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**AIR-TO-GROUND:
A LOCAL COMMEMORATION OF
THE APOLLO MOON LANDING PROGRAM
DURING ITS FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY**

AN EXEGESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF

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Declaration of Originality

I, Rebecca Bigg-Wither hereby declare that the thesis here presented is the outcome of the research project undertaken during my candidacy, that I am the sole author unless otherwise indicated, and that I have fully documented the source of ideas, references, quotations and paraphrases attributable to other authors.

R Bigg-Wither

.....

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Abstract

This practice-led thesis, which shadowed the fiftieth anniversary of the Apollo Moon landing program, uses photomontage anchored by Apollo-era NASA images to investigate how the program and the psyche that it manifested might best be remembered in the now. In doing so, it adds to the relatively small number of attempts by visual artists to address the Apollo program in depth and as a specific historical undertaking. To this extent, it speaks from the unique perspective of the anniversary as both a major commemorative occasion and an historical moment in which key cultural norms that the Apollo program officially represented were challenged by a new Dionysian counterculture. It also significantly contributes to a body of creative work, largely generated during the anniversary, which spotlights the role of the former Honeysuckle Creek Tracking Station in the Apollo missions. The creative works produced for this thesis run against the grain of contemporary imperatives to focus commemorative efforts on forgotten histories. In doing so, they create new knowledge by proposing strategies for sympathetically remembering a departing hegemon without advocating for its reinstatement, while remaining sensitive to surrounding commemorative concerns. Informed by recent attempts to re-interpret contested monuments as an alternative to their removal, it posits Apollo's documentary photographs as a monument to their creators and re-makes them to articulate their current resonances. Ultimately, the creative works suggest Apollo may still have something to offer in terms of an attenuated 'social heroic' and that its passing should otherwise be marked quietly but with respect.

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Introduction

Prologue

In the early morning of 20 July 2019 Australian Eastern Standard Time, I huddled outside the Namadgi National Park Visitor Centre, half an hour south of my hometown Canberra, along with a crowd of two hundred or so frozen fellow travellers. We were waiting for coaches to drive us twenty kilometres up the winding Apollo Road to the site of the former Honeysuckle Creek Tracking Station. Nestled within the park and normally humming with campers and day-trippers even in the depths of Canberra winter, the site had been closed to the public. Today, it would host a commemorative ceremony marking the fiftieth anniversary of the first Moon landing a day in advance of the occasion. Many in the stamping throng had travelled long distances to be here, and many had already attended related events during a week of festivities that would conclude tomorrow with an official luncheon.

Assigned our buses, we began a journey I had undertaken many times over the previous two years, through winter sleet and summer glare and suicidal wallabies impervious to the seasons. As we unfogged our windows, a host from the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Parks and Conservation Service recounted familiar stories about Honeysuckle Creek's role in the first Moon landing. Perhaps most famously, Honeysuckle captured the footage of Neil Armstrong's first steps on the Moon that was broadcast live to the world.

As the buses reached their destination, the sun burned through the mist and the frost melted. The site filled. Honeysuckle technicians—or 'trackers'—now in their eighties, moving more tentatively now, but still as bright as the buttons they had turned on their shiny instrument panels as they hunted for signals overhead; their spouses, children and grandchildren; VIPs and common enthusiasts lucky enough to have snared a ticket; local, national and international media.

After enjoying refreshments from a white marquee, we settled in white plastic chairs while the moon-themed songs that had saturated the airwaves over previous days mingled with the birdsong in the background. A Ngunawal¹ Elder extended a generous Welcome to Country,

¹ The welcome was delivered by Ngunawal Elder Wally Bell and I have used 'Ngunawal' instead of the more common 'Ngunnawal' deliberately here and elsewhere in this thesis based on what I understand to be his views.

observing that the energy of those in attendance was powerful and good and that the site's ancestral keepers were happy to receive us. Speeches were made—informed; invested; warm—while a giant television screen near the speaker's podium flashed images of the station in its prime. Commemorative signage was unveiled.

Then slowly at first but with a building wave of pride in what had happened here, the site erupted into a rollicking cross-country photo shoot with trackers at the centre, grouping and regrouping, pausing for interviews, laughing with family and friends, backgrounded by blue mountains and white gumtrees, while everyone else beamed at them in the morning sun.



Fig.1: Honeysuckle Creek fiftieth anniversary commemorative event, 2019.

Overview

The fiftieth anniversary of the first Moon landing during NASA's Apollo 11 Mission fell on 21 July 2019 Australian time. The landing was the public high-point of the Apollo program which landed twelve American men on the Moon between 1969 and 1972. It can be counted among the rare 'flashbulb' moments in history that are etched in the memories of those who witnessed them and that have otherwise become widely entrenched in public memory. Numerous facilities around the world helped track the Apollo missions including several existing facilities within Australia. NASA also purpose-built a new facility, Honeysuckle Creek Tracking Station, on Ngunawal Country in Namadgi National Park in the ACT, to serve as one of three stations spaced evenly around the globe capable of communicating with Apollo spacecraft at lunar distance. Among its many accomplishments, Honeysuckle Creek captured the images of Neil Armstrong's first steps on the Moon that were broadcast to an estimated audience of six hundred million viewers via live television feed. While the Honeysuckle site is now a beautiful ruin, these images, along with other images from Apollo's monumental photographic archive, remain inextricably tied to how Apollo is publicly recalled.

