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## T(h)ree Rhizome(s) on 'Close/Open' Encounters With Kinsella's Pastoralism of the 'Radical' Kind

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**T(H)REE RHIZOME(S)  
ON 'CLOSE/OPEN' ENCOUNTERS  
WITH KINSELLA'S PASTORALISM  
OF THE 'RADICAL' KIND**

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**submitted by: Klyth Tan Soo-Hong  
in part completion for the degree of BA (Hons.) English**

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**(05 December 2002)**

## USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.

## ABSTRACT

IN HIS ELABORATIVE *Landbridge* 'statement of intent', Western Australian and International poet John Kinsella — whose phenomenal rise since the '90s is now a worldwide literary success story that needs no introduction — asserts a profound interest for the 'pastoral radical' (Kinsella, ed. Kinsella, *Landbridge*, 1999):

I'm particularly interested in the 'pastoral radical' — in blending the so-called pastoral tradition with the linguistically innovative. This 'hybrid' ironises the pastoral construct but allows for genuine movement through rural spaces. Landscape is central to my project — ways of seeing, questions of occupation and space, the position and relevance of the so-called 'lyrical I' and conditions of referentiality. My work may be symptomatic of late modernism (even postmodernism) in its exploration of the processes of its own creation and investigation of language as a thing-in-itself, but its concerns are primarily ethical and moral in nature. Visual art is a strong inspiration.

(p. 193)

I cannot help but think of Deleuze & Guattari and the rhizome in relation to Kinsella's 'pastoral radical'. Think 'pastoral' and I think 'tree'; think 'radical' and I, well I think of quite many things including the rhizome. 'Radical', not 'radicle', and so on, and Deleuze & Guattari, again. Kinsella talks about "blending the so-called pastoral tradition with the linguistically innovative", but I take the view that the poet is only highlighting an important aspect of his 'pastoral radical' that instance and not making a definition.

My thesis approaches his 'pastoral radical' vis-à-vis the primary 'pastoral' and 'anti-pastoral' rubrics as well as other literary critical production labels, terms and conditions attached to describing Kinsella's contemporary poetry/poetics, for example, his Trojan Horse theory according to Bernstein. Or is it Bernstein according to his Trojan Horse theory? I know it is not a question of hemispheres. I mean, there is 'pastoral radical' and there is 'radical pastoral'; there is 'anti-pastoral', 'not-so-anti-pastoral' and there is 'anti-anti-pastoral' (?); there is 'close', there is 'open' and there is 'close/open'; there is 'encounter', there is 'discounter' and there is 'missed encounter'; there is 'end-counter' and there is 'counter-end'; there is 'blending' and there is 'blundering'; there is 'blurring' and there is 'erring'; there is England, there is America and there is Australia (all three there where Kinsella lives and works as a poet/academic) ...

... there is Andy Warhol, there is Andy Warhol and there is Andy Warhol ... (there is/are even Dandy Warhols these days) ...

For the thesis I am making three rhizomes connecting Kinsella's poetry/poetics as a Deleuzean means to study how he 'ironises' the pastoral construct by 'hybridising' it: The pastoral tree-rhizome, the 'pastoral-radical' rhizome and the 'pastoral-radical-artifice' rhizome (not necessarily in any packing or pecking order).

In the Abstract to *Auto* (at that time a student prose work about poetry and life as a poet submitted for his Edith Cowan University's Masters thesis), Kinsella says: "There is no closure ... The text ends where YOU and I write and read ... The roles of reader and writer are blurred ... John Kinsella — I? 'My name is John Kinsella. I make poems' ..." (Kinsella, *Auto*, 2000, Abstract). Klyth Tan — I? 'My name is Klyth Tan. I am making an English Honours thesis on John Kinsella'. I am not mimicking Kinsella. I am only forming another rhizomatic link. You are invited to join us (un)read and (un)write. Upon reaching the Deleuzean point such that "it is no longer of any importance whether one says I", we ARE ("no longer ourselves"), each ("his own") and altogether "have been aided, inspired, multiplied" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 3).

## **DECLARATION**

I DO CERTIFY to the best of my knowledge that the thesis does not :

- (1) incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;
- (2) contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or
- (3) contain any material of a defamatory or libellous nature.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

A solid black rectangular box redacting the signature.

Date:

05<sup>th</sup> December 2002



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ONE PAGE CAN ONLY BE a token summarised expression of my sincerest thanks for the quality professorial advice and literary insights from my thesis supervisor Prof. Andrew Taylor.

Just as many thanks also due to Assoc. Prof. Glen Phillips for his perceptive observations, comments and suggestions as proposal reviewer.

Further thanks to Prof. John Kinsella with whom I had a very substantial and rewarding chat (indeed — what 'close/open' encounter!) during his inaugural Landscape lectures at Perth's WA State Library @ August-September 2002.

To everyone else in ECU's English Department whose guidance and help along the way I shall never forget.

To all my loved ones for their (un)remitting support, care, patience, warmth and encouragement as ever.

To the rhizome (and not forgetting the trees, chillies and eggplants I love as well).

Whatever scholarly inadequacies, inaccuracies and other 'error zones' (may I borrow Kinsella's expression out of context) are entirely my own.

I dedicate this work in loving memory of my father.

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**LOGUE: Pastoral (Radical) In The Time Of 'Speed' & Erratum/Frame(d) Warhol**

**W**ho's not afraid of John Kinsella and what has he not done to/for the contemporary pastoral?

Bloom pronounces Kinsella "a prodigy ... [only] a handful (or fewer) English language poets of his generation whose work is already so original, so fully formed, and so clearly destined to become part of the central tradition" (on Kinsella, *Visitants*, 1999).

In *Fairly Obsessive* (eds. Mengham & Phillips, 2000), Haskell (one of the eminent critics contributing their series of essays on Kinsella) is introduced to the reader as someone living around and about "the wheatlands district that is John Kinsella's heartland ... but Kinsella's poems make him too frightened to visit them often" (Haskell, eds. Mengham & Phillips, 2000, p. 305). A tongue-in-cheek comment, no doubt, yet it does take a fair bit to 'scare' a fellow Western Australian and literary scholar of Haskell's stature.

True, true, Kinsella is the 'maker' of an exceedingly 'scary' contemporary pastoral (thankfully not all the time), which is, shall we

say, one creature definitely not belonging to the idealised construct of some cascading Arcadian paradise or state of rural innocence and values — Dunmore speaks of Kinsella “grabbing” the pastoral tradition and “twisting” it to “fit a landscape where a dog is ripped open by a cornered ‘roo ... a lorry jack-knives ... wells ‘go salt’ ...” (*Observer*, UK) — Murray’s impression of *The Silo: A Pastoral Symphony* (1995) highlights more ‘anti-pastoral’ disturbances notwithstanding its traditional pastoral lyrical narrative structure: “Wheat fires, salt hollows, lightning as a type of razor wire, lymphatic fog ... here’s an anamnesis of rural Australia ...” — A continuing, scattered dozen poems or so revolving around guns and the shooting of parrots — Series of hideous accidental violence and systematic destruction brought upon nature, animals and human beings (*The Hunt*, 1998) — Diseases (*The Kangaroo Virus Project*, 1998) ...

And that is not all, I am afraid (of).

Broadly surveying his poetry via “the inchoate edges and transient discourse strands of postmodernism”, Hughes-d’Aeth advises the reader: “Forget trying to talk about Kinsella in terms of periods or phases, he does it all at once, inter-referencing and teleporting like the Cheshire cat” (Hughes-d’Aeth, *Westerly*, 2001, Vol. 46, pp. 23-24).

What the Cheshire cat, indeed (!), yes, while a completely or incompletely (depending on context) inter-referenced and teleported Andy (probably) smiles (somewhat Cheshire-ly “behind his dark glasses” standing near the Alice-implied “Wonderheat”) when asked about Marilyn in Kinsella’s famously multitextualised ‘Pastoral-Gothic-Pop-Goes-To-Hollywood’ (or vice-versa) poem, ‘Warhol at Wheatlands’ (Kinsella, *Poems 1980-1994*, 1997, pp. 344-345). The erroneously-zoned American Pop Art avant-garde icon Warhol popping up of all places at Wheatlands (say, why not the pastoral ‘W’ figure Wordsworth?) is certainly a very strangely ironic iconic postmodern Wonderland encounter:

He's polite looking over the polaroids

saying gee & fantastic, though always  
standing close to the warm glow

of the Wonderheat as the flames  
lick the self-cleansing glass ... It doesn't

remind him of America at all ...

