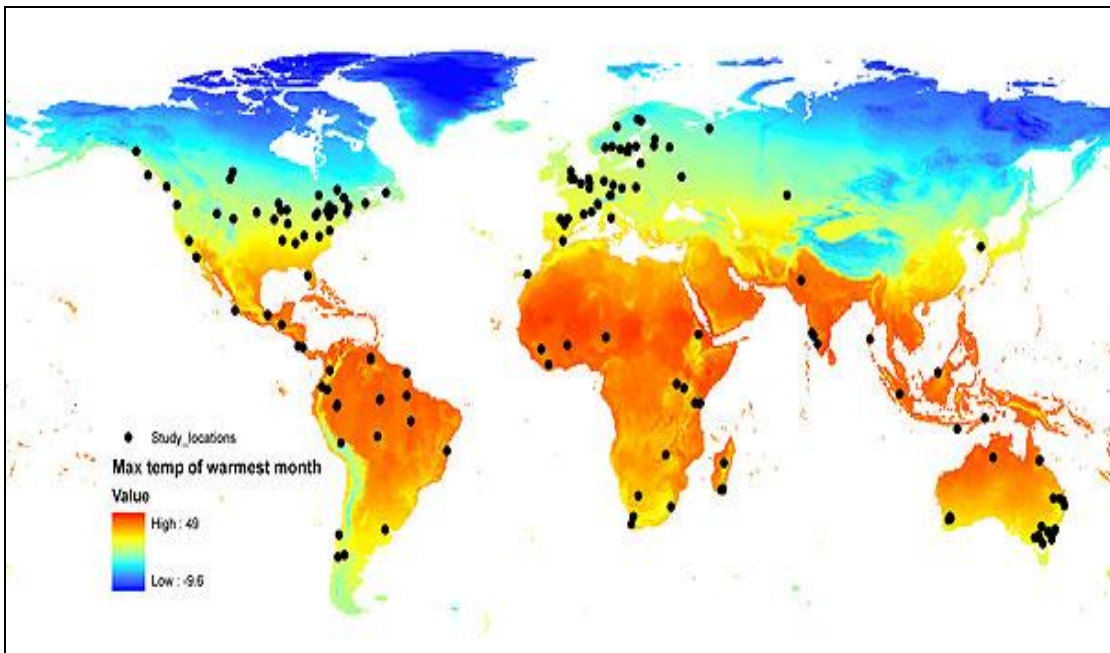


Figure 28. The magnitude of habitat loss/fragmentation is greater in regions with high maximum temperatures. (Mantyka-Pringle, Rhodes, & Martin, 2012a). (Exception to copyright ss40, 103C; research or study).

It is increasingly difficult to access the ‘real’ of nature. Nature exists in the simulacra, in the image which is viewed by the passive spectator, while the remnants of the real survive on the periphery of the spectacular society, dealing with the impact of pollution, land clearing and climate change.

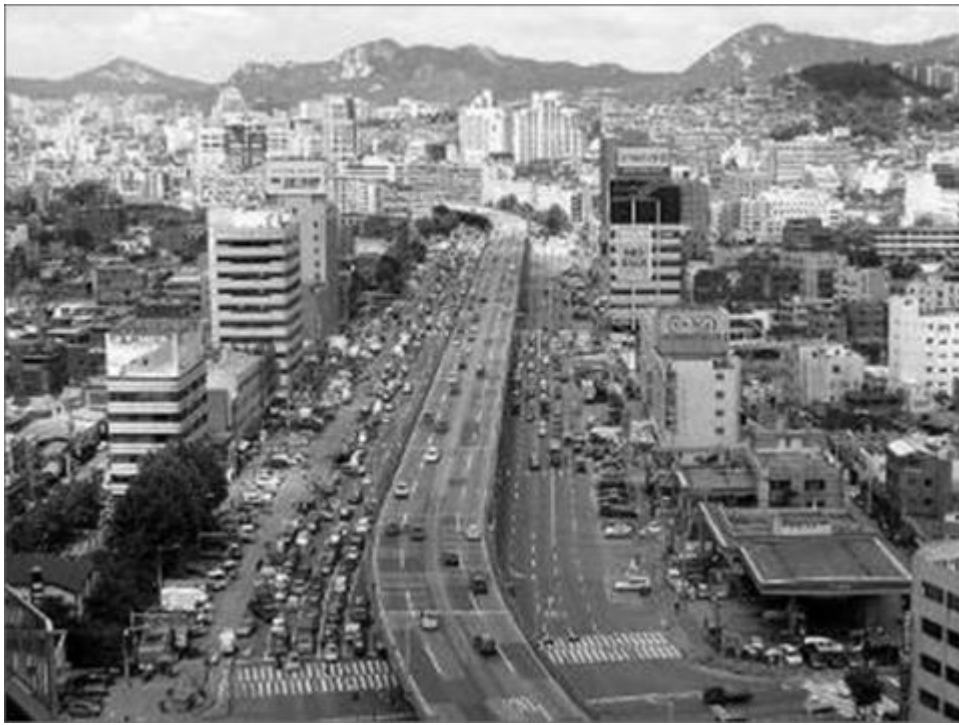
Situationist psychogeography was characterised by the practices of the *dérive*, *détournement*, mapping, and constructed situations, with the main product of these theories and practices being the creation of manifestos which asserted their position on political and societal structures, art and architecture (Debord, 1955b). SI manifesto’s included titles such as ‘Instructions for an Insurrection’, and ‘The Use of Free Time’. The ‘Situationist Manifesto’ of 1960 cites one of their aims as being a society in which:

at a higher stage, everyone will become an artist, i.e., inseparably a producer-consumer of total culture creation, which will help the rapid dissolution of the linear criteria of novelty. Everyone will be a situationist so to speak, with a multidimensional inflation of tendencies, experiences, or radically different "schools" — not successively, but simultaneously. (Debord, Constant, Jorn, Sturm, & Wyckert, 1960)

Situationist practices have proven to be readily translatable responses to current social and political issues. The practices of the *dérive*, *détournement* and re-mapping of urban spaces were taken up by groups such as Manchester Area Psychogeographic (MAP) and the Nottingham Psychogeographical Unit (NPU) in the 1990s (Smith & Hamilton, 1994), and

have been redesigned and reinvented by practitioners in the twenty-first century, such as CONFLUX in New York, Iain Sinclair and Will Self in Britain, Steve Duncan's guerrilla history and urban exploration of disused tunnels beneath cities (S. Duncan, 2010), and the burgeoning global movement of 'Placemaking' which is a hands-on, localised, bodily approach to achieve what Debord called 'Unitary Urbanism', or the 'combined use of arts and techniques as means of contributing to the construction of a unified milieu in dynamic relation with experiments in behaviour' (Debord, 1958, p. 1). Put simply, 'placemaking' is the involvement of residents and artists in the construction of their own communities, returning the means and modes of production into the hands of people rather than submitting to what is imposed on them by governments and corporations (Project for Public Spaces, 2011). Placemaking projects can range from the very large, such as removing a concrete freeway and buildings and 'daylighting' (digging up) the Cheonggyecheon River in Seoul (Park Kil-Dong, 2003), to holding street festivals, and 'constructing situations' such as reclaiming streets for pedestrians, guerrilla tree plantings, and establishing community gardens.

My poeapatetic project *Swamp* utilises the SI theory of the *dérive*. As described in my methodology chapter, the *dérive* is a kind of 'heritage survey' in which the *dériveur* drifts through urban spaces, often away from traffic-dominated streets and into the quieter, lesser known parts of the city, exploring and documenting disappearing places (Sadler, 1998, p. 61). The *dérive* is as an activity in which one or more participants walk through designated areas with no other purpose than to observe environments and interactions (Debord, 1958, p. 2). A Situationist *dérive* could have a duration of days, weeks and sometimes even months, wandering through the city in pursuit of Chtcheglov's 'forgotten desires' (Chtcheglov, 1953, p. 3), and following what is known in architecture as 'desire lines'— those paths and routes people choose to roam that refuse the footpath and the city planner, and that are related more to ambiences and interests than efficiency and expediency (Barnes & Hulme, 2010).



**The Cheong Gye Cheon — Before Daylighting**



**The Cheong Gye Cheon — after daylighting** (Linton, 2009).

**Figure 29. Daylighting the Cheong Gye Cheon River, Seoul, Korea.**  
(Exception to copyright ss40, 103C; research or study).

Desire lines reflect the longing of the walker to encounter the surprising, and to experience the unknown and the enlivening, moving beyond the docile body that follows fixed trajectories. Following the path that is not there is also the path of poeapetetics which,



rather than signposting a definite destination, wanders amongst the mystery and remains open to individual interpretation.



**Figure 30. Desire Line, Robertson Park, Perth 2010.**  
Picture courtesy of Anandashila Saraswati (Nandi Chinna)

Debord's theory of the *dérive* (Debord, 1958) is being co-opted and reinvented by artists and activists as a legitimate way of re-inscribing the human dimension into increasingly alienating city spaces. The creation of a smartphone application titled *Dérive* reflects the present day reinvention of the *dérive*. Released in 2011, *Dérive* allows users to explore the urban environment through the use of random task cards that issue instructions. These cards are refreshed every three minutes and include tasks such as 'find a cloud and follow it', 'ask someone for their favourite place', 'follow a hat' or 'sit for 2 minutes' (Beekmans, 2011). *Drift* is another smartphone application which enables the user to 'get lost in familiar places', providing a playful method of exploring the deeper layers of urban spaces (Lissner, 2012).



**Figure 31. *Dérive* Smartphone Application. (Cachucho, 2011).**  
(Exception to copyright ss40, 103C; research or study).



**Figure 32. *Drift* Smart Phone Application. (Lissner, 2012).**  
(Exception to copyright ss40, 103C; research or study).

Whilst the SI declared themselves ‘the partisans of forgetting’ (Bonnett, 2006, p. 24), Debord’s statement in 1989 that ‘whoever sees the banks of the Seine sees our grief: nothing is found there save the bustling columns of an anthill of motorized slaves’ (Debord, 1989, p. 45) expresses the nostalgia of temporal and spatial homesickness. Bonnett sees nostalgia as a dilemma within political radicalism with the politics of loss as a site of both repression and transgression (Bonnett, 2009). The fact that nostalgia was not embraced by mainstream socialism allowed it to be contested by the avant-garde. However, the mixture of modernism and anti-modernism that seems to be present in the avant-garde reflects the dilemma of how the past is placed or represented in radical politics (Bonnett, 2009).

In Ivan Chtcheglov’s *Formulary for a New Urbanism* a more overt expression of SI nostalgia can be read. Chtcheglov laments the lack of creativity in the city and how the imagination of the city has been lost. His ‘Poetry of the Billboard’ points comically to the state of streetscape imagery:

Shower/Bath of Patriarchs/Meat Cutting Machines/Notre Dame Zoo/Sports  
Pharmacy/Martyrs Provisions/Translucent Concrete/Golden Touch Saw  
Mill/Center for Functional Recuperation/ Sainte Anne Ambulance/Café Fifth  
Avenue/Prolonged Volunteers Street/Family Boarding House in the  
Garden/Hotel of Strangers/Wild Street. (Chtcheglov, 1953, p. 1)

But it is later in his essay that true nostalgia is expressed:

All cities are geological; you cannot take three steps without encountering ghosts bearing all the prestige of their legends. We move within a closed landscape whose landmarks constantly draw us to the past. Certain shifting angles, certain receding perspectives allow us to glimpse original conceptions of space, but this vision remains fragmentary. It must be sought in the magical locales of fairy tales and surrealist writings: castles, endless walls, forgotten bars, mammoth caverns, casino mirrors. (Chtcheglov, 1953, p. 1)

Chtcheglov’s imagined ‘sinister quarter’ in his city of the future bears a striking resemblance to our post-modern, hyper-capitalist metropolises. His sinister quarter ‘would be difficult to get into, with a hideous décor (piercing whistles, alarm bells, sirens wailing intermittently, grotesque sculptures, power driven mobiles called *Auto-Mobiles*)’ (Chtcheglov, 1953, p. 3).

Bonnett argues that the productive role of nostalgia in Situationist psychogeography is found in its capacity to incite a critical historical sensibility (Bonnett, 2006, p. 36). Debord’s comment that ‘history, which threatens this twilight world, is also a force which could subject space to lived time’ (Debord, 2002, p. 178) reveals his belief that Paris was being destroyed by capitalism and bureaucracy and that its centre should be preserved in order to maintain its links with historical time. In *Society of the Spectacle* he comments that:

the new towns of the technological pseudo-peasantry clearly inscribe on the landscape their rupture with the historical time on which they are built: their motto could be: 'On this spot nothing will ever happen and *nothing ever has*' ... the forces of *historical absence* begin to compost their own exclusive landscape. (Debord, 2002, p. 177)

Debord's homesickness was rooted in the city of Paris and in one of his later writings, *Panegyric*, he expresses his deep attachment to that city, stating:

when the tide of destruction, pollution and falsification had conquered the whole surface of the planet ... I would return to the ruins of Paris, for nothing better remained anywhere else. One cannot go into exile in a unified world. (Debord, 1989, p. 47)

The trope of yearning for a time past, as well as longing for a transformed future, was a resource for SI interrogation and creativity. The SI theories underwent a resurgence in 1990s Britain emerging from Thatcherism, the creation of the European Union, the loss of manufacturing industries and mass unemployment in what Patrick Keiller calls 'the increasingly unknown space of present-day England' (Keiller, 1999, front cover). That psychogeography is undergoing renewal in the current period of rapid technological change and worldwide uncertainty concerning the changing climate, loss of biodiversity, and national and personal security, suggests that psychogeographical movements are revitalised during periods of intense dislocation and loss of personal and community identities as the world surges ever forward, attempting to leave its former self behind in a constant shedding of the past and construction of the future.

Krygier describes the current hyper-capitalist psychogeographical movement as involving various practices and actions designed to increase awareness of natural and cultural spaces and of emotions and sense perceptions in relation to places and environments. He comments that:

it is the art and science of using our bodies to collect (and map) all sorts of interesting and important stuff about the world, things that don't normally get mapped. Psychogeography is a mixture of geography, cartography, environmental psychology, urban planning, art, and environmental studies. (Krygier, 2009)

Alastair Bonnett argues that the contemporary British psychogeography movement is a site of struggle over the politics of loss within the radical imagination and is experiencing conflict between two strands inherent in radicalism: 'the use of the past to critique industrial modernity and the suppression of nostalgia' (Bonnett, 2009, p. 45). He posits that the marginalisation of nostalgia in modernism (and post-modernism) and the premise of 'looking



forward' to create a better world inherent in Marxism and communism, tends to suppress nostalgia or any kind of 'looking back'. Once suppressed by mainstream radicalism, nostalgia began to emerge as an inspiration for what Bonnett calls 'counter cultural interventions', that is, for the avant-garde and the resurging psychogeographical movement nostalgia becomes 'radical' in that it is appropriated by radical groups (Bonnett, 2009, p. 45).

Bonnett cites Iain Sinclair's *London Orbital* as a text that is backward looking in attempting to retrieve radical histories but one which is also engaged with the hyper-capitalist, motorway dominated, de-humanised landscape of modern Britain. These themes are common elements in British psychogeography since the 1990s, which turns to the past, uses walking as its central practice, and seeks to explore and report upon the side streets and forgotten, under-utilised voids and spaces that exist around the dominant narrative of ordinary landscapes. In *London Orbital* Sinclair is walking the M25 in search of a past landscape, yet he is also exploring what he calls the 'no-place' and 'the true territory for the fiction that is England' (Sinclair, 2003, p. 15).