Ringnecked parrots sit in the fruit trees  
& he asks if they're famous. But he  
doesn't talk much (really). Asked about Marilyn  
he shuffles uncomfortably — outside, in the

spaces between parrots and fruit trees  
the stubble rots and the day fails  
to sparkle.

(pp. 344-345)

Ironic. What is Warhol the American, the postmodern urban neo-avant-garde, the Pop Art-commodity icon doing in Paul Hogan’s country?

What kind of (Australian) pastoral is it with the Warhol figure at this late-modern and capitalist end-of-the-century and turn-of-the-millennium stage? (Does not matter mathematics we have spilt over a little time. It's *zeitgeist*, spoken generally, if we like).

Strange times for the pastoral and Kinsella is not alone in ironising it. Take the case of the late (d. 1998) Australian postmodern John Forbes (whom Kinsella as a fellow poet of the same generation pays tribute to). Vickery finds that both poets share "a specifically regional poetics ... as well as a fascination with American influences ... ranging from modern art to contemporary poetry to popular culture [and] often combine a humorous, healthy disrespect for cultural mores with a dark, even bleak, sensibility" (Vickery, eds. Mengham & Phillips, 2000, p. 67). Forbes's 'urban radical' (arguably an acceptable term vis-à-vis Kinsella's 'pastoral radical'?) vision produced a brilliantly deconstructed, devolved, decadent and drugged post-satirical 'metaphysical' version of the contemporary pastoral called — would you believe it — 'Speed, A Pastoral'. Parallel (or inverse) to Warhol popping up at Wheatlands, English 'romantic' Keats and French 'naturalist' Flaubert pop in to dine (Forbes, *Collected Poems 1970-1998*, 2001):

It's fun to take speed  
& stay up all night  
not writing those reams of poetry ...  
& when Keats come to dine, or Flaubert,  
you can answer their purities  
with your own less negative ones — for example

you know Dransfield's line, that once you become a junkie  
you'll never want to be anything else? ...

(p. 111)

Forbes, unlike Kinsella, is not a 'pastoral' poet, but this poem could be considered a 'radical pastoral' (or maybe 'urban radical pastoral?') for, despite the 'pastoral' title, it is rebelliously, cynically, satirically (actually also humorously and deliberately) without any mention, notion or representation of the pastoral ideal or idyll other than the guessting of Keats and Flaubert (unless 'paradise' means getting that sort of 'high').

Whatever has become of the pastoral amidst our contemporary popular media and culture?

We are a very long way past Theocritus's pastoral Greek idyll (circa 300 BC) and Virgil's golden age of Arcadia (circa 40 BC) ... past the 18<sup>th</sup> century neo-classical pastoral 'revival' ... past the Romantic pastoral ego'l'sation of landscape ... Curiouser and curiouser it gets ever since Empson not so many decades ago expanded the pastoral notion to encompass a "pastoral process of putting the complex into the simple", whereupon he decided *Alice in Wonderland* was an "unconventional" pastoral, if a "failed" one (Empson, 1935, pp. 8, 23).

Some might say Empson's reading of *Alice* as a pastoral involves an 'escapist' process, yet, we would ask, what is principally wrong with



such an 'escapist' process (if it be one argued so well by Empson) when the pastoral construct we know all along to be conventionally an urban means of devising a complicit rural 'escape' or 'utopia', anyhow?

The pastoral has always been an 'uneasy' construct. Sales defines the English pastoral by "the famous five Rs ... refuge [the desire for escape], reflection, rescue, requiem and reconstruction" and finds the idealised process "deceptive and prescriptive ... a propagandist reconstruction of history" (Gifford, 1995, p. 18). Williams's conclusion "was that the pastoral served a class view of the country, falsifying the economic relations between workers and owners (even if, on occasion, the worker wrote the pastoral himself) ..." (Gifford, 1995, p. 18). Barrell and Bull see the pastoral as "a false vision ... positing a simplistic, unhistorical relationship between the ruling, landowning class and/or the poet's patrons and often the poet himself and/or the workers on the land ..." (Gifford, 1995, p. 19).

It is not such a surprise, therefore, we should find a movement countering the pastoral. The existence of an 'anti-pastoral' tradition (against this notion of 'escape' or 'utopia') for probably as long as the pastoral itself, is a well-known and well-documented fact. In reviewing Kinsella as an 'anti-pastoral' poet (on Kinsella & Sims, *The Kangaroo Virus Project*, 1998), Larkin at one point emphasises, "we don't need reminding that anti-pastoral has been at home within pastoral almost

from its inception (and certainly since Virgil), so much as to note Kinsella's ..." (Larkin, eds. Mengham & Phillips, 2000, p. 208). Alright, alright, we don't and we won't send anyone any 'anti-pastoral' centenary reminders, but allow us a quick who's who of the 18<sup>th</sup> century English 'anti-pastoral' scene ... Goldsmith, Crabbe, Duck, Clare (Gifford, 1995, p. 19) and Kavanagh (Gifford, 1995, p. 55-71) ... Quite an appetising English 'anti-pastoral' menu available there! (Whoever stereotypically says they are hopeless at rebelling, labelling and cooking?).

'Speed' and 'Warhol at Wheatlands' as contemporary 'pastoral' poems only go to show how difficult it is (or even risible) now (or even then) to pretend (or insist) that there is a pastoral paradise beckoning "beyond the yellow brick road" (to borrow from the lyric of that great pop song — yes, the pastoral makes bestselling music for Elton, too).

Three quotes from Kinsella ought to indicate fairly strongly (and obsessively) to us his contemporary pastoral vision as well as 'radical' mood and attitude:

For me, all paradises are rotten. ([www.richmondreview.co.uk/library/kinsella01.html](http://www.richmondreview.co.uk/library/kinsella01.html))

In my 'pastorals' — and I should say that I use this term ironically — there is the sense of there being no idyll possible now. ([www.johnkinsella.org/essays/pastoralpolitic.html](http://www.johnkinsella.org/essays/pastoralpolitic.html))

Writing the pastoral now, here, one must be ironic, and (consequently) political. (Kinsella, *Southerly*, Vol. 56, 1996, p. 37)

The question I am about to pose is: How does one approach Kinsella as a poet within his Australian 'anti-pastoral' tradition, one which apparently shares a salient feature of pastoral/rural violence and violations of both 'natural' and 'human' types, as noted by McCooey amongst the Generation of '68ers (and post-), such established (not necessarily all 'anti-pastoral') names like Murray, Sherborne, Lawrence, Harrison, Hodgins, Foulcher and Salom (McCooey, ed. Webbey, 2000, p. 171)?

For some reason Kinsella is not on McCooey's list. I am wondering whether is it because the poet has yet to establish himself at the time of the book, or his eclectic, genre-bending inclination renders a place under the category 'anti-pastoral' poets unsuitable, or age, or the fact he is constantly overseas and therefore considered less an Australian and more an 'international' literary figure? Whatever it is, it sets me thinking of the many labels used by critics on Kinsella (I mean 'labels' in the neutral sense since they may enhance or hinder the effective contextual study of any discipline).

Edging past the millennium and having recently ploughed (pardon the overworked 'farming' pun) the first full-length field of scholarly criticism on Kinsella, *Fairly Obsessive* (eds. Mengham & Phillips, 2000), a reader can get fairly possessed by the range of prefixes preceding Kinsella's (dare I sometimes say myself) twist-around-the-turn-of-the-

millennium incorporating the fin-de-siecle and contemporary pastoral vision/version. Such as: anti-/counter-, neo-, post-/meta-, radical, experimental, avant-garde and so on ... these are no empty, meaningless labels when applied by critics who know, but it is also a case of not being always possible (neither impossible) to prefix (where it serves to enhance) or pre-fix (where it serves to hinder) Kinsella's pastoralism by any one or a few label/s. This poet owns all the brand names.