Scanlan argues that in current criticism:

Nostalgia as warning, as pejorative marker of certain historical changes, has given way to nostalgia as a more ambivalent, more engaged, critical frame. Now, nostalgia may be a style or design or narrative that serves to comment on how memory works. Rather than an end reaction to yearning, it is understood as a technique for provoking a secondary reaction. (Scanlan, 2009 introduction)

The place of the past and the politics of loss have an important role to play in how activists, artists and the radical politics of the present address the global environmental crisis. The hyper-modern, hyper-capitalist tendency for forgetting makes it difficult to understand the dimensions of our losses. It is common in Perth, for example, that even many long term residents do not know that Perth was once characterised by extensive wetland environments. The birds, animals and plants which were endemic to these places are also being forgotten. They are still being replaced by landscaped parks and gardens which engender a European sensibility, despite the people of Perth having had almost two hundred years of time in which to adapt to being West Australian. The kind of homesickness that drives people to reconnect with lost environments, and to know where they are in time and space, can be a positive form of the condition. Re-remembering our land and learning about its spatial and temporal trajectory allows us to learn to live more compatibly within it.

The SI was driven by a combination of looking to the past, nostalgia, and the desire to create something new. Their homesickness was place-based, linked firmly to Paris yet applicable to any city undergoing extensive transformation. The poetic project of *Swamp*

utilises psychogeographical theory, specifically the theory of the *dérive*, to investigate Perth's lost lakes. In this regard *Swamp* is also a local narrative with global themes, in particular the loss of endemic ecosystems as a result of the construction and expansion of cities, and the homesickness experienced by humans in an era of unprecedented habitat destruction and mass global extinctions.

However, this project is also a literary one, an act of poeopatetics, and must turn to a literary milieu, in particular, to other walker-writers, in order to extend its contextual home. The next chapter steps into the territory of walking and writing and the homesickness inherent in the work of other walker-writers. Thoreau describes the walker as a kind of 'fourth estate, outside of Church and State and People' (Thoreau, 1862, p. 3). In his essay 'Walking' he declares that he wishes to speak for nature and comments that:

the west of which I speak is another name for the Wild; and what I have been preparing to say is, that in Wildness is the preservation of the World. Every tree sends its fibers forth in search of the Wild. (Thoreau, 1862, p. 10)

Walking (and writing) towards a notion of home as the 'Wild' is the preoccupation of chapter four.

## Chapter Four

### The Long Walk Home —Walking and Writing

For the wanderer doesn't bring a handful of that unutterable earth from the mountainside down to the valley, but only some word he's earned, a pure word, the yellow and blue gentian. Maybe we're here only to say: house, bridge, well, gate, jug, olive tree, window – at most, pillar, tower ... but to say them, remember, oh, to say them in a way that the things themselves never dreamed of existing so intensely. (Rilke, 1975, pp. 62-63)

As I step out of my house on the west coast of Australia, near Fremantle, the south-westerly wind is sweeping across the park, depositing a fine taste of salt on my skin and tongue. My body shifts inside my clothes, stiff and slow to get moving. My feet, encased in light shoes, roll along the contours of rough ground. A bank of cloud hovers above the ridge to the west, where a flock of black Carnaby's cockatoos are reeling and wee-looing. I gain momentum, striding across the ragged grass that sews a fine covering across the history of this ground. My elderly neighbour remembers this ground as a swamp where Noongar people camped. She recalls walking along the edge of the swamp, past their camp on her way to the bus stop on Rockingham Road. My friend Tim remembers playing here in the 1960s, launching a home-made corrugated iron canoe between reeds into black water. I am walking through space that is also time and history. The stories enter my stride as I walk and are recorded on the map that is being walked into my body.

Following the tradition of Bashō, Thoreau, Debord and others, the writer who walks, walks to encounter the world as well as the self (Solnit, 2000). In some ways to write on walking is to tread a path that is not there. Every walk is a new experience and there is no map for the journey. In poepratetics there is the subjective body in the landscape, encountering and perceiving, and the mind interpreting and responding. As it was for Hermine and Harry in Hesse's *Steppenwolf*, for the writer-walker the 'only guide is our homesickness' (Hesse, 2002, p. 35), and homesickness becomes both the path and the act of walking it.

This chapter examines the motivations behind the practice of walking and writing through a critique of the work of four writers who walk, and suggests that it is the philosophical notion of homesickness, a yearning to feel at home not related to a particular dwelling, but rather to what Mary Oliver calls 'a longing for whatever supersedes, if it cannot pass through, understanding' (Oliver, 1998, p. 22), that drives the work of many writer-walkers. The four writers discussed here, Matsuo Bashō, Henry David Thoreau, Mary Oliver,

and Gary Snyder, were chosen for inclusion in this study because all four embody walking, the natural world and poetry, which are the three elements that inform my poeapetic *Swamp* project. Through a discussion of the work of these writer-walkers I elaborate upon the idea of home as being a lack that is always yearned for yet never fulfilled (Lacan, 1981), and how an attempt to find a resolution for a philosophical homesickness is found in the practice of walking, and in the act of writing down the walking. Also in relation to the work of these four writer-walkers I explore the parameters of ‘home’; moving beyond the four walls of the dwelling and out into the regions in which the poets dwell. I discuss notions of ‘wild’ and ‘wilderness’ and the idea of ‘working wild’ (Phillips, 2007) which acknowledges the human drive towards nature, as well as the separation from natural world that is inherent in our composition as cultural beings. Finally I introduce the idea of *solvitur ambulando* or ‘walking a solution’ (Bennett, 2005, p. 3) as a way of comprehending and responding to homesickness experienced in reaction both to this separation from the ‘wild’, and the great environmental losses that are being sustained in the twenty first century. *Solvitur ambulando* offers affirmative action through encounters with the wild where ever it may be found; be it in vacant lots, national reserves, or suburban parks.

Whilst homesickness can be seen as an impetus for the walker-writer, the act of walking and the writing down of the walking offers a kind of solace for homesickness. The walker may have ‘no particular home but be equally at home everywhere’ (Thoreau, 1862, p. 1). Through walking in a place the walker-writer is taking the experience of that place into the body, making connections with non-human inhabitants and becoming a resident of the ‘bioregion’, which Thomas Berry describes as ‘an identifiable geographical area of interacting life systems that is relatively self sustaining in the ever-renewing processes of nature’ (T. Berry, 1990, p. 166), and which Giblett defines as ‘a geomorphological and biological region — the watershed, the valley, the plain, the aquifer, etc, where or on which humans live and work and which sustains our life’ (Giblett, 2011, p. 239). As far as one can feel at home, poeapetics offers moments of connection, familiarity and belonging, with the body as a locus of experience that mediates between the encounter and the word, as in Mary Oliver’s poem ‘The Waterfall’:

Gravity is a fact everybody  
knows about.  
It is always underfoot,  
  
like a summons,  
gravel backed and mossy,  
in every beetled basin —  
and imagination—

that striver,  
that third eye —  
can do a lot but  
hardly everything. The white, scrolled

wings of the tumbling water  
I never could have  
imagined. And maybe there will be,  
after all,

some slack and perfectly balanced  
blind and rough peace, finally,  
in the deep and green and utterly motionless pools after  
all that  
falling? (Oliver, 1992, pp. 19-20)

In her writing on walking, Oliver describes the elements and beings she is encountering, and reflects on what these encounters could mean to the human who has stumbled into them. John Elder describes Oliver's poems as 'possessing a dual impulse, at once to acknowledge the intricate dynamic realities of non-human life and to convey the intense meaning of those realities for one who regards them long and clearly' (Elder, 1996, p. 218).

As discussed in chapter two, homesickness that is regarded as simply a longing for one's place of origin is a shallow reading of the term. Homesickness is defined here as a philosophical condition that can relate to spiritual, physical, environmental and artistic milieus. The term homesickness could also describe Lacan's 'object (a)', which he discovered in the psychoanalytic clinic, as an object that falls outside of language and symbolisation. Homesickness is akin to the poetic enigma which is at once present and absent, so eloquently expressed by Bashō as, 'the temple bell stops but the sound keeps coming out of the flowers' (Bashō, 2000, p. 55).

Psychoanalytic theory recognises a deep psychological pull towards the idea of unification and a sense of wholeness in subjectivity. The structure of the psyche is characterised by a lack which is the pulse that pushes us into the world, affecting the drives of the physical body and compelling the subject to circumlocute, circumambulate, repeat and memorialise this lack of unity or, in this case, home (Lacan, 1981). Lacan's theory retains the impossibility of ever returning home, or of filling that lack. In this sense the walker-writer is walking and writing from a place of homesickness, and the practice of walking and writing returns the practitioner to the only true home possible, that is, to the body and to the earth. Homesickness acts as a force or drive which propels and directs a life trajectory to walk in the world and to write from the experience of that walking, a practice which also contains the

prospect that the practitioner will only ever be walking and writing towards the idea of home, and may only momentarily, if ever, reach that destination. German writer Robert Walser, who used walking as a narrative device to move his protagonist through both an internal and external landscape in his short fictional piece ‘The Walk’, comments that ‘writing resides in the manner in which the one doing the writing continually ... strays around what is at the center’ (Harman, 1985, p. 8). The writer, like the walker, is only ever on their way towards the centre, circumambulating the territory of their philosophical and physical home.

In *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study* Edward Casey remarks on Kant’s belief in the impossibility of a return home and that any attempt at return was certain to be ‘very disappointing’ because the physical place was bound to have been ‘wholly transformed’ (Casey, 1987, p. 201) Scanlan points out that Kant also believed that nostalgia is an imaginative act that derives from memories of places that are used to construct a ‘created world’ (Scanlan, 2009). In the case of the walker-writer, place is a real world that is paced into the body through an attentive walking practice, and the moments of return are marked by the walker-writer in their written accounts of the encounter.

Nineteenth century Swiss philosopher Henri Frédéric Amiel wrote that ‘any landscape is a condition of the spirit’ (cited in K. Taylor, 2004). When landscapes are subject to radical alteration the human psyche and condition of spirit is also affected. Margaret Drabble expresses this cause and effect relation well when she writes that:

The past lives on in art and memory, but it is not static: it shifts and changes as the present throws its shadow backwards. The landscape also changes, but far more slowly; it is a living link between what we were and what we have become. This is one of the reasons why we feel such a profound and apparently disproportionate anguish when a loved landscape is altered out of recognition; we lose not only a place, but ourselves, a continuity between the shifting phases of our life. (Drabble, 1979, p. 270)

Changes in landscapes and environments no longer happen slowly. Albrecht’s ‘Solastalgia’ — which describes the grief associated with the loss of particular landscapes that have been destroyed or altered, resulting in an experience of homesickness without having left home (Albrecht, 2005) — can be seen to be escalating due to an accelerated rate of global habitat loss, species extinctions and a warming climate (Reid et al., 2005). In 1992 Doris Lessing wrote:

Every day there are more people everywhere in the world in mourning for trees, forest, bush, rivers, animals, lost landscapes ... an established part of the human mind, a layer of grief, always deepening, always darkening. (Lessing, 1992, p. 318)

Since Lessing wrote, these kinds of losses have intensified, and the rate of known extinctions of species in the past century is roughly 50–500 times greater than the historical extinction rate of 0.1–1 extinctions per 1000 species per 1000 years (Reid et al., 2005, p. 52). Lessing’s ‘layer of grief’, and Albrecht’s ‘solastalgia’ inform the walking-writing project of *Swamp*, and the creation of a poeopatetics which seeks to find solace in wetland-scapes, and to express grief at the loss of such landscapes. The Swan Coastal Plain as a bioregion has undergone extreme re-engineering and re-imagining since the colonising project began in 1829. The home place of the Noongar people has been to a large extent demolished and rebuilt to function as a home for the newcomers, resulting in a present day landscape that is quite alien to the endemic bioregion of Noongar country. Noongar people must surely be subject to solastalgia, as are people who have lived on the Swan Coastal Plain all their lives and been witness to the loss of habitat and biodiversity.

One respondent interviewed for this study gave up his business as a concrete pourer when he could no longer reconcile himself with the covering of former bushland with concrete slabs for housing. He commented that he misses the mist that used to hang in the low-lying swamps that have now been in-filled and concreted over (Sallur, 2011). Another lamented that he grew up in a ‘wet world’ in which his local wetland held clear fresh water that he swam, fished and boated in. Forestdale Lake used to reach depths of two metres in winter. Currently, due to the drying climate and altered hydrology, the lake is barely covered with water in winter and remains dry for most months of the year (James, 2011). The Swan Coastal Plain as a ‘home place’ has been irrevocably altered so that many of the species and spatial markers that defined it as a bioregion are no longer in existence. The boundaries of the ‘home’ are difficult to define amidst this kind of rapid and unremitting change and the interviewees above can be seen to be experiencing Albrecht’s solastalgia for the home place that has been radically altered.

Geraldine Brooks points out that the root of the word ‘home’ is ‘haunt’, and that she is ‘haunted by the absence and dissonance’ (Brooks, 2011, p. 14) of living in the United States, so far from her home-place of Australia. Another definition of haunt is to practise something habitually or frequently, or to frequent a place (Brown, 2002). In the sense of the walker-writer, this ‘haunting’ can be seen as a symptom of homesickness, as well as a practice of haunting as walking.