Seriously though, should one strictly read Kinsella on the basis he is most often called an 'anti-pastoral' poet, or are there other literary critical aspects we ought to consider in view of his large oeuvre, its eclecticism, scope, depth and innovation at the edge of the pastoral construct, since there is, specifically, a professed interest for the 'pastoral radical'?

The 'radical' word throws open a whole wide vista of (general to specific) meanings most suited to his eclectic, peripatetic poetic manoeuvres inside (not necessarily always so; he also goes outside) the pastoral construct (which the American l-a-n-g-u-a-g-e poet Bernstein calls Kinsella's Trojan Horse theory of getting in[/out] there and dismantling (even savaging?) any (over)signifying structure of the pastoral tree).

The Radical (Kinsella, *Poems 1980-1994*, 1997)

Green is the heat,  
each chilli a piece,  
sweat and a repeating stomach  
something to flaunt.  
You grow your own  
but despite rumours  
don't plant on the full moon.  
Slim canisters  
of motivation, slick grenades  
imploding.

(p. 320)

'The Radical!' An early piece of 'radical' by Kinsella! The green chilli — also known as another type of Trojan Horse that gets in and dismantles the stomach.

Do we read 'Warhol at Wheatlands' as an 'anti-pastoral', 'radical pastoral' or 'pastoral radical'? Do all critics use these labels the same way? What other approaches? Why Warhol and not Wordsworth? Is Warhol a Trojan Horse (as Kinsella and Bernstein define it)? Written in the '90s: Are there circumstantial and significant temporal/spatial affects/effects to the Warhol/Monroe series of poems? (By 'affect' I mean the general as well as Deleuzean sense/sensation). These are just some topics of (en)counter for the 'pastoral-radical-artifice' rhizome to come. 'Pastoral-radical-artifice' and not 'radical-pastoral-artifice'. The order is important as far as the meaning is.

**'PASTORAL-RADICAL-ARTIFICE' RHIZOME: Beginning With The  
Sense Of An Andy-Andy-Andy-Ending-No-Ending-No-Ending ...**

The pastoral has not been an easy form to practise in the post-Nietzschean twentieth century, as we grimly wait for the barbarians, shoring fragments against our ruin. It has survived, however, like a flower in the rubble, perhaps because of the centrality of the Garden myth in Western culture, and despite a determined attempt in the eighteenth century by writers like Johnson in *Rasselas* and Crabbe in *The Village* to ridicule it once and for all out of existence.

(Hassall, *Dancing On Hot Macadam*, 1998, p. 78)

**I**t is true that pastoralism has survived the 'anti-pastoral' onslaught of Johnson and Crabbe (perhaps even as much as God and the 'author' are still alive post-Nietzsche/Barthes), but how does the garden grow today? And how much of the central Garden myth really takes kindly to Australian pastoral/rural landscape on the fringe, anyway?

Whether or not the barbarians come to savage, what view of the Garden or classical pastoral myth (all the while mainly remaining so) to salvage? A sense of sa(l)vaging, maybe?

Appearing instead (not on behalf) of the barbarians: American Pop Art icon — 'Warhol at Wheatlands' (Kinsella, *Poems 1980-1994*, 1997, pp. 344-345) — among other less identifiable and repetitive 'aliens' from 'outer spaces' (Kinsella, *Visitants*, 1999).

Warhol comes to the Wheatlands at the end of the century and the turn of the millennium. What for? What do Warhol and the pastoral have in common? Nothing much between New York and the Wheatlands, but when Kinsella radicalises (certainly not synchronises) their mutual experiential time and space, he creates an ironising 'hybrid' to dismantle the pastoral construct by way of 'traumatic realism' (I will explain) of the urban neo-avant-garde. Kinsella's Warhol is the Trojan Horse. This particular Warhol-Wheatlands instance of 'pastoral radical' is hardly a 'blending'. Neither is it a 'clash'. It is more of a juxtaposed 'blundering'. Kinsella's Warhol as a sort of 'blundering' Trojan Horse. An erratum/frame(d) Warhol goes country to the Antipodes and finds that "[i]t doesn't/ remind him of America at all".

An extreme 'undoing' of codes via a 'hybrid' of the 'pastoral radical', as Kinsella would put it. The poet expounds his 'hybridising' poetics of the 'pastoral radical' (Kinsella, *Artes*, 1997, Vol. 4):

I see this third body of work as ... being *hybrid*. By hybridising, I don't simply mean a mixing, or a production of a new strain from a set of specific 'biological' material. A hybrid is not a possible next stage in a developmental sense, nor is it a 'dilution' of the original. Nor is it a fusion of traditions. It is in fact a conscious undoing of the codes that constitute all possible readings of a text ... It recognises frames for what they are: empty shells. Charles Bernstein recently called this my Trojan Horse theory — get inside and dismantle. It is not an ideolectical poetry that replaces certain demarcations, borders, divisions, qualifications. In some sense, it highlights those separations ...

(p. 107)

Had it been Wordsworth at Wheatlands? I would say the situation is still a 'pastoral radical' for the reason that he is, at any rate, an 'English alien' (so to speak), yet not so extreme a case. Maybe a milder sort of green chilli 'radical'. At least Wordsworth is the Romantic pastoral figure and there exists an earlier important Australian example to show his influence, as Taylor advances a perceptive study of the fact. Taylor cites Harpur writing poems such as 'A Midsummer Noon in The Australian Forest', where he "creates an antipodean reflection of The Lake District, idyllic in its sense of warmth and luxurious repose", but nevertheless, "was unable to inscribe into the beginnings of Australia's poetic tradition his own antipodean version of romanticism" and subsequently "[b]y the time Harpur was 'rediscovered' — and Judith Wright is as much responsible for this as anyone else — Australian poetry was firmly headed elsewhere" (Taylor, 1987, pp. 29-30).

Warhol, the American urban postmodern neo-avant-garde Pop Art-commodity icon simply does not have any similar precedent historical pastoral frame or landscape identification, even such as streets bearing his name, as Wordsworth. Here is Kinsella introducing the Warhol figure at one 'hybrid' extreme of his 'pastoral radical' so bent on 'undoing' as many cultural codes as possible.

So, this highly ironic postmodern Wonderland encounter, where to? Yes, the question is, where can the avant-garde radical go once past



the 'moment of crisis'? And the pastoral? What of the pastoral? Where can the pastoral go? Does the pastoral ever really go anywhere?

What the poet Kinsella attempts here is not a classic, straight case of 'anti-pastoral' against pastoral. Warhol brings to Wheatlands a whole 'traumatic' spectrum of issues from the pastoral/rural landscape construct to the art/urban innovative construct at the end of the century and the turn of the millennium. 'Warhol at Wheatlands' is the *piece de resistance* in Kinsella's famous series of 'Warhol (featuring Monroe)' poems.

As an alternative to the 'anti-pastoral' line, Armand suggests reading Kinsella's Warhol as a 'missed encounter with the real', which I shall now proceed to elaborate.

**'anti-pastoral' and Warhol's 'missed encounter with the real'  
(landscape)**

'ANTI-PASTORAL' is essentially a dialectical process of questioning and negating the artificiality and idealisation of the classical pastoral construct, which Armand substantiates as "a negative dialectics whose

anti-subjectivism presupposes the possibility of a more authentic relationship between representation and its objects (or, on the other hand, countering the devaluations of 'post-modernism', between representation and repetition) ..." (Armand, eds. Mengham & Phillips, 2000, pp. 136-137).

Within this 'anti-pastoral' tradition of negative dialectics, Gifford identifies tension "between notions of reality and poetic conventions (Gifford, 1995, p. 59) ... between authenticity and the temptation for the poet to become Bard (Gifford, 1995, p. 59) ... between the bitter and the lyrical (Gifford, 1995, p. 61), where such balances are constantly sought on "the closed circuit of pastoral/anti-pastoral poetry" (Gifford, 1995, p. 142).

Armand makes a distinguishing comment on Kinsella's famous series of 'Warhol' poems that its collective 'anti-pastoral' affect/effect (I am using both the general and Deleuzean sense/sensation of 'affect') — "does not define itself in terms of a negation of the pastoral tradition [which is usually the case for 'anti-pastoral' negativising dialectics], but rather as an articulation of the pastoral's 'missed encounter with the real' ..." (Armand, eds. Mengham & Phillips, 2000, p. 137). Such 'missed encounter with the real' is a first Lacanian usage subsequently applied by Foster in his art criticism of Warhol under the term "traumatic realism" (Foster, 1996, pp. 130-136) and now bears literary aesthetic

significance through Armand's essay, "Ground Zero Warholing: John Kinsella And The Art Of Traumatic Realism' (Armand, eds. Mengham & Phillips, 2000, pp. 119-143).

Explaining "the [Lacanian] traumatic as a missed encounter with the real", Foster adds that "[a]s missed, the real cannot be represented; it can only be repeated, indeed it *must* be repeated" (Foster, 1996, p. 132). It is neither a return of the repressed (as nothing has been repressed) nor trauma management by integration (that is Freud). It is a return of the 'real' (as wished) by way of repetitive trauma to the point of rupture (Deleuze & Guattari might tell us to rupture as many times as the rhizome could well possibly take ... Always follow the rhizome by rupture ... etc, etc, etc).

Just as Gifford points out "the closed circuit of pastoral/anti-pastoral poetry" and its blind spots (Gifford, 1995, p. 142), Armand also expresses his own reservations about reading 'Warhol at Wheatlands' as an 'anti-pastoral' because the rubric's dialectical process is vulnerable to "being re-appropriated by a discourse of engagement which masks an ideological investment in the so-called 'Ground Zero' of 'objectivity' ..." (Armand, eds. Mengham & Phillips, 2000, p. 135). The preference is for reading Kinsella's Warholian 'traumatic realism' as "a condition of discourse, and not as an object or objective" (Armand, eds. Mengham & Phillips, 2000, p. 137), which I feel is a good idea given

that Armand sires/sights the poet's work mostly "at this [Australian] intersection of the pastoral tradition and pastoral industry" (Armand, eds. Mengham & Phillips, 2000, p. 135). It is an Australian intersection space full of cultural superimpositions, overlays, deletions, displacements, anomie and alienation (let alone the questions of pastoral, what pastoral and whose pastoral?) that must necessarily affect/effect many 'missed' encounters with the 'real' (not simply one, since who misses what depends on context), so I agree approaching 'traumatic realism' as "a condition of discourse" would paradoxically impose less condition on the reader than any 'anti-pastoral' (over)projected authenticity of "object/s" or (over)corrective 'Ground Zero' (masking) "objective/s".

Armand's commitment to the 'condition of discourse' as preferred to any over-signifying/signified 'object' or 'objective' reads well alongside Kinsella's own *Syzygy 5* poem, 'The Cane Cutter' (*Poems ...* pp. 277-278, also quoted in the critic's essay, Armand, eds. Mengham & Phillips, 2000, p. 136):

on meeting archaeological light, spent swarming  
the traps, for this is Ground Zero Warholing  
in cyclone territory, zoning the sirens  
equivocating hot dogs and pies mushrooms  
pushed to the side of the plate: cadillacs  
racketing Monroe hubcaps ... (pp. 277-278)

Kinsella unmasks in cyclone territory "Ground Zero Warholing" of American cultural icons (hot dogs, cadillacs, Monroe hubcaps), thus allowing the possibility of critiquing (or not critiquing) any such 'object' or 'objective', as Armand is also aware of. Both I would say more or less subscribe to one extended Deleuzean principle of the rhizome (arguably the duo's version of the oft-quoted Lyotardian 'incredulity toward metanarratives'), which states (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987):

Making a clean state, starting or beginning again from ground zero, seeking a beginning or a foundation — all imply a false conception of voyage and movement (a conception that is methodical, pedagogical, initiatory, symbolic ...

(p. 25)

So, evidently, Kinsella presents the 'Ground Zero' Warholing 'object' and 'objective' earliest before the American Pop Art icon goes to Wheatlands, as such, it is a starting or beginning point and not a point for starting or beginning again (unless Kinsella reprises that particular poem, which he has not, so far).

On "missed encounter with the real", Armand perceives "the situation is one of disengagement posed against an Australian rural landscape whose 'authenticity' masks an ideological content in a manner that is both disingenuous and beguiling ... For 'Warhol', who is presented as mere surface effect, the signifying codes of the Australian landscape are unrecognisable" (Armand, eds. Mengham & Phillips, 2000, p. 123).

The 'alien' sense of antipodean disorientation is apparent, even if we disregard the embedded issues of ideology and culture:

It's winter down here & the sudden  
change has left him wanting. Fog  
creeps up from the gullies & toupees  
the thinly pastured soil. It doesn't  
remind him of America at all. (p. 344)

As such, Armand reads this poem as Warhol's missed encounter with the Australian landscape, surely not that it is more 'real' or 'authentic' than America or anywhere else, but rather, it is "unassimilable" as an "other" to him — "nothing more than an unfamiliar system of signs" (Armand, eds. Mengham & Phillips, 2000, p. 124). The Warholian missed encounter here may so be seen as one more in the long repetitive line of Western perception of the Australian landscape as "aberrant, repellent, dystopic: the underside of the world, the Antipodes" (Armand, p. 125). There exists, as such and as always, a potential 'error zone' for 'missed encounters' between the central Anglo-European Garden myth and the vast, inhospitable Australian fringe often conceived as 'hell' on earth.

In the pastoral context then, Australian pastoral tradition (if that is a good acceptable way to say it) develops a different strand of aesthetics from the Garden; its 'anti-pastoral' is also a different 'double-labelled' case of 'anti-idyll' and 'anti-centre' (where the centre is usually taken to be Anglo-European). I shall pick up on this 'double anti-pastoral' issue

again when providing a rhizomatic link between 'Warhol at Wheatlands' and *The Silo*.

As regards what constitutes the 'real', Armand observes from reading 'Shot Marylins & Gunbelt' (another poem in the Warhol-Monroe series) that "Kinsella is quick to remind us ... the 'real' is not anchored in mere portrayals of landscape (or 'crops [with] broken unglazed surfaces') ... Significantly there are '[p]owerlines' that 'hiss in the uneasy air —/ like poems escaping from screen-prints', suggesting that the poem itself, like the industrial objects and 'collectibles' that define the rural environment in terms of commodity pre-packing, is already involved in a process of consumption" (Armand, eds. Mengham & Phillips, 2000, p. 132).

Consumption and commodity are the two indispensable considerations for any Warholian event. So, when Warhol goes to Wheatlands, he takes to the country his whole Warhol aesthetics (so to speak). 'Warhol at Wheatlands' looking at the ringnecked parrots sitting in the fruit trees, he "asks if they're famous" (Kinsella, *Poems* ... p. 345). Technically and aesthetically, Warhol could commodify parrots as art, as he would rows upon rows of serial repetitive Campbell soup cans and make them 'famous'. Warhol asking whether parrots are 'famous' raises a highly ironic agenda, as these birds are shot on a regular basis in the country to protect crops while others die violent natural deaths — a matter

which has prompted Kinsella to write another series of poems about them. This moment of focus on parrots I would regard as another Warholian 'missed encounter with the real' here, as the Wheatlands rural landscape does not indicate or reveal anything specifically violent to Warhol other than a drooping hint of impotent disengagement and natural decay:

— outside, in the  
spaces between parrots & fruit trees  
the stubble rots & the day fails  
to sparkle. (p. 345)

Two critical commentaries on how the poem wraps up are of great interest.

To use Armand's expression again, it is "an Australian rural landscape whose 'authenticity' masks an ideological content in a manner that is both disingenuous and beguiling" (Armand, eds. Mengham & Phillips, 2000, p. 123). The assertion ought to be best read tentatively as 'things are not what they seem at first sight' on the hidden profile of violence done against parrots in this case (whether perpetrated by man or nature), which I think is a reasonable position, without straining toward any 'ideological' (whether general or specific) interpretation that requires a far more intense contextual scope.



Where there is what Kinsella allocates as the 'error zone' (his term) of perception and intent, say, as presently, "in the spaces between parrots and fruit trees", it so conceals a motif and/or motive of violence as to lead to a 'missed encounter with the real'. Needless and needful to say, all human violence is quite capable of an 'ideology' of its own, as we know, whatever the 'ideology' is taken to be.