William Stafford writes: ‘the earth was my home; I would never feel lost while it held me’ (cited in Felstiner, 2009, p. 251). Whilst most people may live in dwellings, houses, flats, apartments etc, these constructions of timber, brick and steel are situated in places, and places are a part of the greater earth house in/upon which we live. The title of Gary Snyder’s

publication *Earth House Hold* (Snyder, 1969), plays on the etymology of the word ‘ecology’ which was originally coined in 1873 by the German zoologist Ernst Haecke as ‘Okologie’. ‘Okologie’ is derived from the Greek word ‘oikos’ meaning ‘house, dwelling place, and habitation’ (Harper, 2011). I use the term ‘earth house’ here in order to talk about a deepening homesickness for the dwindling ecological values of our earth home, and to discuss the walker-writer’s walking maps which point towards a more reciprocal and responsible relationship with the earth that sustains us. Thoreau describes this poeapatetic cartography thus:

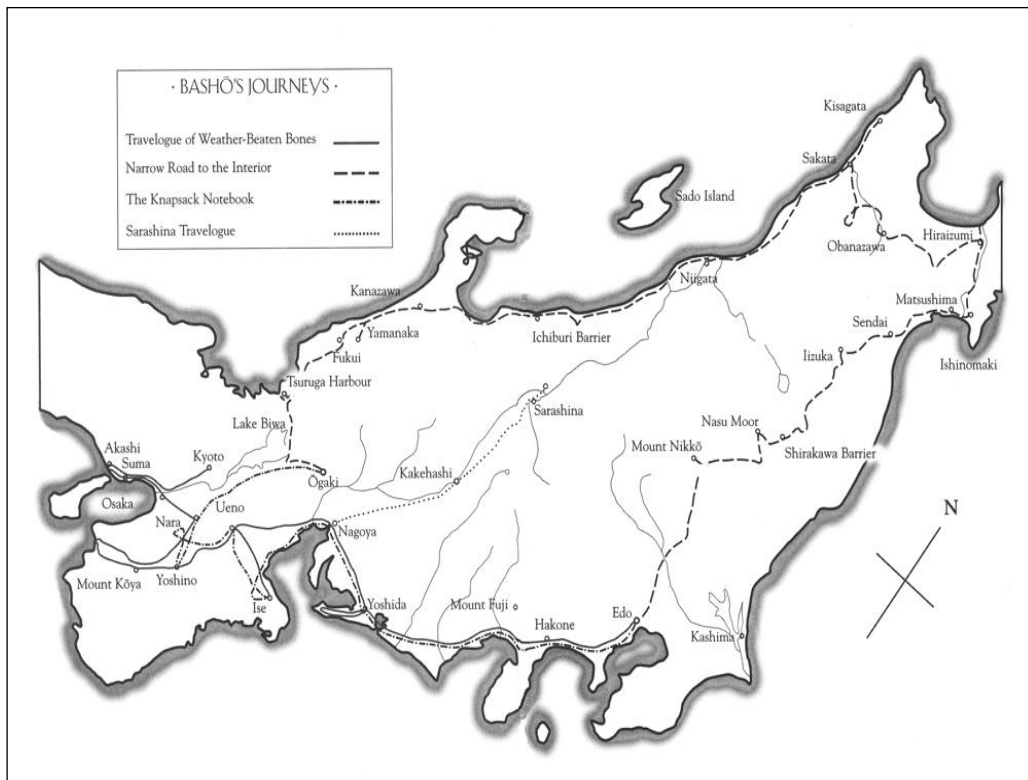
here I am at home. In the bare and bleached crust of the earth I recognize my friend ... the constant endeavour should be to get nearer and nearer *here* ... *Here* of course is all that you can love, all that you expect, all that you are ... Here is all the best and all the worst you can imagine. (Thoreau cited in Giblett, 2011, p. 244)

One of the most profound practitioners of poeapatetics was Matsuo Bashō (1644-1694). Bashō was a Haiku poet of the early Edo (now Tokyo) period in Japan. Whereas the walker-writer Wordsworth tended to idealise and romanticise nature (Elder, 1996), and Keats has been criticised for describing nature ‘as she appeared to his fancies and not as he would have described her had he witnessed the things he described’ (Clare, cited in Felstiner, 2009, p. 57), Bashō walked in all weathers and recorded the extremes of his physical suffering and spiritual desolation. Bashō was a Zen practitioner and spent many years in deep meditation before he began his long wandering journeys across Japan. He wrote at this time:

What is important is to keep our mind high in the world of true understanding, and returning to the world of our daily experience to seek therein the truth of beauty. No matter what we may be doing at any given moment, we must not forget that it has a bearing upon our everlasting self which is poetry. (Yuasa, 1975, p. 28)

Bashō’s walking and his poetry were driven by an impulse to seek the truth of beauty in nature. One of his translators, Nobuyuki Yuasa, comments that when Bashō left his home in 1684 to begin his first long walk described in *The Record of a Weather-exposed Skeleton*, walking in Japan was a dangerous and precarious proposition due to the condition of the roads and prevalence of thieves. Yuasa suggests that Bashō undertook the journey after a long period of meditation and self scrutiny at the end of which he felt that he had no alternative but to walk, in order to let go of his worldly attachments and to seek his true ‘everlasting self which is poetry’ (Yuasa, 1975, p. 29). Before he set out on his third long journey in which he walked for more than two and half years and travelled to unfamiliar territory in the north of Japan, Bashō sold his house as if expecting never to return.





**Figure 33. Map of Bashō's Journeys (Hamill, 2000, pp. xxxiv-v).**  
 (Exception to copyright ss40, 103C; research or study).

Yuasa argues that Bashō's journey on 'the Narrow Road to the Deep North' represented a life journey in itself, and that he travelled along it as one would travel through the span of a lifetime seeking a 'vision of eternity in the things that are, by their own very nature, destined to perish' (Yuasa, 1975, p. 37). Bashō describes his homesickness thus:

in this mortal frame of mine which is made up of a hundred bones and nine orifices there is something, and this something is called a wind-swept spirit for lack of a better name ... This something took me to writing poetry years ago ... finally making it its lifelong business. (Bashō, 2000, p. 71).

This is not a longing for a particular home but the inexplicable drive or yearning, described only as a kind of 'windswept something' that compels Bashō to set out on his wandering journeys and to make poetry of his life. The poet is leaving home in search of home, that unattainable place that we see glimpses of in his poems:

It looks as if  
 Iris flowers had bloomed  
 On my feet —  
 Sandals laced in blue (Bashō, 1975, p. 112)

In the utter silence  
 Of a temple,  
 A cicada's voice alone

Walking towards home in this case is to stumble upon the mystery inherent in the idea of home. In seeking a ‘vision of eternity in the things that are, by their own very nature, destined to perish’ (Bashō, 1975, p. 37), the poet is walking in the physical world where life is in a constant cycle of birth, death and renewal, and seeing within this cycle the kind of eternity to which humans too are subject. Bashō’s philosophy of ‘learning from the pine’ is a practice-based observation of earth home and the place of his human self within it which does not succumb to the temptation to believe in an imagined spiritual home created through belief. He is on the road, walking and learning about the world and the self through encounter and experience.

Homesickness as a philosophical condition can be discovered in the work of another of the most influential walker-writers, Henry David Thoreau. However, Thoreau betrays his homesickness through his belief in a return to oneness with nature, failing to recognise that human beings are not natural but cultural animals. In the opening paragraph of his essay on walking Thoreau declares:

I wish to speak a word for nature, for absolute freedom and wildness, as contrasted with a freedom and culture merely civil—to regard man as an inhabitant, or a part and parcel of Nature, rather than a member of society. (Thoreau, 1862, p. 1)

His homesickness is expressed in his exaltation of the wild, and in an impetus to walk (a being-in-the-world) and to continually re-experience this reverie. What is at stake in his walking-writing is the division between subject and object and, in his words, the ‘suicide’ or self-annihilation of being cut off from nature. He comments that if he does not walk for at least four hours per day he cannot remain healthy in body or spirit, and even goes as far as to suggest that those who do not or cannot walk for extended periods each day ‘deserve some credit for not having all committed suicide long ago’ (Thoreau, 1862, p. 2).

Thoreau describes his walking practice as sauntering and it is instructive to examine his spurious, though suggestive, etymology of this word. Thoreau suggests that the word saunter is derived from the French ‘Sans Terre’ which can have two meanings. One definition is that of an ‘idle, lounging fellow; applied to persons, who, having no lands or home, lingered and loitered about’ (Grose, 2007); another is that San Terre derives from ‘Saint Terre’ or Holy Land, and was applied to pilgrims walking to the Holy Land. A more current

etymological dictionary suggests that the word saunter derives from ‘santren’, meaning to muse, or be in reverie (Harper, 2011), a definition which accords with the Thoreauvian notion.

For Thoreau the former etymology of ‘sans terre’ can mean that the saunterer, while having no particular home, is equally at home everywhere (Thoreau, 1862, p. 1). However, he claims to prefer the latter derivation which implies that the saunterer is on a kind of sacred pilgrimage. He declares that ‘every walk is a sort of crusade, preached by some Peter the Hermit in us, to go forth and reconquer this Holy Land from the hands of the infidels’ (Thoreau, 1862, p. 1). To be ‘at home everywhere’ and to ‘reconquer the Holy Land’ Thoreau must continually amble away from culture, yet as a human being he must also return. It is in this culture/nature split that his homesickness resides.

In the Thoreauvian sense ‘Wildness’ (Thoreau’s capitalisation) is defined as a state of mind whereas ‘wilderness’ is usually defined as a place, and is often seen as a culturally constructed concept (see Phillips, 2007; Cronon, 1995; Callicott, 1991). Thoreau’s ‘Wildness’ is not only found in wilderness areas, but within the human condition. The artist Perdita Phillips discusses how the term ‘wild’ can be both definite, in that it is linked to a physical time and place, and yet also indefinite in that its changeable and mutable nature ensures that the ‘wild’ resists definition. Phillips’ way of comprehending that which escapes definition is to discuss her work (walking and visual/sound art) as ‘working wild, an arts practice that is open, lived and enacted’ (Phillips, 2007, pp. 99-144).

Thoreau’s comment that ‘in Wildness is the preservation of the world’ (Thoreau, 1862, p. 10) is a reminder that as living beings we are dependent on the ecosystems of the earth to provide us with the resources we need to survive and that we are shaped culturally and physically by the geography of our regions. The disruption of the ‘Wild’ through the re-engineering of ecosystems to maximise production has resulted in the fouling of water, air and the very land that we need to provide us with food (T. Berry, 1990, p. 164). In this way Thoreau’s home as being the walk in the wild is a paradox in that he can never be fully ‘Wild’, and will always experience a longing for unity with nature. What his poepratetic practice does offer us is a way of exploring a relationship with our earth home that is attentive to non-human life and takes responsibility for our impact on the ecosystems and bioregions in which we live.

Thoreau’s walking country is not a nation, but a collection of encounters and experiences ambulated into the body, a place that is closer to the notion of a bioregion, than to a political border. Yet Thoreau draws on biblical and western poetical figures to define his

nature walking and fails to recognise the Native American country that he is walking in. In denying the cultural construction of human life, he denies the first peoples' custodianship of his 'Wild'. He comments:

I walk out into a nature such as the old prophets and poets, Menu, Moses, Homer and Chaucer, walked in. You may name it America, but it is not America; neither America Vespueius, nor Columbus, nor the rest were discoverers of it. There is a truer account of it in mythology than in any history of America. (Thoreau, 1862, p. 5)

The erasure of first peoples is addressed by Wendell Berry when he comments that:

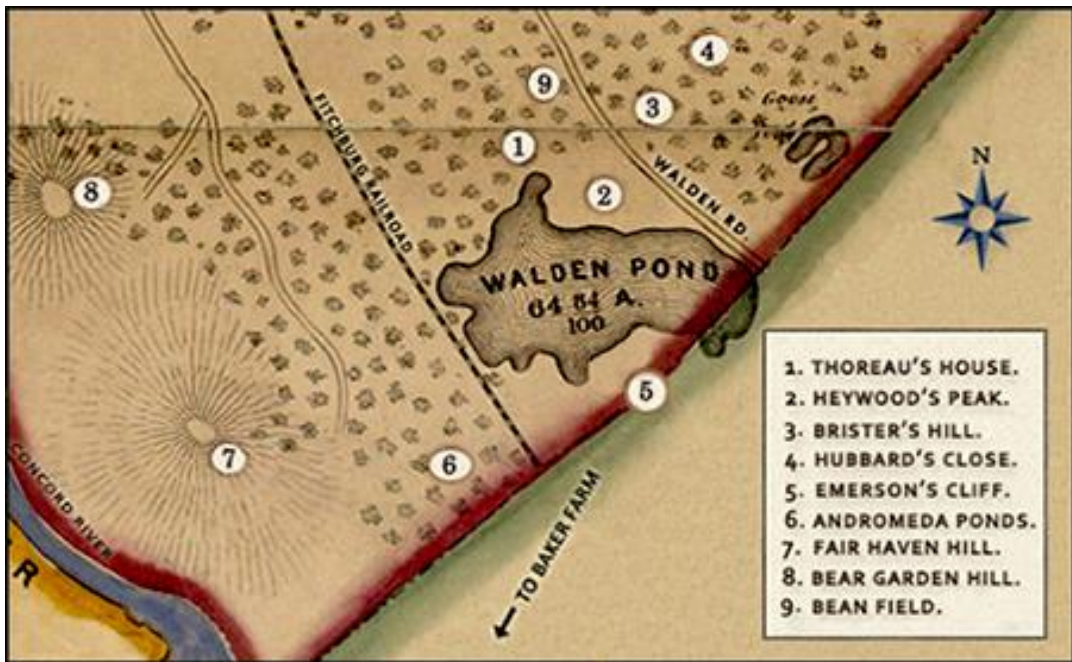
I am forever being crept up on and newly startled by the realization that my people established themselves here by killing or driving out the original possessors, by the awareness that people were once bought and sold here by my own people, by the sense of the violence that they have done to their own kind and to each other and to the earth, by the persistent failure to serve either the place or their community in it. (W. Berry, 1981, p. 104)

As discussed in chapter one, wherever one walks in a colonised country, one is walking on the tracks of the colonised. When the place now known as Australia was first settled permanently in 1788 it was through the English language that the multiplicity of different Aboriginal places became the re-imagined place of Australia or, as J. M. Arthur describes it:

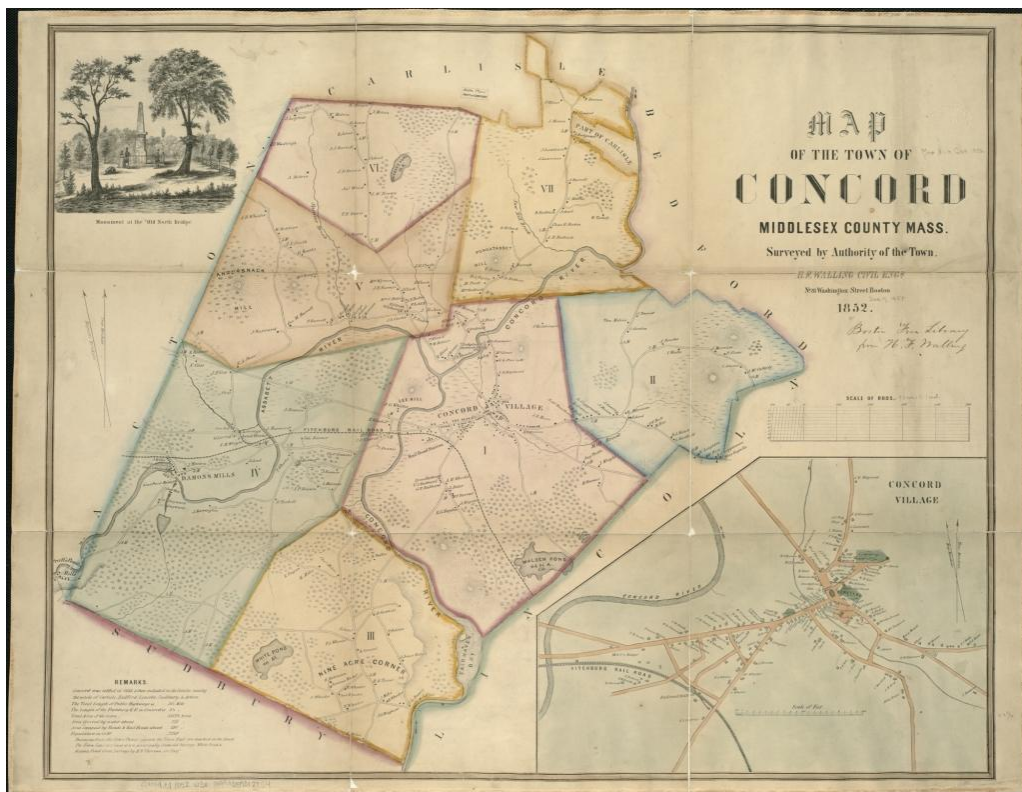
Australia emerges through the language of the occupiers. It was through English that the process of emerging took place, it was and is through English that the occupiers mediated their occupation. (Arthur, 2003, p. 3)

The absence of recognition of America's first peoples in the work of Thoreau is apropos to his denial of culture and his notion of 'absolute wild', which is a home that humans, as cultural beings constructed by language and society, cannot hope to attain.

Thoreau wrote 'my desire is to know what I have lived, that I might know how to live henceforth' (Thoreau, 2007, p. 1), and records in his journal that 'the smothered breathings of awakening day strikes the ear with an undulating motion; over hill and dale, pasture and woodland, come they to me, and I am at home in the world' (Thoreau, 2007, p. 2). In order to feel at home in the world, Thoreau must constantly walk and enter a kind of reverie. His longing for absolute freedom and wildness means that he is continually walking around the perimeters of this yearning, and as a human who lives in culture, must step in and out of the space of home.



**Figure 34. Thoreau's Walking Country (Thoreau Society, 2012).**  
 (Exception to copyright ss40, 103C; research or study).



**Figure 35. Map of the Town of Concord (Walling, 1852).**  
 (Exception to copyright ss40, 103C; research or study).

In poeapetics the rhetoric of walking is constructed by the walk, and the path it generates offers a route homewards. One contemporary writer who both composes and walks such a path is the American poet Mary Oliver whose work has been described as ‘an extended

investigation into the nature of the self' (Ratiner, 1992, p. 1). Ratiner comments that Oliver's writing also invites a greater openness in the representation of the self in which her identity has 'rain passing through her, contains swans and gannets, pine groves and waterfalls, and the uncanny sense that, at any moment, the world is poised on the verge of speech' (Ratiner, 1992, p. 1).

Oliver considers her relationship to the place where she lives and walks as 'a certain lucent correspondence that has served me all my life in the ongoing search for my deepest thoughts and feelings (Oliver, 1998, p. 22). She describes the landscape's obedience to its own internal laws and its constancy through seasonal cycles, as something which provides a steadiness to her own human capacity to be changeable and fickle. Oliver articulates her drive to walk and write as 'something that feels unsatisfied at the center of my life — which could be called a longing for home' (Oliver, 1998, p. 1).

Vicki Graham observes that Oliver's poetry has been criticised for perceived romantic notions about the woman in nature, a position which some feminist theorists claim puts the woman writer at risk by somehow disempowering her (see Bond, 1992, p. 1). Yet Graham sees Oliver's poetry as having a self consciousness which admits that nature is 'other'; she can enter her natural subjects with her imagination and emerge intact, prepared to turn to other subjects for contemplation. Graham comments that in Oliver's work:

immersion in nature is not death: language is not destroyed and the writer is not silenced. To merge with the non-human is to acknowledge the self's mutability and multiplicity, not to lose subjectivity. (Graham, 1993, p. 353)

In her *Poetry Handbook*, Oliver explains that poetry evolves directly out of the relationship between nature and the body:

The natural world has always been the great warehouse of symbolic imagery. Poetry is one of the ancient arts, and it began, as did all the arts, within the original wilderness of the earth. Also, it began through the process of seeing, and feeling, and smelling, and touching, and then remembering — I mean *remembering words* — what these perceptual experiences were like, while trying to describe the endless invisible fears and desires of our inner lives. (Oliver, 1994, p. 106)

J. S. Bryson argues that Oliver's poetry emerges from a phenomenological, body-centred world view that interrogates the human body's intrinsic relation to non-human nature (Bryson, 2005). In some cases her place-centred poetics attempts to enter the consciousness of her natural subjects though, as Bryson points out, she does this with an awareness of the human inability to speak for nature. Bryson comments that her poetry:

proceeds out of a deep desire to play the role of related participant in the world she observes; however, with this ever-present awareness that real connection between herself and the rest of the world most often takes place as only an act of the imagination (Bryson, 2005).

This awareness of human connection and encounter as being mediated through the word and through the imagination is an important aspect in comprehending our human place and responsibilities as inhabitants of the biosphere. As practitioners of poepratetics we seek a physical encounter with the other non-human beings in our region: with trees, water, ground, insects, birds and mammals. Through a walking encounter we become acquainted with our non-human neighbours and can perhaps come to have regard for their needs. Yet this is the conundrum at the heart of homesickness. As humans we contain the wild in our bodies and imaginations, and long to reconnect with the elements of the wild, but are separated from it and them by our language and culture. Whilst living on Walden Pond, even Thoreau, who wished to see people as ‘part and parcel of nature, rather than a member of society’ (Thoreau, 1862, p. 1), had ‘three chairs in my house; one for solitude, two for friendship, three for society’ (Thoreau, 1854a). His cabin was only a mile and a half from Concord, and he regularly walked home for meals cooked by his mother! (Thoreau, 1854a).

Despite this paradox inherent in Thoreau’s ‘Wild’ practice, his poepratetic endeavour is in a sense a call to the wild. He is advocating the experience of being in nature as an essential aspect of being human, and one that even in Thoreau’s time was becoming increasingly repressed by a focus on the intellect and dominion over nature. Thoreau admits to being ‘astonished at the power of endurance ... of my neighbours who confine themselves to shops and offices ... for weeks and months’ (Thoreau, 1862, p. 2). Paul Shepard comments that human intelligence and the evolution of language are based on a connection to the natural world and that the grief experienced in response to loss of species and habitats stems in part from the fact that the very things which taught us how to think are disappearing (Shepard, 1995). The earth house that has been the site of human evolution is undergoing such rapid deterioration that the base-line from which human beings measure themselves, and from which their bodies and imaginations have developed, has been recalibrated, resulting in disorientation and homesickness.

Like Thoreau, Mary Oliver’s writing is deeply informed by, and based upon, daily walking, in her case the vicinity of her home in Provincetown, Massachusetts. Also concomitant with Thoreau is Oliver’s focus on ‘wildness’, rather than ‘wilderness’ (Elder, 1996, p. 217). Oliver seeks wildness in her local environs, and discusses her relationship to this place in an essay entitled ‘Home’ in which she comments: ‘I go off to my woods, my

ponds, my sun-filled harbour, no more than a blue comma on a map of the world but, to me the emblem of everything' (Oliver, 1998, p. 25). Her longing for 'whatever supersedes understanding'(Oliver, 1998, p. 1) is a drive that informs her writing, and it is through walking in the wild that this homesickness is assuaged and expressed. The bioregion of Provincetown, with its forests and wetlands, and her daily encounters with the non-human life that inhabit them, contains the journey (walking) and the destination (poetry). She observes that:

to rise I must have a field to rise from. To deepen, I must have a bedrock from which to descend. The constancy of the physical world, under its green and blue dyes, draws me toward a better, richer self, call it elevation (there is hardly an adequate word), where I might ascend a little — where a gloss of spirit would mirror itself in worldly action. (Oliver, 1998, p. 25)

Thomas Berry describes the poeapetic practices of Thoreau and Oliver as a 'visionary circuit' in which the walker paces out into the world collecting sensory data, and returning to the writing room to convey and interpret the experience to readers (T. Berry, 1990, p. 217). This walking circuit extends the parameters of an individual's 'home' from a building or dwelling to the bioregion. The poet then extends the idea of the bioregion through the expression of their attentive observations and connections to the reader. The reader in turn, may also be inspired to walk in their own region; to encounter the world through the apprehension of the senses, creating new meanings and causing the effect of walking and writing to ripple out into new territory.

Writer and actor Alisa Piper begins her radio broadcast with the question 'what made me imagine I could walk across a country carrying other peoples sins on my back? A poem that's what' (Piper, 2012). Piper was inspired to embark upon her epic walk 1300 kilometres across Spain, during which, in the tradition of medieval pilgrims, friends and colleagues paid her to walk with their sins, after reading Mary Oliver's poem 'The Summer Day' in which Oliver asks:

who made the world?  
Who made the swan and the black bear?  
...  
I don't know exactly what a prayer is.  
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down,  
into the grass, how to kneel in the grass,  
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the  
fields,  
which is what I have been doing all day.  
Tell me, what else should I have done?  
Tell me, what is it you plan to do  
with your one wild and precious life?



(Oliver, 1992, p. 94)

Piper comments that poems are her internal guides, her maps and markers, and that Mary Oliver's poem 'made me walk' (Piper, 2012). After reading 'The Summer Day' she remarks that she knew instantly what the next part of her 'wild and precious life' would be, and that it was to walk off other people's sins, to explore the consequences of walking for others, and to examine personal and global responsibility' (Piper, 2012). Thus the region of Oliver's work expands as a reader takes up her challenge to answer the question of how to live ethically, and begins to walk and to write about the walking.

Essayist and poet Gary Snyder is another walker-writer who can be included in this 'visionary circuit', describing his poepratetic practice as, 'going out — fasting — singing alone — talking across the species boundaries — praying — giving thanks — coming back' (Snyder & Harrison, 2010, p. 7). Snyder's homesickness is expressed in his apparent need to return to a more primitive, pre-technological relation to the earth. Snyder writes of his work, 'as a poet I hold the most archaic values on earth. They go back to the upper Paleolithic: the fertility of the soil, the magic of animals' (Snyder, 1978, p. 23). Much of Snyder's writing is informed by his lifelong practice of walking, particularly in wilderness areas. He began his wild walking as a child, wandering in the forests and swamps near his home in Washington State (Snyder & Harrison, 2010).

Snyder too makes the distinction between wild and wilderness, commenting that 'wild' refers to a process, where as wilderness refers to a 'place in which the process is dominant' (Snyder & Harrison, 2010, p. 11). In the wild as a process, the walker becomes a participant in the wild, the physical body moving through the domain of the walk absorbing sensory inputs and experiencing the bodily effect of its own exertions. Snyder defines 'wild mind' as 'elegantly self-disciplined, self-regulating. That's what wilderness is. Nobody has a management plan for it' (Carolan, 1996, p. 1). Snyder's 'wild' can be a forest, a park, or a vacant city block which is inhabited by birds, insects and grasses. In the poem 'Night Herons' his wild is found during a walk around San Francisco:

Night Herons nest in the Cypress  
by the San Francisco  
stationary boilers  
with the high smoke stack  
at the edge of the waters:  
a steam turbine pump  
to drive salt water  
into the city's  
veins. (Snyder, 1974, p. 35)

Snyder's themes include the relationship between human and non-human life, work, cycles of life and death, and the body's physical effort,, as in the poem 'Fire in the Hole': 'squatting a day in the sun/one hand turning the steel drill/one swinging the four pound singlejack hammer/down ... sweat trickles down my back' (Snyder, 1968, p. 12). Selby argues that work is central to Snyder's ecological poetics because it allows him to throw explicit attention on to the act of 'writing the land' (Selby, 1997, p. 1). Snyder comments that:

practically speaking, a life that is vowed to simplicity, appropriate boldness, good humor, gratitude, unstinting work and play, and lots of walking brings us close to the actually existing world and its wholeness. (Snyder & Harrison, 2010, p. 3)

Most often Snyder's poems begin with orienting the reader into the physical place of the poem, attentive to weather patterns, compass points, changes in air and sky, and an awareness of the small routines of non-human beings occurring around and alongside the routines of humans. In Snyder's poetry the poem 'becomes a place as well as a proposition' (Elder, 1996, p. 211):

An owl winks in the shadows  
A lizard lifts on tiptoe, breathing hard  
Young male sparrow stretches up his neck  
Big head watching

The grasses are working in the sun. Turn it green.  
Turn it sweet. That we may eat.  
Grow our meat. (Snyder, 1968, p. 47)

In his overt primitivism Snyder moves closer to a biocentric view, enacting his human body of poetry in kinship with a greater web of biodiversity. Carolan argues that Snyder's sense of place is not fixed to his farmyard or property but upon the whole bioregion. Snyder writes:

what I emphasize more and more is that a bioregional consciousness is equally powerful in a city or in the suburbs. Just as a watershed flows through each of these places, it also includes them. (Carolan, 1996, p. 4)

In her essay 'Footprints' Jane Goodall discusses the link between an actual human footprint made by feet treading on the ground, and the concept of the ecological footprint developed by William Rees and Mathis Wackernagel (Rees & Wackernagel, 1996). Goodall describes the human footprint as being resonant with a sense of the physical limits of the human body and expressing 'a literal kind of grounding, a connection with the earth marked from childhood and remaining unbroken' (Goodall, 2009, p. 37). The idea of the footprint,

she argues, loses its innocence when applied to the spread of human construction, energy use, and resultant ecosystem devastation that is implied by the ‘ecological footprint’. As Goodall points out, ‘there are no footprints in economic hyperspace, only incessant trans-global movement that defies the gravitational pull of the earth’s body’ (Goodall, 2009, p. 43). Rees comments that ‘people today rarely think of themselves as biological beings’ (cited in Goodall, 2009, p. 44), and that this is what may lie at the heart of the problem of human relations with the natural world upon which their lives also depend. Goodall suggests that if we actually had to physically walk the perimeters of our ecological footprint we would be more aware of the impact of our lifestyles upon the earth.

Placing our human footprints into the earth, enduring the sheer physical effort of moving the body across terrain, breathing in the various aspects of air, wind and stillness, having bodily encounters with life other than human, connects us with our being as just one of a multitude of beings inhabiting our region. Bashō, Thoreau, Oliver and Snyder are all practitioners of poeapetetics; all are writers who inhabit the regions in which they reside, by walking in, around and through; leaving their physical footprints and extending the reach of their human footprints by writing down the walking and publishing their interpretations, enabling others to enter into the experience.

Bashō’s longing for home takes him away from his dwelling to walk out into the wider world. Driven by a need to follow something that he calls a ‘wind-swept spirit’ (Bashō, 1975, p. 71), he writes:

With a bit of madness in me,  
Which is poetry,  
I plod along like Chikusai  
Among the wails of the wind. (Bashō, 1975, p. 31)

The desire for connection with the natural world and a sense of ontological ‘being at home’ leads the four writers discussed here into an ambulatory practice that offers access to the world beyond the walls and roof of the dwelling; towards the development of a sense of home that encompasses the living earth and, in the case of Oliver, Snyder and Bashō, recognises our separateness from the same. Residing within the visionary circuit and poeapetetics of the walker- writer is the idea of *Solvitur ambulando*, translated as ‘walking a solution’ (Bennett, 2005, p. 3). Thoreau and Snyder declare that they wish to speak for nature. Snyder asserts that ‘the reason I am here is because I wish to bring a voice from the wilderness, my constituency’ (Snyder, 1974, p. 106). Bennett says that Thoreau wrote *Walden* to ‘wake people up’, and suggests that a poetics of space ‘requires an enlarged aesthetics, one

fully respecting and alerting us once more to the natural’, and that ‘this kind of attention is not reverie, but involves alertness’ (Bennett, 2005, p. 6).

Homesickness and nostalgia for a living, healthy global ecosystem is not a matter of being stuck in the past and refusing progress, but an acknowledgement that as humans we are one element in a biological system, and that we depend upon that system for our physical, mental and spiritual well being. This homesickness suggests a move towards a different kind of ethics, one that includes the rights of beings other than human to healthy and sustainable life. Heidegger writes that:

to be a poet in a destitute time means: to attend, singing, to the trace of the fugitive gods. This is why the poet in the time of the world’s utter night utters the holy’. (Heidegger, 1971, p. 94)

In a time of great biological and climatic change, in which the view of the earth as solid and immutable is no longer certain, Lessing’s ‘layer of grief’ and Albrecht’s ‘solastalgia’ can be read as homesickness for the elements of the natural world that are disappearing from our earth home. The embodied act of walking invites an encounter with the physical and elemental world, and an opportunity to make connections with living environments outside the writing room. Walking takes on the limits of space in a certain time, Bashō years, Thoreau hours, Oliver moments. In walking we encounter the temporal and spatial limits of the body and senses and, in trying to convey this experience in words, the poet encounters the limits of language. In this sense poepratetics encounters the limits of the world/self/language in relation to any discovery of what can be said about the same, and these limits represent a kind of existential incompleteness or loss which is homesickness.