Vickery reflects that "Australian environment provokes a break in the cycle of simulacra and cultural domination. It cannot be reproduced, and instead invokes its own violence upon Warhol's decentred, even feminised, figure" (Vickery, eds. Mengham & Phillips, 2000, p. 84). Let so be the case, yet I should say that violence against parrots can certainly be (re-)produced again and again by the Australian environment and its pastoral through reading Kinsella's other poems (soon I shall turn to those).

As to Warhol at Wheatlands, Armand observes, he is still very much "the Warhol of The Factory, 'tin-foiling/ his bedroom' for whom ringnecked parrots are only conceivable if they are 'famous' in a landscape where 'the day fails/ to sparkle' in a haze of dualities" (Armand, eds. Mengham & Phillips, 2000, p. 124). The image of a "decentred, even feminised" Warhol (ironically playing the ambiguous role of the disorientated 'other') is probably more Vickery's idea of a 'break' than any diminished sign of the simulacra or cultural domination.

Adding on to the study, I will now examine the notion of 'missed encounter with the real' from the viewpoint of the 'pastoral radical' poet writing at the end of the century and the turn of the millennium.

### **'pastoral radical' poet and Warhol's 'missed encounter with the real' (avant-garde)**

In postwar art to pose the question of repetition is to pose the question of the *neo-avant-garde*, a loose grouping of North American and Western European artists of the 1950s and 1960s who reprised such avant-garde devices of the 1910s and 1920s as collage and assemblage, the readymade and the grid, monochrome painting and constructed sculpture. No rule governs the return of these devices: no one instance is strictly revisionist, radical, or compulsive.

(Foster, *The Return Of The Real: The Avant-Garde At The End Of The Century*, 1996, p. 1)

FOR THE 'PASTORAL RADICAL' POET Kinsella, writing at the end of the century and the turn of the millennium, Warhol's (postmodern) neo-avant-gardism generates an intense spatial and temporal set of uniquely fetishised artistic and aesthetic contradictions inspiring him (Kinsella) to make a 'gallery' series of poems to the point where the American urban Pop Art radical experiences a 'missed encounter with the real' landscape at traditional Western Australian pastoral/rural Wheatlands. Yet, conversely, there is also the pastoral and 'pastoral radical' poet's 'missed encounter with the real' neo-avant-garde and

avant-garde at this meeting 'junction' or 'circle' of Deleuzian intensity (D & G would not mind either form of a 'junction' or a 'circle').

As explained sometime earlier on, a 'missed encounter with the real' is understood by the affect/effect of 'traumatic realism'. Foster's use of the label 'traumatic realism' is "an effort to mediate the contradictory views surrounding the work of Andy Warhol — that is, as 'referential and simulacral, connected and disconnected, affective and affectless, critical and complacent' " (Armand, eds. Mengham & Phillips, 2000, p. 119).

In the context of the neo-avant-garde, Warhol's art (like the rest of the group) is itself a 'missed encounter with the real', where 'real' refers to the historical (modernist) avant-garde of the 1910s and 1920s. Perloff thus explains Burger's analysis of the neo-(postmodernist)-avant-garde: to its immediate contemporary implication and conclusion (Perloff, 1991):

... the so-called Neo-avant-garde is doomed from the start. Dada, Burger argues, represents a moment of crisis that cannot be repeated: 'Once the signed bottle drier has been accepted as an object that deserves a place in a museum, the provocation no longer provokes; it turns into its opposite. If an artist today signs a stove pipe and exhibits it, that artist certainly does not denounce the art market but adapts to it' ... And, accordingly, 'The Neo-avant-garde, which stages for the second time the avant-gardiste break with tradition, becomes a manifestation that is void of sense and that permits the positing of any meaning whatever'.

(p. 9)

Doomed from the start because there is no returning back to the 'moment of crisis'? Dada (modernist to the extreme, anti-), as Burger argues, "represents a moment of crisis that cannot be repeated"? On the contrary, Foster ponders the possibility that "rather than cancel the project of the historical avant-garde, might the neo-avant-garde comprehend it for the first time?" (Foster, 1996, p. 15). Foster sees the 'original' avant-garde as "traumatic ... a hole in the symbolic order of its time that is not prepared for it, that cannot receive it, at least not immediately ...", and so, "[o]nce repressed in part, the avant-garde did return, and it continues to return, but it returns from the future: such is its paradoxical temporality" (Foster, 1996, p. 29). For the (postmodern) neo-avant-garde then, "repetition" and "return" (Foster, 1996, p. 32) are its two recurring 'traumatic' modes of strategic serial significance to 'comprehend' the historical (modernist) avant-garde.

On these recurring aspects of the neo-avant-garde, Foster is further quoted by Perloff as using another label of an "arriere-avant-garde [where] such art functions in terms of returns and references rather than the utopian and anarchic transgressions of the avant-garde" (Perloff, 1991, p. 9). From the Lacan-Foster-Armand 'traumatic realism' perspective, it is the neo-avant-garde's 'missed encounter with the real' that "cannot be represented; it can only be repeated, indeed it *must* be repeated" (Foster, 1996, p. 132). Extending to Warhol, "repetition ... is not reproduction in the sense of representation (of a referent) or

simulation (of a pure image, a detached signifier), [rather, it] serves to *screen* the real understood as traumatic" (Foster, 1996, p. 132).

Warhol's serial repetitive 'Monroe', 'Death & Disaster' Pop Art exhibition photo-paintings (which, as we know, once again become serially repeated in Kinsella's oeuvre as poems) recur as a neo-avant-garde process of commodified fetishisation (or fetishised commodification) serving to "screen the real understood as traumatic". The commodification of guilt and/or loss (both personal and public), as Armand states, "has earned him [Warhol] the accusation of being 'morally numb' and of being 'disposed to treat all events as spectacle' " (Armand, eds. Mengham & Phillips, 2000, p. 137), yet it "does not render a denial of responsibility, but rather a destructuring of responsibility" (Armand, eds. Mengham & Phillips, 2000, p. 138). A destructuring of responsibility through traumatic realism, which paradoxically and contradictorily (as a postmodern condition) yearns for the real and also, at the same time, wishes to insulate against it. Foster describes the experience as "a warding away of traumatic significance and an opening out to it, a defending against traumatic affect and a producing of it" (Foster, 1996, p. 132). In the case of Warhol, as such, traumatic realism recurs on two levels:

(1) as a destructuring of responsibility under the commodified fetishisation (or fetishised commodification) of guilt; Armand further

phrases it as “the on-going repetition of this missed encounter (the failure of responsibility) ...” (Armand, eds. Mengham & Phillips, 2000, p. 138);

(2) as a neo-avant-garde's missed encounter with the real (historical avant-garde.

By intensely adopting the leitmotifs of Warhol, Monroe and/or his 'Death & Disaster' series of Pop Art exhibition photo-paintings (recreated as poems distributed between sections of *Syzygy* (Kinsella, 1993), *Full Fathom Five* (Kinsella, 1993) and *Wireless Hill* (Kinsella, 1992-1994)), Kinsella, as a poet, is also thus repeating his own missed encounters with the (Warholian) neo-avant-garde and by extension, the historical (modernist) avant-garde. Perhaps we can call the whole event Kinsella's (either Self- and/or Representative) Postmodern Portrait of a 'Pastoral Radical' Poet in Missed Encounters with the Two Avant-Gardes.