## Chapter Five

### A Walk in the Anthropocene

My eyes already touch the sunny hill.  
going far ahead of the road I have begun.  
So we are grasped by what we cannot grasp;  
it has inner light, even from a distance —  
and charges us, even if we do not reach it,  
into something else, which, hardly sensing it,  
we already are; a gesture waves us on  
answering our own wave ...  
but what we feel is the wind in our faces.  
( Rilke, 2003)

This morning I am out walking along the Swan River at North Fremantle. It is a brisk autumnal morning with an infinitely blue sky and a chill in the air. Activity on the river is warming up and a few small power boats are heading west through the harbour and out towards the Indian Ocean. Traffic on the bridge spanning the river emits a rumbling growl as trucks leave and enter the port and cars sweep towards unknown destinations. My legs are striding across the river beach, my chest is expanding with the almost fresh river air, the morning sun is beginning to penetrate my skin, and the black and white dog is happily whisking along beside me. As Rebecca Solnit comments, ‘walking itself is the intentional act closest to the unwilled rhythms of the body, to breathing and the beating of the heart’ (Solnit, 2000, p. 5). My walk takes me through the re-vegetation sites of river wetlands, and river bank rehabilitation, where fences surround plantings of sedges, reeds, and melaleucas. These ‘returns’ add to my feeling of gladness, that amongst the constructed environment, this wild is re-adapting, and that even here, in a heavily altered and humanised water/mudscape, the living habitats of Noongar country are being renewed. Perhaps my lifted spirits are also due to the communion of body and mind experienced while walking. Solnit suggests that walking is a state in which the mind, body, and the world are aligned, ‘as though they were three characters finally in a conversation together’ (Solnit, 2000, p. 5). This three-way conversation affords us moments of ‘being’, of the self in place.

In this final chapter I return to walking and writing and the idea of *solvitur ambulando* or walking a solution (Bennett, 2005). I discuss how the human homemaking project has had a significant destructive impact upon our earth home as well as upon human health, and explore Gessner (Gessner, 2011) and Kingsnorth’s (Kingsnorth, 2012) views on why and how the environment movement has to a large extent failed to protect the earth from the

catastrophic impacts of land clearing, pollution and climate change. I examine atmospheric scientist Paul Crutzen's definitions of the Anthropocene (Crutzen & Schwägerl, 2011), the era of a human-dominated earth, and look at some of the challenges faced by human and non-human beings in this era. I then turn to the work of Berry (T. Berry, 1990) and Gille (Gille, 2011) in defining a human position that moves towards participation and mutual responsibility and that is inclusive of species other than human. Finally I posit that poepratics offers the practitioner a way of being in our earth home that is attentive, and responsive; that engenders an ethic of care for the 'bioregional home-habitat' and a sense of community which 'encompasses all beings' (Gille, 2011, p. 244).

The restless mind and body have gone out walking. The walker is driven by a lack and a desire to feel at home, to find moments of being within the layers of uncertainty — the inverse of the Cartesian logic which seeks definite truths. To walk out in the world is to find an ever changing, uncontrollable complex of life and being. The more we try to make it absolute, the more it slips from our grasp, like the tidal river hovering in and out of its trajectory, the draw-down of wetland water into the ground, the golden orb spider that has inhabited a space between the trees for months and is suddenly one morning missing from its web, leaving a gaping hole in the fine silk. This lack of absolutes is well expressed by Spanish poet Miguel Hernandez:

Wanderer, your footsteps are the road and nothing more, wanderer we have no road, we make the road by walking. As you walk you make the road and to look back is to see that never can we pass this way again. (Miguel Hernandez cited in Piper, 2012)

If there is no road except the one that we make by walking, I would like to return to the idea of *Solvitur ambulando*, or walking a solution (Bennett, 2005, p. 3). Homesickness has had both a constructive and a destructive impact on world environments. The short history of European homemaking on the Swan Coastal Plain has led to most of its wetlands being drained, filled in or otherwise destroyed (Jennings, 1996). The Western Australian Environmental Protection Authority estimated in 2004 that 80% of wetlands on the Swan Coastal Plain have been lost (Environmental Protection Authority, 2004, p. 2). Solastalgia for home places that are constantly being re-engineered to exclude non-human beings is an ever deepening ache in the psyche of humans (Albrecht, 2005).

The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment instigated by the United Nations in 2005 concluded that:

Over the past 50 years, humans have changed ecosystems more rapidly and extensively than in any comparable period of time in human history, largely to

meet rapidly growing demands for food, fresh water, timber, fiber, and fuel. This has resulted in a substantial and largely irreversible loss in the diversity of life on Earth. (Reid et al., 2005, p. 1)

The report continues:

The rate of known extinctions of species in the past century is roughly 50–500 times greater than the extinction rate calculated from the fossil record of 0.1–1 extinctions per 1,000 species per 1,000 years. The rate is up to 1,000 times higher than the background extinction rates if possibly extinct species are included. (Reid et al., 2005, p. 52)

Globally the detritus and end products of our human homemaking project have reached critical levels in the waters, soils and atmosphere of our earth home. A recent study titled ‘Interactions between climate and habitat loss effects on biodiversity: a systematic review and meta-analysis’, concludes that climate change and habitat loss are both key drivers in global loss of biodiversity. The paper looks at how the global growth of human populations and the resulting spread of urban development and agriculture have caused increased habitat degradation. Loss of habitat combined with rises in temperature and reduced rainfall as a result of a changing climate are creating an escalated rate of species extinctions (Mantyka-Pringle et al., 2012b). Figures such as these indicate that despite concerted efforts over many generations, and many localised preservation projects, the environmental movement has failed to protect the earth from the devastating tide of land clearing, pollution, and climate change.

One of the reasons posited for this failure by Paul Kingsnorth is that our ever-increasing urban migration means that many environmentalists do not have an attachment to any particular environment. Activism is carried out on-line through apps and blogs. The issues now are about sustainable technologies and parts-per-million of carbon in the atmosphere, and about how to save the planet, rather than the local patch of bush or wetland down the road which may be being encroached upon by developers and road builders (Kingsnorth, 2012). The idea of wilderness being something other, something removed from our daily lives, perhaps blinds us to the fact that all through our urban and sub-urban landscapes, the wild is finding cracks in the pavement, empty lots, post industrial sites and abandoned buildings in which to create habitats. These urban wilds amount to what Helen Armstrong calls ‘spaces of dereliction and beauty’ (Armstrong, 2006, p. 117), and are described by the French architect Christophe Girot as ‘landscapes of contempt’ (cited in Armstrong, 2006, p. 117) in that they are often considered as wastelands and voids waiting to be filled by human construction. Armstrong argues for the poetics embedded in so-called wastelands, and comments that artists and writers who are exploring the fragmentary experience of the twenty-first century world are concerned about the loss of these spaces and

the ‘powerful connection between dereliction and beauty’ (Armstrong, 2006, p. 120). Writer and environmentalist David Gessner addresses this dilemma in his book *My Green Manifesto*. Gessner’s subtitle reads ‘Down the Charles River in pursuit of a New Environmentalism’. (Gessner, 2011 front cover). The book documents the author’s boat trip down the Charles River in eastern Massachusetts, considered to be one of America’s most polluted urban rivers. Gessner argues that there is a need to embrace what he calls the ‘limited wild’ — local places that allow contact with nature. Gessner’s travel companion on the trip was Dan Driscoll, who has been working on the restoration of the Charles River for many years. Gessner believes that we need to rethink our idea of what the wild is, and begin to engage with the small wild places that inhabit the voids, parks, wetlands, road reserves, and rivers in our urban environments and cityscapes (Gessner, 2011, p. 10).

Kingsnorth argues that much of today’s environmentalism is about hyper-capitalism and the plethora of products we can buy that will make us greener or more sustainable. He writes that there is an aspect of environmentalism today that: ‘is not about ecocentrism. It is not about reforging a connection between over civilised people and the world outside their windows ... today’s environmentalism is about people’ (Kingsnorth, 2012, p. 22). Kingsnorth describes the post-capitalist environment movement as: ‘the catalytic converter on the SUV of the global economy’ (Kingsnorth, 2012, p. 22) and concludes his article with: ‘I am going out walking ... I am going to listen to the wind and see what it tells me, or whether it tells me anything at all’ (Kingsnorth, 2012, p. 24).

The statistics and figures cited above articulate a cartography of loss. In communities all over the world people are living with the everyday, place-based realities of these losses. From the spiders that no longer spin their webs in back gardens, to the tiniest links in the food chain, to the birds that no longer sing, and the larger mammals that are missing from our world, the diversity of life on earth is diminishing to an ever narrower set of species, dominated by the needs of one group — humans. The wetlands of the Swan Coastal Plain and the flora and fauna that inhabit/ed them are one small localised microcosm, one tiny corner of this large canvas that is resulting in Lessing’s ‘layer of grief, always deepening, always darkening’ (Lessing, 1992, p. 318).

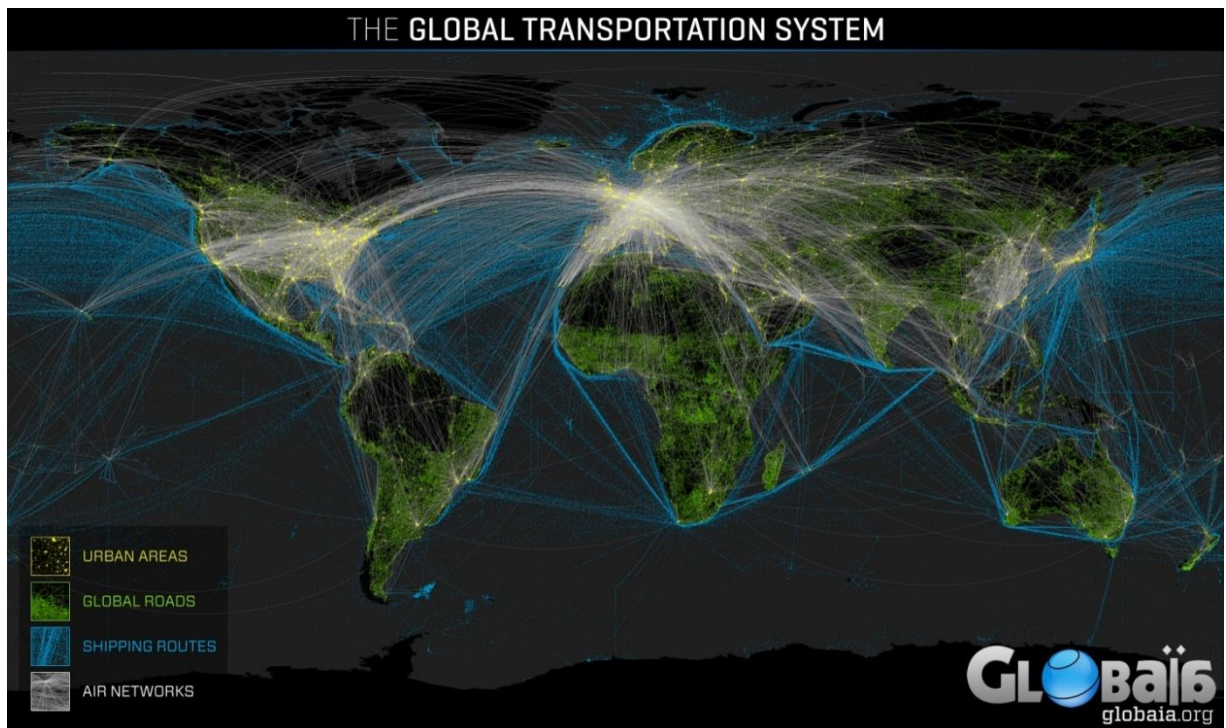
The geography of the human-altered world has entered into what Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer have termed the Anthropocene. From the Ancient Greek, *anthropos* meaning ‘human being’, and *kainos* meaning ‘new or current’, the Anthropocene is defined as the new human-dominated period of the Earth’s history. The International Commission on Stratigraphy may add this epoch to the geologic time scale in 2016 (Pharand-Deschênes, Poulin, Lauzon, & Black, 2011), but the term is already being utilised in science and cultural



geography (Houston, 2012) to refer to this period in which human activity has altered the earth's biology, chemistry and geology, changing the way carbon and nitrogen circulate between land, sea and atmosphere, resulting in most of the planet's ecosystems being affected in some way (Crutzen & Schwägerl, 2011). Pharand-Deschênes et al. define the Anthropocene as:

A period marked by a regime change in the activity of industrial societies which began at the turn of the nineteenth century and which has caused global disruptions in the Earth System on a scale unprecedented in human history: climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution of the sea, land and air, resources depredation, land cover denudation, radical transformation of the ecumene, among others. (Pharand-Deschênes et al., 2011)

Crutzen states that 'human dominance of biological, chemical and geological processes on Earth — is already an undeniable reality' (Crutzen & Schwägerl, 2011, p. 1), and that the Anthropocene describes 'a planet that is being anthroposized at high speed' (Crutzen & Schwägerl, 2011, p. 1). By changing the climate for millennia to come, by clear felling rainforests, removing mountain tops to access coal deposits, and acidifying coral reefs, Crutzen argues, we fundamentally alter the biology and the geology of the planet. He notes that while we are driving 'uncountable numbers of species to extinction, we create new life forms through gene technology, and, soon, through synthetic biology' (Crutzen & Schwägerl, 2011, p. 1).



**Figure 36. Globaia Map of Global Transport Systems (Globaia, 2011).**  
(Exception to copyright ss40, 103C; research or study).

The map in Figure 36 of global transportation systems produced by the global education organisation Globaia depicts a kind of eerie, ethereal web that is all too real, and reflects the traces of human movements over the whole biosphere of the planet earth.

Living in the Anthropocene presents challenges to the way we view and respond to nature and wilderness. Much of our earth is now characterised by human interventions, and relics and remnants of human usage. Where lands have not been degraded by agriculture, industry and mining, they may contain the residues of synthetic chemicals that are now persistently circulating in the earth's metabolism. As Crutzen and Schwägerl point out, where wilderness remains, it's often only because exploitation is still unprofitable (Crutzen & Schwägerl, 2011), and it is becoming increasingly common for lands that have been set aside as 'Bush Forever sites' and National Parks to be encroached upon by mining companies and developers (see the Tarkine, Jandakot bushland, the Beeliar Wetlands and Kimberley Coast for Australian examples).

Nature and the wild are no longer those areas of pristine habitat that we can observe in Attenborough documentaries and feel relieved, from the comfort of our couches, that out there somewhere, the wild lives on. The grand narrative of nature has been irrevocably altered by human activity and herein lies the ethic of responsibility needed to develop a healthful stewardship which includes the rights to life of species other than human. Thomas Berry suggests that for there to be any progress in caring for the earth, the whole life community, the non-human as well as the human, must be involved in that progress, and that this will involve moving towards a transition in focus from anthropocentrism to biocentrism and what he calls 'appropriate human-earth relations' (T. Berry, 1990, p. 165).

In south-western Australia, Noongar Elder Dr Noel Nannup observes that whether a person is Aboriginal or non Aboriginal, if they are born in Noongar country the country knows them. If they have lived in Noongar country for more than six years the country knows them. And if they intend to stay in Noongar country they have a responsibility and that responsibility is to care (Nannup, 2010). Whilst many non-Aboriginal people may not have access to Noongar knowledge of their country, Dr Nannup stresses that all of us who now live here are responsible for the health and resilience of our home place. In the Anthropocene, caring for country entails an awareness that the wild is not necessarily something 'out there', disconnected from our experience, but that the wild is all around us in its altered and diminished form. This is the world we have created and this is the world that demands an ethic of responsibility to ensure the health and survival of all its inhabitants.

In Veronica Brady's biography of Australian poet Judith Wright, Brady asserts that Wright practiced a certain responsibility in her work and saw poetry as 'a way not only of knowing but also of living in the world' (Brady, 1998, p. x). Brady describes Wright's ethic as having an 'awareness of our relationship to and responsibility for the living world around us' (Brady, 1998, p. x). This sense of responsibility is inherent in what Bennett calls the 'ecological approach' (Bennett, 2005, p. 6) and what Phillips terms 'ecological walking' (Phillips, 2007, p. 144).

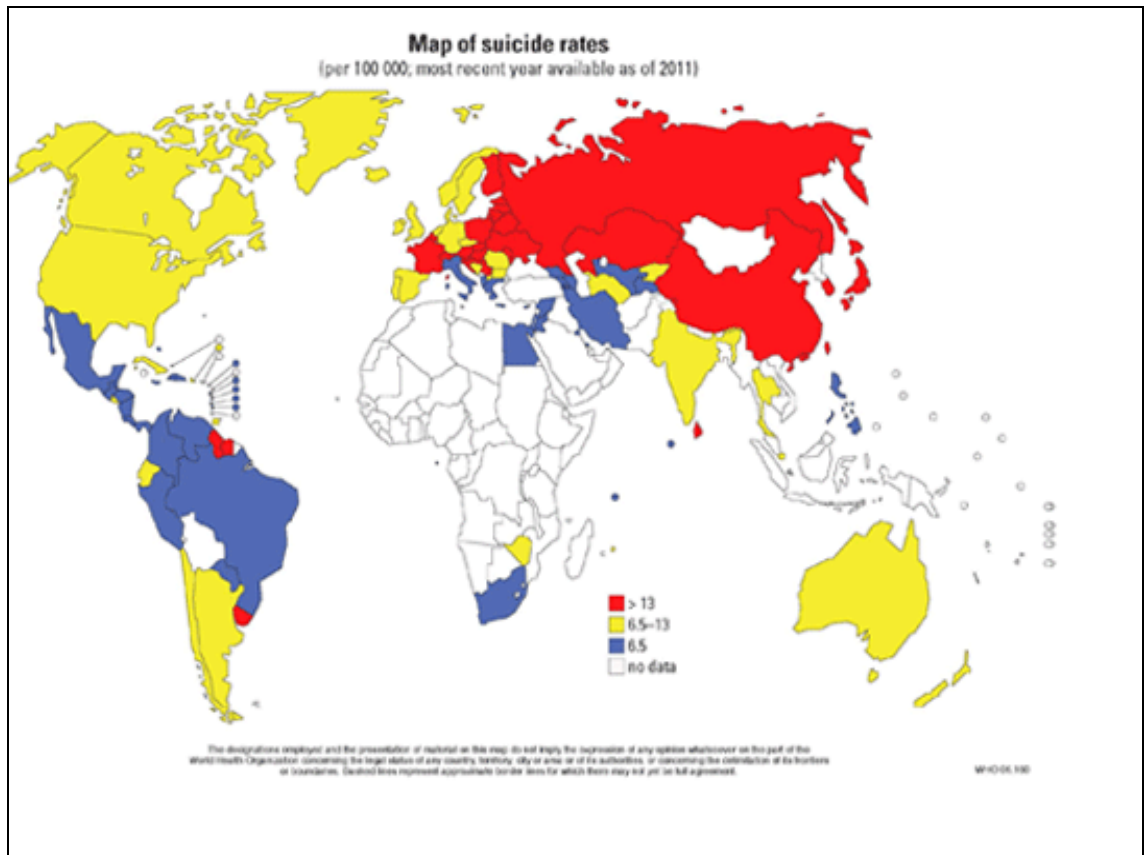
In *People and Places of Nature and Culture*, Rod Giblett argues that simply to live on the earth and to reassess what it means to live in nature, 'humans need new ways of thinking and acting, new ways of seeing, saying and doing, new ways of being' (Giblett, 2011, p. 239). This may involve re-imagining our relationship to the earth and a move away from a subject-object relationship with the air, water, soil, and other organisms that share our earth house, towards one that is participatory and contains mutual responsibility.

Our home making has resulted in the destruction of the homeplaces of many indigenous peoples, as well as a myriad of habitats and species. Our homesickness for the ideal of home, for the new, the next best thing, the latest invention to make our lives easier and more comfortable, has literally made our home sick. And this sickness extends to ourselves. Worldwide, human movement towards wealthier, more comfortable ways of life has resulted in our own sickness within our earth-body-home. Sedentary lifestyles and poor eating habits have resulted in diseases such as obesity, diabetes, heart disease becoming widespread. The World Health Organization (WHO) recently released statistics on obesity, heart disease and diabetes stating that, 'in every region of the world, obesity doubled between 1980 and 2008 ... today, half a billion people (12% of the world's population) are considered obese' (Chaib, 2012). The highest obesity levels are in the region of the Americas (26% of adults) and the lowest in the South-East Asia region (3% obese). According to the *World Health Statistics* report, one in three adults worldwide have raised blood pressure, a condition that causes around half of all deaths from stroke and heart disease, and one in ten adults has diabetes (Chaib, 2012).

The WHO also tracks suicide rates and reports that every year almost one million people die as a result of suicide; a global mortality rate of 16 per 100,000, or one death every 40 seconds. In the last forty-five years suicide rates have increased by 60 percent worldwide. Suicide is among the three leading causes of death among those aged 15-44 years in some countries, and the second leading cause of death in the 10-24 years age group; these figures do not include suicide attempts, which are up to twenty times more frequent than completed suicide (World Health Organization, 2012). The suicide of farmers in India is reported to have

reached 250 000, with reasons for deaths related to drought, floods, and an inability to repay loans on seed and fertilizers (Blechman & El-Tantawy, 2012).

All of these health conditions are connected to the way we live in our earth home, and in the case of the epidemic of suicides in Indian farming communities, many are directly connected to changes in the biosphere which result in altered atmospheric conditions in which farmers are unable to sustain the growth of their crops.



**Figure 37. Map of Global Suicide Rates, 2011 (World Health Organization, 2012).**

(Exception to copyright ss40, 103C; research or study).

The connection between the health of our home places and our own bodies is apparent in these statistics. Arundhati Roy has written extensively on the true costs of living in our earth home and its inhabitants. In *The Cost Of Living* she writes:

Day by day, river, by river, forest by forest, mountain by mountain, missile by missile, bomb by bomb — almost without knowing it — we are being broken. Big dams ... and nuclear bombs ... represent the severing of the link, not just the link — the understanding — between human beings and the planet they live on. They scramble the intelligence that connects hens to eggs, milk to cows,

food to forests, water to rivers, air to life, and the earth to human existence.  
(Roy, 1999, pp. 80-81)

And so to *Solvitur Ambulando* — walking a solution. Living in the Anthropocene presents a great number of compelling and urgent challenges to our behaviour and our relationship with our earth home. Solutions to the degradation of our soil, air and water, and loss of biodiversity will call on a vast array of possible ideas, collaborations and actions. Realising that there is no cure for the existential lack in our own homesickness, and that the desire for a return to a place of unity with our own beginning is an insuperable act, may be part of our learning to live in the Anthropocene. Once we comprehend and accept the impossibility of perfection in the ideal of home, we become open to the possibility of an acceptance of our earth home with all its beauty, imperfections, godliness, splendour, heart ache, unpredictability and terror.

Walking a Solution — *Solvitur Ambulando* — offers a twofold opportunity to engage with the responsibility of being human in the Anthropocene, the epoch of the human engineered world. The embodied act of walking is on one level conducive to thinking, dreaming and creativity, and on another level is a path towards an experience of the earth and a physical connection to soil, air, water and habitat. Walking in our earth home allows us the possibility of using our own bodies to encounter our home places and to create works which engage with the relationship between us and the non-human beings that share our home. Compelled by a philosophical sense of homesickness to wander through tangled voids in towns and cities, to stride out beyond the edges of culture into spaces of dereliction, scrubby parks and abandoned swamps, the walker-writer, or poepatetic practitioner, has no particular destination but is moving towards a bodily experience of being in the world. By walking through a place the walker experiences that place, and through this experience produces knowledge that is *a priori* to the Cartesian notion of the absolute. Poepatetic knowledge is the knowledge of enquiry, which is provocative and leaves spaces open and in question, rendering them sympathetic to artistic endeavour and human habitation. Solnit writes that:

walking shares with making and working, that crucial element of engagement of the body and the mind with the world, of knowing the world through the body and the body through the world. (Solnit, 2000, p. 29)

The rhythm of thinking falls in step with the rhythm of walking and the business of the everyday mind slips away leaving the walker free to dream, to witness, to encounter and to allow the creative thought to arise. Poet Wallace Stevens writes

In my room, the world is beyond my understanding;

But when I walk I see that it consists of three or four  
hills and a cloud. (Stevens, 1955, p. 57)

When writer Annie Proulx was asked why she chose to live in the difficult and isolated terrain of Wyoming, she answered ‘because of its horizons’, adding that ‘walking and looking at great distances sets the mind on fire, ideas come out like tsunamis. I can walk and look out and this solves writers block, the knotty problems of narrative and stanza’ (Proulx, 2011). Perth writer Kevin Gillam comments that when he is working on a poem he invariably takes the poem for a walk. He says that after forty minutes of being out walking with the problem of the word, line or stanza in mind, the creative moment kicks in and he is able to resolve the poem he is working on (Gillam, 2011).

Thomas Shapcott urges us to ‘begin with walking’ (Shapcott, 1972). John Bennett suggests that we ‘get out of the house and go for a bush walk’ (Bennett, 2005, p. title). Rebecca Solnit writes that human beings think at the speed of walking (Solnit, 2000, p. 29). Bennett recounts the story told by Gary Snyder about an incident that occurred when he was travelling in the back of a ute with the Aboriginal Elder Jimmy Tjungurrayi. Snyder recalls that the old man was telling stories very rapidly and that he realised after about half an hour that ‘these tales were meant to be told while walking and that I was experiencing a speeded up version of what might be leisurely told of several days of foot travel’ (Snyder cited in Bennett, 2005, p. 8). The earth tells us its stories at the pace of walking and it is through walking that we comprehend the physical nature of the world.

The walker-writer traverses the outer and the inner landscape, connecting the two with a map of words, and it is the inner reflection, enquiry and imagining which offers us ways of re-relating to our earth house. Emily Dickinson once wrote: ‘earth’s most graphic transaction is placed within a syllable’ (cited in Felstiner, 2009, p. 357). Words are tied in with the physical experience of the world and hold the possibility of re-imagining our lives within the earth house. William Stafford writes:

We must go back and find a trail on the ground  
back of the forest and mountain in the slow land ...

We must go back with noses and the palms of our hands  
and climb over the map in far places, everywhere,  
and lie down whenever there is doubt and sleep there.  
(cited in Felstiner, 2009, p. 257)

It is through the bodily re-membering of the earth, and attentiveness to place that we are afforded some idea of where we are in time and space, and can find direction by climbing ‘over the map’, to be in a place, to ‘lie down’ in a place when we are unsure as to how to



proceed. The poeapetetics,practitioner, walking and writing the land, begins with their feet on the soil, and as a human animal uses the home of the body to be in the home of the land. Through the practice of poeapetetics in the home place, the walker-writer restores their relationship with the elemental aspects of our world and covers the distance between the symbol of the word ‘environment’ and the real of the air, water, soil, birds and mammals.

In the skies above my home, flocks of Carnaby’s cockatoos wheel and soar, calling out to each other, landing in the dryandra and marri trees along the limestone ridge, and cracking open seed pods with their tough beaks. When I see or hear the birds my chest expands a little, I breathe deeply, and am moved from my thoughts and activities into an encounter with the wild. Every visit from the birds is also filled with anguish. The latest survey results show that their population has declined by 40 percent, from 12,954 roosting birds in 2010 to just 4000 birds in April 2012 (Kabat, 2012). As the last remaining swamps and banksia woodlands are cleared to make room for more houses, roads and airport runways the food sources for these birds become more scarce. The birds are literally starving to death. This mixture of gratitude and grief I experience when the birds fly over is a part of daily life in the Anthropocene. We watch extinctions happen and we grieve. We feel solastalgia, and we experience homesickness.



**Figure 38.** *Carnaby’s Cockatoos — Calyptorhynchus latirostris.* (Green, 2011).

Image courtesy of Ralph Green under creative commons licence, 2011.

What can we do? Crutzen suggests that teaching people that we are living in the Anthropocene, the age of a human dominated planet, would ‘stress the enormity of humanity’s responsibility as stewards of the Earth’ (Crutzen & Schwägerl, 2011, p. 1). He offers three suggestions for adapting to living in the Anthropocene: first, we must learn to grow our economies in different ways than our current model of hyper-consumption: second, we must make a greater investment in science and technology to develop energy outputs that do not harm natural ecosystems: and finally that we should adapt our culture to sustaining what Humboldt, over 200 years ago, called the ‘world organism’. We need to grow our capacities as a part of this world organism, and not at its cost (Crutzen & Schwägerl, 2011, p. 1).

The poeapatetic project of *Swamp* was motivated by a feeling of homesickness, of solastalgia. I wanted to walk this country that is now a city and suburban hinterland, to step up to the edge where the wild was. By walking and reading and writing I have learned what we have lost and what is still at stake. I have tried to walk myself home, to know my bioregion and to learn to live in it, and have understood the impossibility of the ideal of home. By walking and writing about the walking, by reading these poems to others and by publishing them, I hope to spread some of the seeds of my home place, as Thoreau, Oliver and Snyder have done, and to engender a more symbiotic relation to the unique wild of where I live. In the Anthropocene the feeling of homesickness can be overwhelming and crippling. One response to homesickness is to take to our feet and encounter what is around us, step by step at the speed of walking. Getting to know our small patches and learning to take care of them ripples out to the edges of other people’s patches, and so an ethic of care reverberates out through the world.

We can follow Thoreau into the swamp: ‘to wade sometimes in marshes where the bittern and the meadow-hen lurk, and hear the booming of the snipe; to smell the whispering sedge’ (Thoreau, 1854b, p. 24). Perhaps when we take the home of our bodies outside into the home place of our ‘watershed’, our bioregion or ‘life territory’ (Sale, 1985, p. 43), we may know what it is to physically inhabit a home that exists geographically, hydrologically, and ecologically in time and space. This kind of movement enters into what Giblett calls the ‘bioregional home-habitat’, a sense of community which encompasses all beings’ (Giblett, 2011, p. 244). Just as we learn to look after our own bodies as we grow and ease into adulthood, walking in our home places encourages a similar kind of knowledge and careful attention to the health of our local environment. As poet William Stafford expresses it:



The well rising without a sound,  
the spring on the hillside,  
the plowshare brimming through deep ground  
everywhere in the field — ... ..