Writing at the end of the century and the turn of the millennium when the fin-de-siecle or sense of an ending is a prevalent mood, admittedly, any poet who is 'radical' (including the 'pastoral radical' Kinsella) has to tackle the issue of innovation, if not the avant-garde. How does one still innovate after missed encounters with the avant-garde and neo-avant-garde movements? Jameson feels that “a world in which stylistic

innovation is no longer possible, all that is left is to imitate dead styles, to speak through the masks and with the voices of the styles in the imaginary museum” (Perloff, 1991, p. 9). Such a pastiche is “the postmodern form par excellence” Jameson calls by his famous term “blank parody” (Perloff, 1991, p. 9). Huysen further observes: “The American postmodern avant-garde ... is not only the end game of avant-gardism. It also represents the fragmentation and decline of the avant-garde as a genuinely critical adversary culture” (Perloff, 1991, p. 9). The fin-de-siecle as such (?) whose decadence is similarly matched by the decay and rot of a rural day contained in the ultimate line of ‘Warhol at Wheatlands’, so once again:

— outside, in the  
spaces between parrots & fruit trees  
the stubble rots and the day  
fails to sparkle. (p. 345)

**the Warhol gallery and parrots as a ‘pastoral-radical-artifice’  
rhizome**

IS KINSELLA ‘BLANK PARODYING’ WARHOL by constructing a gallery of poems based on the American Pop Art icon’s serialised work?

Is his Warhol series contrived as an artifice of little innovation speaking “through the masks and with the voices of the styles in the imaginary museum” (Perloff, 1991, p. 9) that he builds to serve as a memorial?

No, surely not.

Although mannered after Warhol’s Monroe, Death & Disaster photo-art exhibitions, Kinsella innovates what may I call a hybridised ‘pastoral-radical-artifice’ out of it, which doubly ironises both the pastoral construct and the urban commodity culture for their serialised ‘narrative’ repetition of violence.

Before going further, what is a ‘radical artifice’? To begin with, an ‘artifice’ is a construct; every piece or kind of art is to some extent, artifice, as opposed to nature or, for example, the “natural look” pursued by Modernist poetics (Perloff, 1991, p. 27). Artifice is “the recognition that a poem or painting or performance text is a *made* thing — contrived, constructed, chosen — and that its reading is also a construction on the part of its audience” (Perloff, 1991, pp. 27-28). The pastoral construct, for one, is a literary artifice contrived to construct the idyll or rural paradise through certain heightened forms, textual procedures or conventions. On occasion, Kinsella uses classical pastoral forms such as the Georgics and eclogues, but often to ironise,



as he says: "To utilise a traditional structure is to emphasise the undoing" (Minter, eds. Mengham & Phillips, 2000, p. 145).

A 'radical' artifice would be one that is either an extreme case of its own type, highly formalistic (in terms of its form or structure) or comprising the integration (not some superficial mix/mixing) of a few different media/genres/styles/elements.

A 'pastoral-radical-artifice' can be either a 'radical' artifice that is pastoral in nature or a 'pastoral radical' kind of artifice. Either category denotes and connotes a 'hybridising' element which, within Kinsella's poetics, would ironise the pastoral construct.

To speak in Deleuzean terms here, I am suggesting that Kinsella's artifice of the *urban* Warhol gallery of poems and another artifice of *rural* parrot poems together form a 'pastoral-radical-artifice' rhizome that ironises both the urban and the pastoral for their serialised 'narrative' repetition of violence.

The other artifice (musically) of rural parrot poems may be found in *The Silo* (1995), Kinsella's collection composed, arranged and structured by inspiration of Beethoven's 6<sup>th</sup> symphony ('The Pastoral'), but ironically, 'anti-pastoral'. As an artifice based on music, accordingly, one poem is 'Counterpoint', reflecting its 'anti-pastoral' vocality against the killing of

parrots, while a pair of poems similarly entitled 'Parrot Deaths' perform a kind of ritualistic coda at the closing section of *The Silo*.

'Counterpoint' has a 'parrot parodic' rhythm that further ironises in nature the serialised repetitive traumatic realism of Warhol's work. The bird's refrain is also contrapuntally set against the sound of violence:

Counterpointing the death of twenty-eight  
parrots so named because their call comes  
twenty-eight twenty-eight twenty-eight  
which is seven on three times a scatter gun's  
twelve-gauge call ... (p. 48)

'Warhol at Wheatlands' is the Deleuzean plateau where the urban and the rural artifices rupture in a complicit missed encounter with the real. Such when Warhol asks if the parrots are 'famous', he is extending his urban 'aesthetics' of serial repetitive 'commodification' to the rural 'guilt' of serial repetitive violence done on the parrots, which Armand would describe as "the on-going repetition of this missed encounter (the failure of responsibility) ..." (Armand, eds. Mengham & Phillips, 2000, p. 138). This failure of responsibility is thus lyrically 'spaced' as an 'error zone' of the landscape in the poem, so traumatically, yet again:

... Asked about Marilyn  
he shuffles uncomfortably — outside, in the  
  
spaces between parrots & fruit trees  
the stubble rots & the day fails  
to sparkle. (p. 345)

Both inside the 'urban construct' of house (Warhol "shuffles" when asked about Marilyn) and the pastoral/rural construct outside ("spaces between parrots & fruit trees"), there is, using Armand's words, "a destructuring of responsibilities" (Armand, eds. Mengham & Phillips, 2000, p. 138) and hence "the day fails to sparkle". Elaborating, as such, Armand offers the 'traumatic' conscience that "[f]or Warhol, as for Kinsella, it is not a question of responding to or for the 'guilty' image, but of encountering those structures which render such 'responsibility' impossible and which tie the individual into an economy of guilt that is self-perpetuating at the same time as it is meaningless" (Armand, eds. Mengham & Phillips, 2000, p. 138).

As an innovative 'pastoral radical' poet, nevertheless, Kinsella has, poignantly, I think, created an affective/effective 'pastoral-radical-artifice' rhizome out of his Warholian gallery and parrot artifices to ironise both the serialised 'narrative' repetition of violence in urban culture and the pastoral construct/rural landscape.

#### **additional notes on 'pastoral radical' and innovation**

THE 'PASTORAL RADICAL' is a very recent label compared to the 'anti-pastoral' tradition. Its usage sometimes causes confusion.

In a web interview with Bradshaw of *The Richmond Review* on his poem 'Firebox', Kinsella describes it as "an example of 'anti-pastoral' or 'radical pastoral' " ([www.richmondreview.co.uk/library/kinsella01.html](http://www.richmondreview.co.uk/library/kinsella01.html)). [note: 'radical pastoral' and not 'pastoral radical']. Here, he uses the labels generally as interchangeable. Elsewhere when discussing his two collections *The Silo* and *The Hunt*, however, Kinsella describes the former as 'anti-pastoral' and the latter, 'radical pastoral': "My volume *The Silo: A Pastoral Symphony* had been an exploration of the anti-pastoral, or a non-'Romantic' landscape ... *The Hunt* picks up on these themes but is altogether darker than *The Silo* in its darkest moments. The colloquial voice is the redeemer of *The Silo*, while in *The Hunt* it is the stuff of *Heart Of Darkness* ... In essence, *The Hunt* is a volume of pastoral poetry — but a somewhat more 'radical pastoral ..." ([www.johnkinsella.org/essays/anotehunt.html](http://www.johnkinsella.org/essays/anotehunt.html)). It would appear then Kinsella makes a distinction of 'intensity' (whether thematically or tonally) between 'anti-pastoral' and 'radical pastoral', which is again not the same as the label 'pastoral radical' used to mean a 'hybrid' of "blending the so-called pastoral tradition with the linguistically innovative" in his Landbridge statement of intent (Kinsella, ed. Kinsella, 1999, p. 193). There is yet the literary theorist/critic Tarlo who prefers the term 'radical pastoral' when Kinsella means 'pastoral radical'. In his web article 'Innovation contra Acceleration', Larkin discusses Tarlo's grouping of 'radical pastoral' English poets, such as

Clark, McSweeney, O'Sullivan, Caddel ... and goes on to add Kinsella to the list as the Australian example.

Larkin emphasises that these 'radical pastoral' poets (including Kinsella) "certainly can't be lumped together under a common adherence to a particular technique" ([www.bath.ac.uk/~exxdgdc/lynx/lynx46.html](http://www.bath.ac.uk/~exxdgdc/lynx/lynx46.html)). I must agree especially since even Tarlo's label 'radical pastoral' becomes the inverse 'pastoral radical' in Kinsella's usage.

A question of which hemisphere and antipodean inverse for 'radical pastoral' and 'pastoral radical'?

Whatever it is, Larkin draws our attention to Tarlo's point about "the double marginality of such [radical pastoral] work: it is heavily involved in non-standard [which I take to mean Kinsella's notion of the 'hybrid'] techniques but also committed to some sort of pastoral deployment of what is usually associated with an urban-privileging stance of radicalism".

On this point I would cite 'Warhol at Wheatlands' as an ingenious case of Kinsella having successfully managed to 'radicalise' a missed encounter ('failure of responsibility') between the very urban American postmodern neo-avant-garde Warhol and Western Australian rural Wheatlands to the non-privileging affect/effect of ironising both

urban/rural constructs for their traumatic complicity in violence. Far from being any 'blank parody' of Warholian styles or fetishisms, Kinsella's gallery of poems for the American Pop Art icon and the parrots may affectually/effectually be one excellent example of 'pastoral radical' innovation (while at the same time, 'anti-pastorally', ironic) around the end of the century and the turn of the millennium.

In fact, Larkin speculates that 'pastoral radical' (Tarlo's 'radical pastoral') could be "one of the strongest margins around, a poetry of ecotonal attunement, moving outside oppositional hierarchies [Gifford would say "beyond the closed circuit of pastoral/anti-pastoral poetry" (Gifford, 1995, p. 142)], giving space and time for the settings of edge rather than staking everything on a more assertive programme to set on edge ... Radical pastoral [Kinsella's 'pastoral radical'] is emerging, it seems, with a new appreciation of the literal, holding in suspension what must remain undecidable but not unaddressable".

All we await ...

**'ANTI-PASTORAL': In Defence Of 'Fenceposts' To 'PASTORAL-RADICAL' RHIZOME: Blurreading 'Rhizomic Perth'**

I can understand Armand's trauma about reading Kinsella's Warholian 'traumatic realism' under the 'anti-pastoral' rubric stand as it brings to mind a critic's comments on one of Kinsella's poems, 'Fenceposts' from *The Hierarchy of Sheep* (Kinsella, 2001, p. 16).

**in defence of 'Fenceposts'**

URQUHART WRITES THAT 'Fenceposts' (I would note the plural) is a piece which "begins as a thoughtful and interesting meditation on that very pastoral subject of its title ... [b]ut towards the end ... loses confidence in its project and demolishes itself with an allusion to the art of Tom Roberts as a form no longer capable of encapsulating modern experience" (Urquhart, *Westerly*, 2001, Vol. 46, p. 118).

These are the two rhyming endlines of 'Fenceposts' he puts to challenge:

A Tom Roberts painting becomes a lost refrain —  
information breaking up, the field enclosed — without gain. (p. 16)

The critic rather wants to assume that since Kinsella is often said to be an 'anti-pastoral' poet, everything he creates must be 'anti-pastoral' in intent for all purpose and therefore has to be read accordingly to the letter of the 'anti-pastoral' rubric.

What is to the letter of the 'anti-pastoral' rubric is anyone's guess, though. Despite a tendency for 'anti-pastoral' negativising dialectics to revolve around "the closed circuit of pastoral/anti-pastoral poetry", as Gifford says (Gifford, 1995, p. 142), his book *Green Voices* also shows us the many differing practices, rules and conventions within the 'anti-pastoral' tradition itself.

Yet just because the closing line of Kinsella's poem speaks of "information breaking up", Urquhart expects to see, as if it is a matter of good 'anti-pastoral' poetics, the idea of " 'breaking up' ... embodied throughout the fabric of the poem" (Urquhart, *Westerly*, 2001, Vol. 46, p. 119). I do not see why the critic should insist it be the case, 'anti-pastoral' requirements or otherwise. As far as I know, on the contrary if the poem overworks the idea of 'breaking up', it might actually break something else down — the 'anti-pastoral' dialectics of reaching a balance of things for a more 'authentic' relationship/representation



between subjectivity and the object. Anyway, he concludes the poem lacks a serious commitment to the idea of 'breaking up' and so, categorically states: "By and large, Kinsella's fenceposts remain very traditional objects, and if they are breaking up, it is probably due to the more traditional processes of change and decay than the information concerning them. In other words, Kinsella's pastoral project is still too, too successful, and the counter-pastoral project sits like an uneasy superstructure on top" (Urquhart, *Westerly*, 2001, Vol. 46, p. 119).

'Fenceposts' may not be the strongest poem or even one of the stronger poems in *The Hierarchy Of Sheep* and perhaps the criticism is valid up to a point on the distracting or disconcerting allusion to the art of Tom Roberts at the close, but I think the narrative sustains an essence of painting and colour (though not of a pretty/prettified countryside picture sort) which then makes aesthetic sense of the two endlines. In fact, I feel that it recognises the need for 'anti-pastoral' tension and balance "between the bitter and the lyrical" (Gifford, 1995, p. 61), a quality achieved on its adherence to a slow, regular (of course not absolutely perfect, if one is trying to emulate Milton) rhyme scheme aaa, bbb, ccc across each and every stanza of three lines, so imperceptibly timing the hazardous rural environmental scenes to a considerable crawl. My only 'complaint' is the closing stanza's "brain", "refrain" and "gain" sounds a tad like a gym club ad and not among Kinsella's memorable combinations).

Actually, such a sedate rhyme scheme sits very comfortably with the intended fact that "Kinsella's fenceposts remain very traditional objects" (to use the critic's own phrase) and thus I have to confess I do not feel the uneasy weight of any 'counter-pastoral' superstructure sitting on top (maybe not on this poem).

After this reading of 'Fenceposts', I think it is even clearer why Armand prefers to read Kinsella's Warholian 'traumatic realism' as a 'condition of discourse' and not engage the 'anti-pastoral' tendency toward 'object' or 'objective' (or, for that matter, on the other side, pastoral tradition's set 'subjective' representation). Urquhart's version of 'anti-pastoral' (or he uses the equivalent 'counter-pastoral') reading, whether or not it is the 'right' one, I gather exhibits this tendency toward 'object' or 'objective' that Armand would rather not apply to Kinsella's Warholian 'traumatic realism', since it might preconceive an 'anti-' stance and work toward a certain orientation on what Gifford sees as "the closed circuit of pastoral/anti-pastoral poetry" (Gifford, 1995, p. 142).

### **blurreading 'Rhizomic Perth'**

TO FIND A POEM ENTITLED 'Rhizomic Perth' in a Kinsella's collection so named *The Hierarchy Of Sheep* is an exciting prospect.

One (meaning also many) get/s this feeling that there is some postmodern sense of the paradox and blurring boundaries at play a la Kinsella's contemporary eclectic maybe ironically returning to classical ecologic sense, sensations, sensibilities and extrasensories ... 'Rhizomic ('flat' and 'radical' Deleuzean multiplicity) Perth (not exactly 'mountainous' rather 'multicultural' city)' and '*The Hierarchy* (signifying 'tree' or other such similar 'arborescent' systems) of *Sheep* (pastoral/rural construct ... possibly also rhizomic when visualised as a flock thus back to contradicting the collective 'hierarchy' word)' ... and then as one (meaning also many) read/s *The Hierarchy Of Sheep* one (meaning also many) realise/s there is no poem 'The Hierarchy Of Sheep' (which is to be found in the earlier collection *Wheatlands*), but there is now a poem 'The Epistemology Of Sheep' ...

So, now, blurring boundaries, blurring words and blurreading 'Rhizomic Perth' (Kinsella, *The Hierarchy Of Sheep*, 2001, pp. 34-35), one (meaning also many) could possibly read it the following ways:

(1) 'anti-pastoral' (quite traditionally vocalised narrative) ironic instructional (occasionally, residually Georgic) tone disapproving of human violation against nature and hypocrisy that we "pay lip-service to the deaths of serpents" ... mapping sections of eco-consciousness as "the ocean/ makes beautiful waves and aches under/ the carcinogenic

sun; [p]etrol stations hover over water mounds; Kimberley pipeline is a broken thread/ of Hansard ...”;

- (2) postmodern/post-pastoral situation where “The Old Brewery/ footnotes King’s Park — an open and closed case —” is an inside/outside blurring of boundaries between the urban construct and nature (construct as well ... a city park) ... “we ARE closer to nature, despite the traffic lights”;
- (3) postmodern paradox derived initially from an architectural (conveniently assumed as ‘origin’ of postmodern) perspective: “[i]n creating a language of Edge” evolving to becoming capital ‘E’ language of the ‘centre’ devised for the purpose of commodifying the ‘margin’;
- (4) note the emphatically code signifying/signified “ARE” not ‘are’, therefore, MANY OF US, not the collective or representational lyrical ‘we’, Deleuzean “ARE” multiplicities ;
- (5) “Mrs Dance/ transforms into a tree” ... Deleuzean rhizome-tree textuality of poem serves to self-reference/reflex Kinsella’s own contemporary ‘pastoral radical hybrid’ of the ‘pastoral tree’ tradition and ‘radical rhizome’ innovation ... also the processes of territorialisation, deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation constantly happening between the stratifying ‘tree’ hierarchy and the rupturing ‘rhizome’ lines of flight ... pastoral tradition (tree) signifying one-to-one binary

linking structures and pastoral radical (rhizome) asignifying multiplicities of heterogeneous many-to-many connectable points.