The swallow heart from wing beat to wing beat  
counselling decision, decision:  
thunderous examples. I place my feet  
with care in such a world.  
(Stafford cited in Felstiner, 2009, p. 254)

## Conclusion

I stride along with calm eyes, with shoes  
with fury, with forgetfulness.  
(Pablo Neruda cited in Solnit, 2000, pp. 77-8)

I began this discussion by inviting the reader on a metaphorical walk in my home place, the Swan Coastal Plain, and by elaborating upon some of the history, geography, and cultural practices that have characterised the relationships between people and wetlands pre and post-colonisation. I have shown that the south west of Western Australia was a place mapped by people on foot and that the paths and trails made by Noongar people formed the basis for transport routes used and developed by the British colonists. I examined the great changes that have occurred in the land/waterscapes of the Swan Coastal Plain resulting in a massive loss of wetland environments, and suggested that it was the British homesickness for familiar landscapes that contributed to the destruction of these wetlands. I explain how homesickness for the ‘real’ country upon which the city of Perth stands inspired the development of a walking-writing practice; a ‘poepatetics’ which seeks to inhabit and reinscribe these environments lost.

I then explored the idea of homesickness as a philosophical and existential experience, and posited that the idea of home is not a simple issue but a multifarious collection of meanings with physical, psychological, and spiritual associations. I investigated the notion of homesickness as an unresolved drive within the human condition, a space that we are constantly moving out from in our desire to find home.

I discussed how homesickness was a site of tension in the Situationist International and has remained so in subsequent psychogeographical movements; and how psychogeography continues to be reinvented and utilised as a way of reclaiming city spaces for bodies and communities where public space is being eroded by the constant erasure and rebuilding of urban spaces, often to make room for ever more automobiles. Up to 10 percent of the arable land in the US is taken up by infrastructure for cars and in New Jersey developers are now required to build 3000 sq feet of parking space for every 1000 sq feet of commercial office space (Freund & Martin, 1993). The theories of the *dérive*, *détournment*, and re-mapping remain relevant and have been taken up by the ‘placemakers’ and psychogeographers of the twenty-first century.

I then examined the homesickness present in the practice of walker-writers as they wander out into the lands and countries, the watersheds and bioregions of their home places.

Driven by a desire to connect with our earth home, — Snyder's 'Earth House Hold' (Snyder, 1969) — these writers exemplify a walking-writing practice that I call poepatetics, which inhabits the littoral zone between nature and culture, subject and object, and seeks to encounter and interpret human relations with earth places and the non-human beings that co-exist within them. In the current earth house milieu, in which our human homemaking has resulted in habitat loss and climate change that diminishes the diversity, the health, the beauty and the poetry from our earth home, this kind of act seems ever more urgent and compelling.

In undertaking research for my poepatetic project *Swamp*, I have walked the lost lakes of Perth, noting, as the Situationists did, the urban landscape and the spaces of wild within it. The body of poetry produced from these walks reflects the topographical and architectural terrain, the marks of human activity, the absences and presences, and the memorialisation of wetland lakes. I have been for a walk in the Anthropocene, the current epoch in which human intervention has irrevocably altered the earth and its biosphere. This walking leads me back to my own patch, the swamps and remnant bushlands of the Swan Coastal Plain where walking and writing have enabled me to experience the small wilds of my home place. I feel fierce about this place now. I have encountered the 'others' that live here and I harbour a strong desire for the bobtail lizards, wrens, snakes, cockatoos, the trees, sedges, and turtles to continue to live. I want to be a part of a bioregion that sustains a diversity of life other than human because this diversity is what makes our world rich, wondrous and full of encounters that stimulate our human imagination. I also want it to be there for its own sake, because it is a part of the cycle of living and dying, death and renewal that we as humans are born into and will leave from. Life other than human life is part of our home.

The diversity of my home place is still being re-engineered into a saleable idea of home, such as the Satterley development at Harrisdale Swamp named 'Heron Park', offering its 'picture perfect lifestyles now selling' (Satterley, 2012). The streets in this development carry names such as 'Lapwing Approach', 'Welcome Meander' 'Peregrine Link', 'Songbird Link' 'Greenshank Road', 'Kulbardi Way' (the Noongar word for magpie), and the profane 'Sacred Glade'. These road names are a simulacra of the real. The sacred glade has diminished to a small isolated pocket within a commuter suburb. The habitat that these birds need to remain living on our planet has been compromised to make way for roads, highways, garden bores and houses. Heron Park epitomises homesickness and home — sickness.

Plastow argues in his essay 'Longing and the First Man', that nostalgia is a 'story to be re-traced, an object to be re-found' (Plastow, 2000, p. 95). He links this re-tracing to signifiers, which are the constituents of language. Homesickness is one way of representing this lost object and the writing of poetry is a mechanism with which to apprehend what is lost and that

which is unable to be re-incorporated, thus manifesting a repeating loop propelled by the drives of the body in a restless ambulation. The lost object is enigmatic; it is the object cause of desire, of excess and loss (Evans, 1996, p. 125). It is the split in the subject that initiates a separation or homesickness. In language this is un-representable; but leaves traces and enigmatic gaps. It is the role of the poet, through the signifiers of language, to try to allude to, silhouette, or trace the metonymy of the object.

As a result of this research I have been able to define a way of relating to the word via the body and observed phenomena: 'Poepatetics', the act of walking and of poetry. Recognising the loss of the wetlands, loss of habitat, loss of place for indigenous people is a real material experience. Recognising the enigmatic lost object that produces a space for art as the cause of desire, is provocative for the artist and for the walker-writer. The works of poetry that have been created through this practice of poepatetics are an act of ethics that recognises diversity and the right to existence of all living things. Poepatetics embodies the ethics of the act, in this case the act of walking and writing which apprehends the limitations of the Cartesian privileging of thought over experience, and opts for the experience of walking. Poepatetics is also about the ethics of the word committed to paper which interprets the walking experience, settles it onto the page and spreads the sphere of the walk beyond the imprint of actual footsteps taken. As well as ethics the walker-writer has the chance to encounter the uncanny, the mundane, joy as well as loss, and layers of time in situ. In this way the walker-writer expands the temporal-spatial sphere, and articulates a landscape of many histories, experiences, voices, smells, tastes and words.

Poepatetics in the lost wetlands of Perth, provides an opportunity for chance encounters with beings lost — herons, turtles, paperbarks and mist — that are unable to be symbolised directly (hence the garish effigy of the spectacle and simulacra), to encounter something of difference and of uncertainty — and of anguish. The lost object/homesickness is the path — reconciling oneself though walking is the act, and the act is our only ethical means to encounter desire provoked by loss.

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**Appendix One:  
Swampwalking.com.au**



[swampwalking.com.au](http://swampwalking.com.au)

Follow this link to find galleries of photographs taken during the creation of the *Swamp* project.



## Appendix Two: Lake and Land reclamation

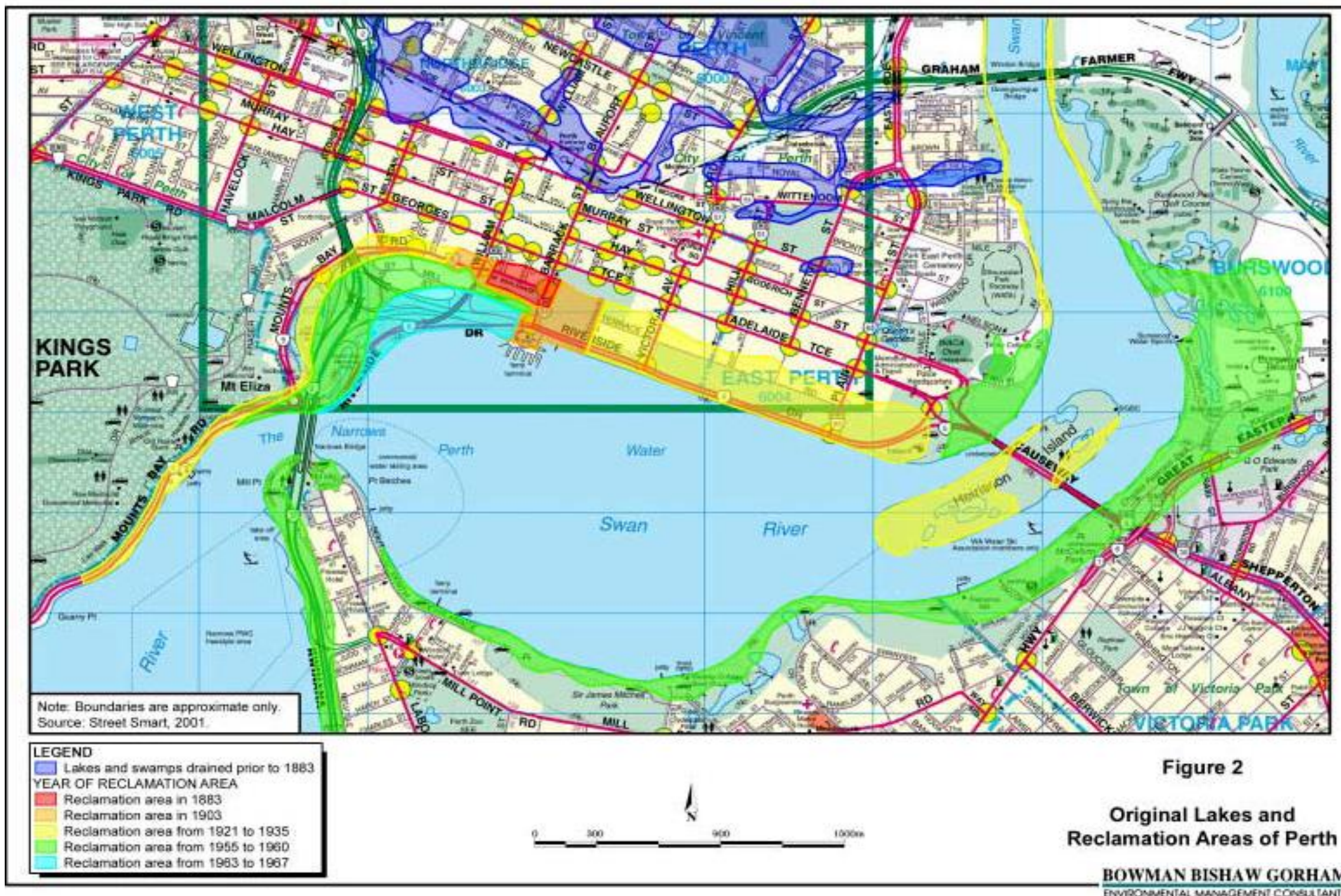
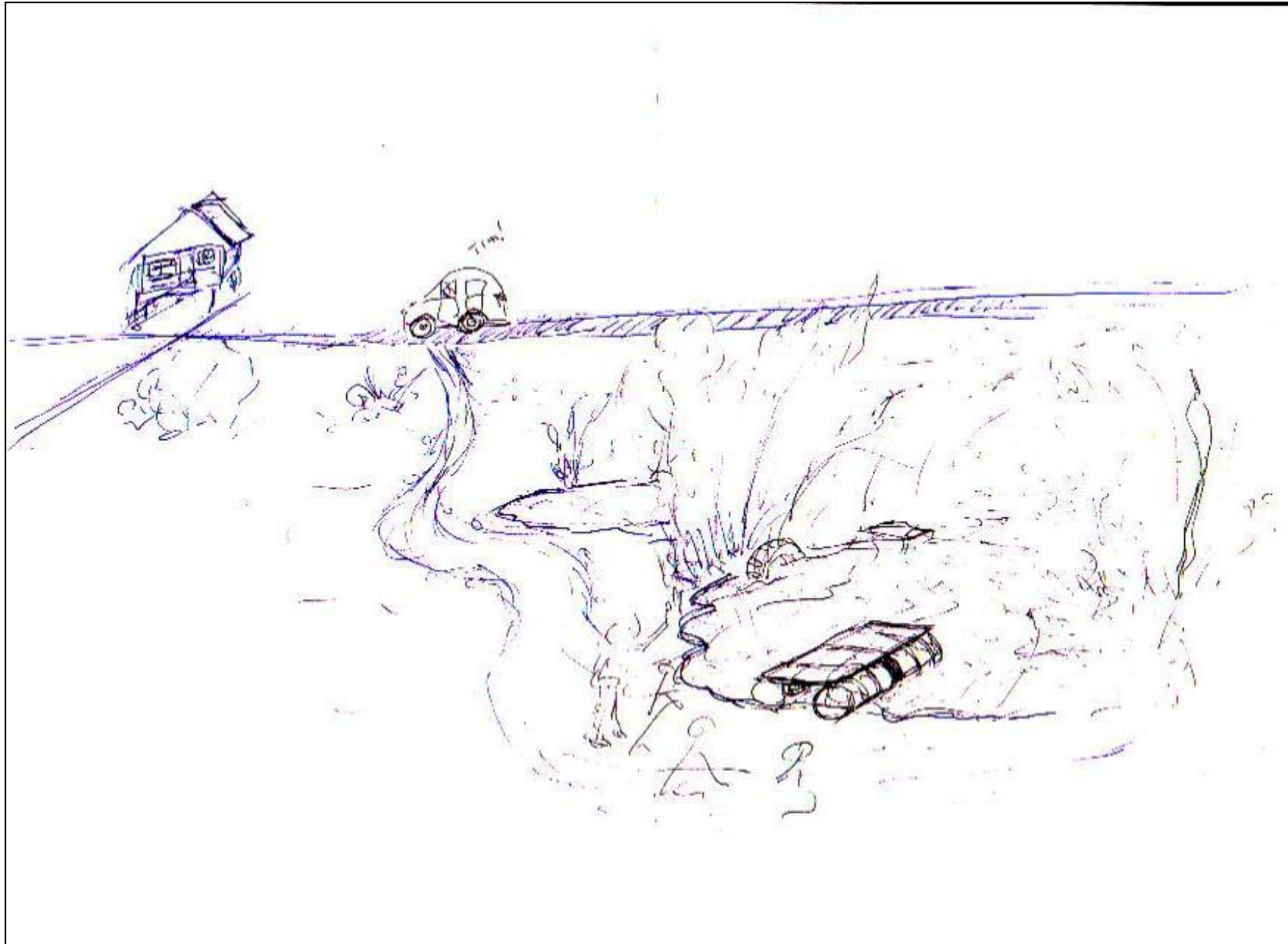


Figure 39. Map Showing Original Lakes and Land reclamation areas of Perth (Bowman Bishaw Gorham, 2001).  
(Exception to copyright ss40, 103C; research or study).



**Appendix Three:  
Tim Grant's Memory of a Swamp**



**Figure 40. Tim Grant's memory of the swamp in Dixon Park, Hamilton Hill, 1960s. Courtesy of Tim Grant 2011.**

## Appendix Four: Swamp Images

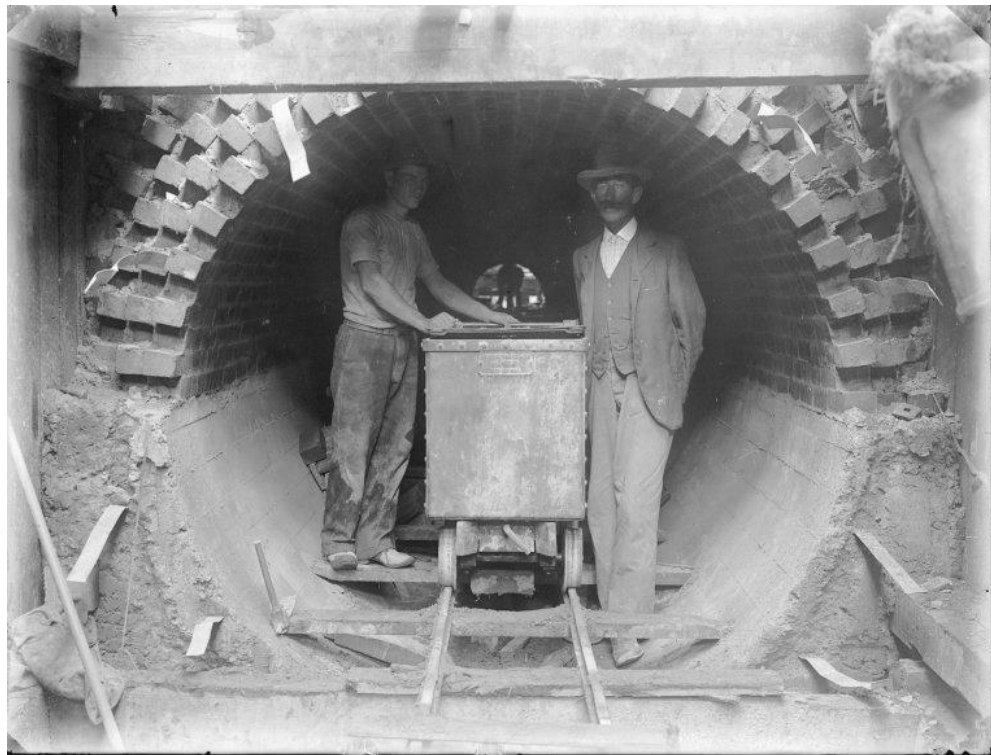


**Figure 41. Robertson Park, Perth, 1860-70.**

Image courtesy of the State library of Western Australia, 3145B/2  
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**Figure 42. Drain and general view of reclaimed swamp 1920s.**  
Image courtesy of the State Library of Western Australia, 006733d.  
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**Figure 43. Building a stormwater drain, Perth, ca. 1906.**  
Image courtesy of the State Library of Western Australia, 014087PD  
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**Figure 44. Commencement of Royal Street main drain 1898-1900.**

Image courtesy of the State Library of Western Australia, 00129D  
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**Figure 45. Millars Dewatering system at an excavation, 1965.**

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**Figure 46. Aboriginal women at Perth, 1910, including Fanny Balbuk (far right).**

Image courtesy of the State Library of Western Australia, [25341P]

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**Figure 47. Laying the Golden Pipeline from Perth to Kalgoorlie.**

Image courtesy of the National Trust WA. (Exception to copyright ss40, 103C; research or study).

# Appendix Five: Image Copyright Permissions



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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'MA', written over a horizontal line.

for Margaret Allen  
Chief Executive Officer and State Librarian



## **Appendix Six: Information Letter to Interviewees**



### **The Lost Lakes of Perth; Research Project.**

Dear

I am a PhD student at Edith Cowan University, Western Australia, in the school of Education and Arts. I am undertaking research into the history of wetlands and water in the Perth Metropolitan region. The proposed outcome of this research will be a substantial body of poems and prose which trace the radical changes imposed upon the wetlands of the Swan Coastal Plain since colonisation/invasion by the British in 1829. This collection of writing will be accompanied by a critical essay which explores the notion of psychogeography as a tool of engagement with changing urban environments.

My supervisors on this project are Dr Marcella Polain (9370 6322, [m.polain@ecu.edu.au](mailto:m.polain@ecu.edu.au)) and Professor Rod Giblett (9370 6052, [r.giblett@ecu.edu.au](mailto:r.giblett@ecu.edu.au)).

Since 1829 over 80% of the wetlands on the Swan Coastal Plain have been lost to drainage, infilling and development. By investigating the history of these lakes it is hoped that the project will provide a historical perspective that will encourage greater appreciation of the remnant wetlands still in existence in the Perth metropolitan area, and will contribute to a move towards conservation and care of wetlands and water.

The following questionnaire seeks to discover information about the history of wetlands and water in Western Australia. The purpose of the interview is to build upon the researcher's knowledge of pre-colonial, as well as post-colonial history of wetlands and water on the Swan Coastal Plain. It is anticipated that the information gathered will contribute to the researcher's understanding of wetlands and water from a historical perspective, which will add essential depth to the creative work.

Participation in this research is completely voluntary and participants are free to withdraw from the project at any time. If they choose to withdraw from participating in the project any information previously collected will also be withdrawn.

The interview will require up to one hour of your time, at a place of your choosing. The interview will be recorded on a digital recording device and later transcribed. The interview material will be kept in a secure place for a period of five years after which it will be destroyed.

The interview questions are general in nature and it is up to you how much information you wish to share. It is expected that the interview will cause very little discomfort or stress, apart from perhaps the emotional response to the retrieval of memories.

The interview questions are attached. The researcher will contact you shortly to ascertain whether you are able to take part in this research.

If you have any questions or require any further information about the research project, please contact: Nandi Chinna on 0431 970 797 or [asaraswa@student.ecu.edu.au](mailto:asaraswa@student.ecu.edu.au).

If you have any concerns or complaints about the research project and wish to talk to an independent person, you may contact:

Research Ethics Officer  
Edith Cowan University  
100 Joondalup Drive  
JOONDALUP WA 6027  
Phone: (08) 6304 2170

Email:

[research.ethics@ecu.edu.au](mailto:research.ethics@ecu.edu.au)

Best wishes

Anandashila Saraswati (Nandi Chinna)

## Appendix Seven: Consent Forms

### The Lost Lakes of Perth; Consent Form



I .....

.....

Address .....

.....

.....

.....

Post code ..... Email address .....

.....

Phone/ home ..... mobile .....

.....

- have been provided with a copy of the Information Letter, explaining the research study and have understood the information provided;
- have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have had any questions answered to my satisfaction and am aware that if I have any additional questions I can contact the research team;
- understand that participation in the research project will involve participating in a short interview of approximately one hour;
- understand that the information provided will only be used for the purposes of this research project, and understand how the information is to be used;
- understand that I will be fully acknowledged in any publication or performance of the work, and that I have the right to withdraw from participation at any time, without explanation or penalty;
- freely agree to participate in the project.

Signed .....

Date .....

## The Lost Lakes of Perth; Verbal Consent

To be filled out by researcher, read to participant, and signed by participant and witness

I .....

Address .....

Post code ..... Email address .....

Phone/ home ..... mobile .....

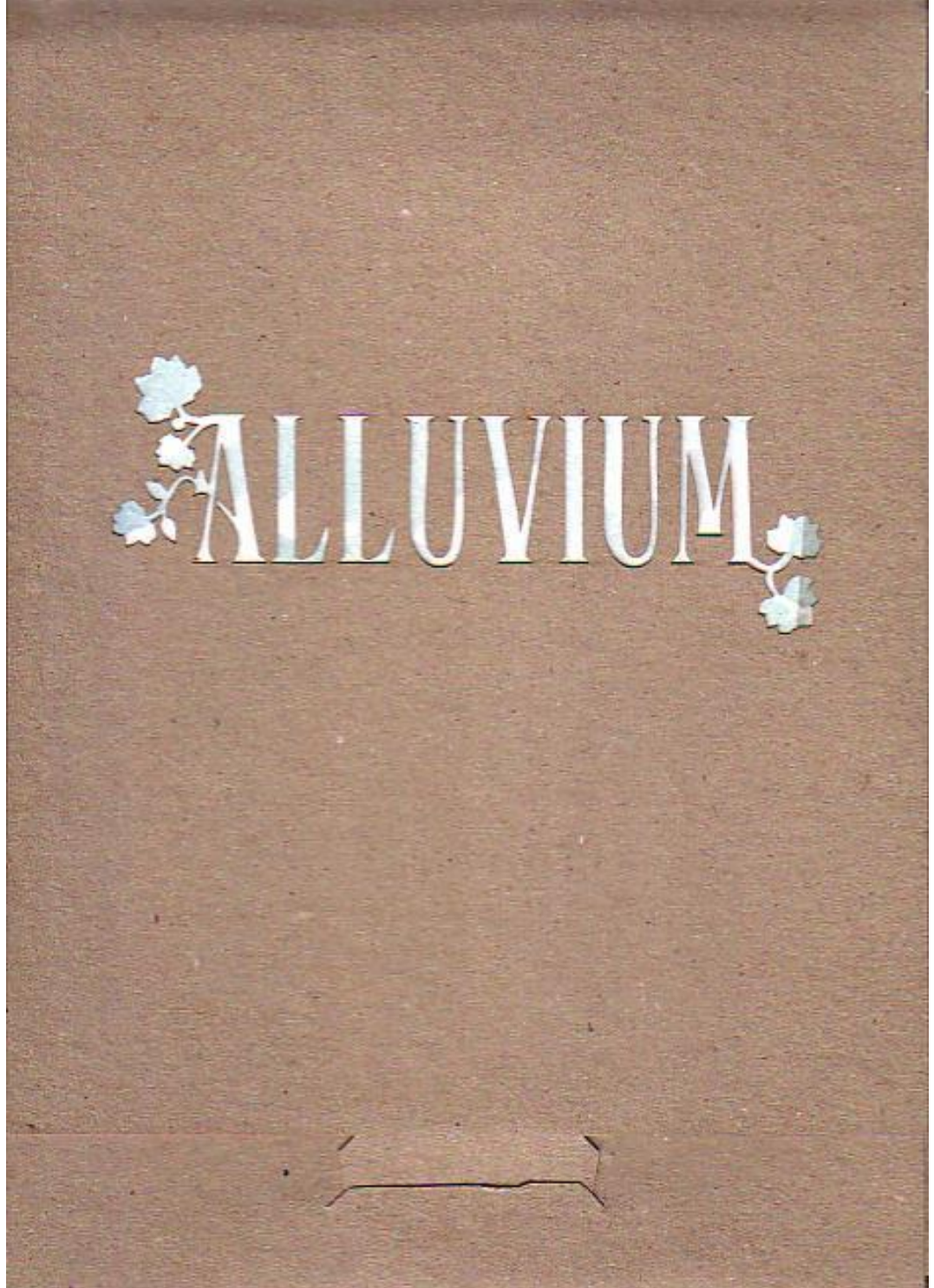
- have had the research study verbally explained to me and I have understood the information provided;
- have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have had any questions answered to my satisfaction and am aware that if I have any additional questions I can contact the research team;
- understand that participation in the research project will involve participating in a short interview of approximately one hour;
- understand that the information provided will only be used for the purposes of this research project, and understand how the information is to be used;
- understand that I will be fully acknowledged in any publication or performance of the work, and that I have the right to withdraw from participation at any time, without explanation or penalty;
- freely agree to participate in the project.

Participant's signature ..... Date .....

Witness's signature ..... Date .....

## Appendix Eight: Alluvium

Collaboration with Andrea Smith for Art /Text project, Lethologica Press 2011.



Courtesy of Nandi Chinna and Andrea Smith, 2012  
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# SILENT MORNING

*Charlie Ariti noticed that bird numbers fell dramatically around the end of the 1950s'. He judged that this may have been related to the spraying for Argentine Ants. He and others believe the bird numbers today are far less than in earlier days. Charlie Ariti, 1994.*

Without the morning alarm bells  
of magpie, crow and wattle bird,  
the sun volleys against walls and curtained windows,  
the somnolent dream on in their beds.

Down at the pond,  
the palliate surface lacks reflection,  
water boatmen fail to row their morning regatta,  
insects are absent from webless spaces.

Opaline droplets coalesce with water,  
gather in reed beds,  
drift through the wire of chook pens,  
and settle like an invisible score sheet on lawns.

An orchestra of the deaf and mute  
bereft of their instruments,  
tune to an inaudible pitch,  
perform a silent song.



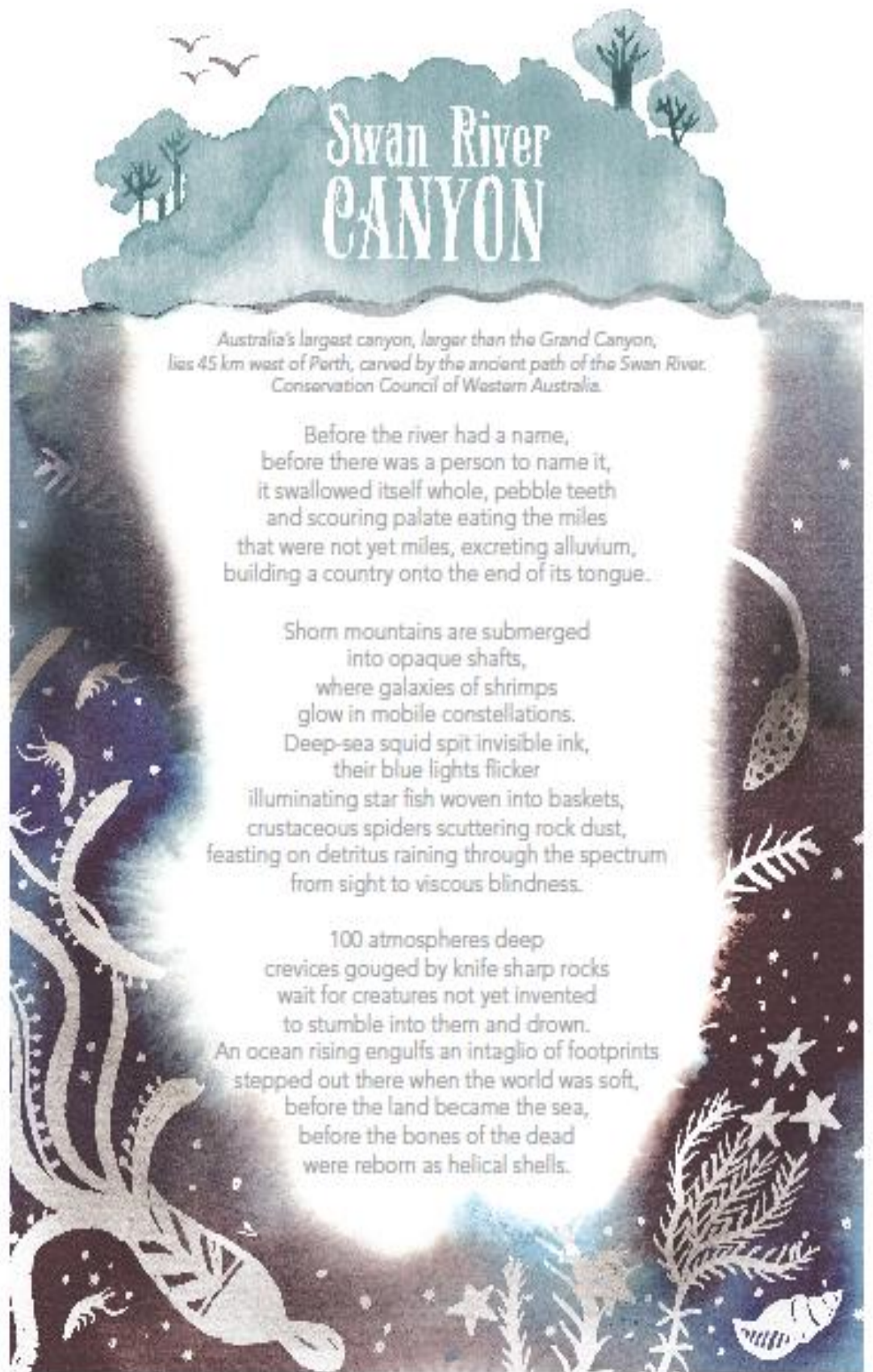
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