*The Hierarchy Of Sheep* frequently concerns itself with blurring and/or bricolaging Perth's urban-rural movements and local-global boundaries, 'Sublimated through our thought' (title of poem, pp. 37-38) rhizoming "an Aboriginal myth reconstructed/ by an educational publisher" while "[i]n the fens [probably Kinsella teleporting to Cambridgeshire] dialect is lampooned/ and a bunch of lads sing karaoke,/ forgetting their prejudices." A blurring, bricolaging sense of moving through words, people and places from Australian 'wheatlands' to Cambridgeshire 'wetlands'.

Urquhart astutely tells us the poems are "largely bereft of the first person pronoun, invaded by 'cut out boutique pastoralists' ('Sheep at Night') and often deconstructing themselves ... phraseology such as 'the freelancing/ narratology of marketing boards' ..." (Urquhart, *Westerly*, 2001, Vol, 46, p. 118). I would add *The Hierarchy Of Sheep* reflects Larkin's current view ('Innovation contra Acceleration') on 'pastoral radical' poetry — a tentative "moving outside oppositional hierarchies, giving space and time for the setting of edge rather than staking everything on a more assertive programme to set on edge" ([www.bath.ac.uk/~exxdgdc/lynx/lynx46.html](http://www.bath.ac.uk/~exxdgdc/lynx/lynx46.html)). There is no doubt a

postmodern paradox between the centre and edge/margin/fringe, which 'pastoral radical' poetry has to address, one of 'commodification' and 'exploitation' embedded in these ironic lines opening 'Rhizomic Perth', that we "[i]n creating a language of Edge/ check below the surface — harness/ the stuff that drives colloquial bric-a-brac ..."

"[A]t the horizon of the burdens of the new" (Larkin's words in "Innovation contra Acceleration") ... the 'nature' of 'nature' poetry?

## 1995 PASTORAL TREE-RHIZOME: Another Look 'On Arriving' At

### *The Silo*

In my pastorals — and I should say that I use this term ironically — there is the sense of there being no idyll possible now. This is not the world of Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony*. And the Australian landscape is not the European. If anything, it is really the Storm that belongs ...

([www.johnkinsella.org/essays/pastoralpolitic.html](http://www.johnkinsella.org/essays/pastoralpolitic.html))

Likening him (definitely a term of endearment) to “one of the notorious cyclones which descend on the Western Australian coast every summer”, Phillips confesses that “Kinsella’s personal energy levels are slightly stupefying on first encounter” (Phillips, eds. Mengham & Phillips, 2000, p. 16). The image is Kinsella as an antipodean fringe of ‘anti-pastoral’ fury blowing Down Under, so vicious, far flung and inversely removed from the blessed feelings experienced after Beethoven’s classical pastoral storm (the teacup sort?) that perpetuates the centrality of the Garden myth. On this topsy-turvy bush ‘hell’ topography of edge, how does the Garden grow but quite contrary?

To call and structure *The Silo* (Kinsella, 1995) A Pastoral Symphony a la Beethoven is, without doubt, deeply ironic. The Trojan Horse is getting in there and dismantling the pastoral construct again. Kinsella’s

Australian antipodean 'anti-pastoral' tradition is quite often a 'double' one — it is both anti-idyll and anti-Anglo/European to whatever varying degrees. Here is the poet using a formal European cultural referent, Beethoven's Symphony No 6, F major Opus 68 ('The Pastoral') to inverse the idea of an idyll. An 'anti-pastoral' inverse of the idyll, where "[instead of] Beethoven's Romantic morning lyricism we arrive at the poetic sequence at night and with a sense of violence" (Haskell, eds. Mengham & Phillips, 2000, p. 94).

Opening *The Silo*, 'On Arriving At A Deserted House Deep In The Country After Running Over A Rabbit On A Gravel Road, At Night' is a dark, (Go)thick 'anti-pastoral' narrative spooking at the underlying physical violence and psychological trauma of causing an animal's death: "The flywire door slams ominously/ as the fluorescent starter cracks ... you know the springs/ are shot, recoiling like bad suspension/ as the car grinds to a sluggish halt,/ tyres slicked with blood-letting,/ fur-coated in summer ... Mice unsettling ... If not fear then uncertainty/ curtains the windows like moon slick/ on a densely atmosphered night ... Wide-eyed/ like a rabbit".

If the Beethoven pastoral form is a composition of light acting as a "starter" to spark *The Silo*, here then, its first light pathetically (not Pathetique-ly) " ... suggests company/ that evaporates, fails/ to materialise ..." A 'missed encounter with the real' just as it is the case



in 'Warhol at Wheatlands'. The poem's anti-classical (Gothick) atmosphere produces an antiphony of words contrapuntal to the Beethoven symphony of sounds. Kinsella continues ironising the pastoral construct right till the end as *The Silo's* fifth and ultimate section includes two 'Parrot Deaths' powerfully countering Beethoven's climactic Arcadian storm of blessings. As an assemblage, Kinsella's collection "is by turns lyrical and savage — never a place of quiet, idyll retreat or of Beethoven's 'happy and thankful feelings after the storm' " (Haskell, eds. Mengham & Phillips, 2000, p. 102).

By turns "lyrical and savage": That is 'anti-pastoral' par excellence! (applying Gifford's, 1995, p. 61).

Given its strong traditional lyrical narrative drive and 'metrical' depiction of rural scenes, *The Silo* is still much conceived within the pastoral tree 'radicle' (not 'radical') signifying structure, though it appropriates the form of Beethoven's Symphony No. 6 to ironise. To me it is something of a pastoral tree-rhizome, "a book of memory" (as Hejinian describes it on *Erratum/Frame(d)*, also 1995), deeply rooted in/to the poet's sense of place, yet containing burgeoning 'radical' elements of rhizome, such as the opening poem, 'On Arriving At ...' (dismantling the pastoral construct somewhere 'anti-pastoral' between a (tree/root) 'radicle' and a (rhizome) 'radical'). A 'bad' tree contradiction? No, no, no, no worries, there are 'pastoral radicals' and there are 'radical pastorals'; there are

'tree-rhizomes' and there are 'rhizome-trees'. According to Deleuze & Guattari (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987):

... [there] exist tree or root structures in rhizomes, conversely, a tree branch or root division may begin to burgeon into a rhizome ... A new rhizome may form in the heart of a tree ... generative trees ... can open up ... and in turn form a rhizome.

(p. 15)

So, there! Tree-rhizomes! Rhizome-trees!

My little portrait thesis of Kinsella as a 'pastoral radical' poet in three rhizomes is complete: Pastoral Tree-Rhizome, 'Pastoral-Radical' Rhizome and 'Pastoral-Radical-Artifice' Rhizome (not in any packing or pecking order) ... Or is it a 'pastoral' portrait of the 'radical' rhizome in three Kinsellas? Or is it ...

Whatever it is, I hope we have all traumatically enjoyed suffering (making) reading-and-writing rhizomes out of these close/open (really-not-to-be-missed) encounters with the 'pastoral radical' poet prodigy.

The rest (as they say) is more history waiting to be made by the poet Kinsella.

And more plateaus to draw and to dream up to.

And more rhizomes to follow as we watch the poet and his visiting ant  
lines leave one plateau to move on to another.

Even an anti-thesis to go?

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