This practice-led thesis, which shadowed the fiftieth anniversary of the Apollo program, uses photomontage anchored by Apollo-era NASA images to investigate how the program and the psyche that it manifested might best be remembered in the now. In doing so, it adds to the relatively small number of attempts by visual artists to address the Apollo program in depth. To this extent, it speaks from the unique perspective of the anniversary as both a major commemorative occasion and an historical moment in which key cultural norms that Apollo officially represented were challenged by a new Dionysian counterculture. It also significantly contributes to a body of creative work, largely generated during the anniversary, that spotlights Honeysuckle Creek's role in the Apollo missions and its 'ownership' of the first steps images. The thesis runs against the grain of contemporary imperatives to focus commemorative efforts on forgotten histories. In doing so, it creates new knowledge by identifying strategies for sympathetically remembering a departing hegemon without advocating for its reinstatement, while remaining sensitive to surrounding commemorative concerns. Informed by recent attempts to re-interpret contested monuments as an alternative to their removal, it posits Apollo's photographs as a monument to their creators and re-makes

them to articulate their current resonances. Ultimately, the creative works produced for this thesis suggest that Apollo may still have something to offer in terms of an attenuated social heroic and that its passing should otherwise be marked quietly but with respect.

For one of the most notable events of the twentieth century, Apollo garnered little sustained attention from major artists in its day, perhaps reflecting broad antipathy towards or disinterest in the program among “men of the left.”² The most notable exception was Robert Rauschenberg, whose *Stoned Moon* lithographs, produced for the NASA Art Program, helped to embed the program in public memory through an exploration of its celestial-terrestrial complexities. Apollo 11 was also covered privately as it unfolded by Japanese-American artist On Kawara who gave prominence to its key moments in his vast *Today* series of Date Paintings completed between 1966 and 2014. To mark the thirtieth anniversary of Apollo 11 in 1999, American photographer Michael Light produced his *Full Moon* book which curates a selection of Apollo mission photographs to probe the minds of their makers. In the same year, Swedish-American artist Aleksandra Mir’s *First Woman on the Moon* restaged the first Moon landing with a female cast, highlighting, among other things, the omission of women from the program. While many shows were staged throughout the world to coincide with the fiftieth anniversary, these broadly appeared to cover space travel or the Moon in more general terms. One exception was Massachusetts Institute of Technology’s *In Event of Moon Disaster*, a deep-fake in which President Nixon is made to read a speech prepared for broadcast had the Apollo astronauts failed to return from the Moon. I am unaware of any additional major projects undertaken by individual artists that specifically sought to commemorate Apollo during its fiftieth anniversary.³

Honeysuckle Creek’s role in the Apollo missions has been historically overlooked. Despite the sustained efforts of Honeysuckle Creek’s memory-keepers, popular belief has held that the first steps images were captured by Parkes Radio Telescope. Canberra artist Ursula Frederick, whose father was among American personnel tasked with selecting the station site, made a video animation about the station which was shown in the 2013 *Shaping Canberra* exhibition to coincide with Canberra’s one hundredth anniversary. The

² See e.g., Matthew D. Tribbe, *No Requiem for the Space Age – The Apollo Moon Landings and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 43–44, including a quote from Eugene Ionesco that “I have the impression that writers and intellectuals – men of the left – are turning their backs on the event”.

³ I do not include illustrative artists here.

work was cited in the 2016 decision to grant provisional heritage listing to the site as evidence that the site was active in public memory, pointing to the potential for creative works to contribute to the formation of public memory and what it contains. During the anniversary, Frederick curated a group show, *Promised the Moon*, which highlighted the role of ACT facilities, including Honeysuckle Creek, in the Apollo program. This show, in which I participated along with thirteen other Canberra artists, was one of many events staged around Canberra during the anniversary that sought to bring Honeysuckle's role to light. In 2020, Craft ACT also staged its *Terra Celestial* exhibition presenting works by five artists who had undertaken residencies linked to the anniversary. I am not aware of any additional sustained creative efforts by visual artists to address Honeysuckle's role in Apollo.

Amidst recent renewed interest in remembrance and commemoration, a broad consensus has emerged regarding the need to re-make commemorative landscapes to include subjects and communities who have to date been unrepresented or represented in ways that do them no justice. As an epic manifestation of establishment mind, Apollo was, on its face, antithetical to these concerns as a subject for commemoration. My remembrance of Apollo was not an attempt to impugn or draw oxygen away from these concerns. It sought, instead, to modestly supplement them with a search for what the establishment past might still have to offer and a wish to adequately mark its passing. My creative works present Apollo as an *outgoing* cultural-political hegemon whose overweening obsessions with reason, liberal international order, and expertise may seem more forgivable when viewed against recent trends towards non-reason and insularity and their underlying drivers, including an uncoupling of capitalism from the institutions that formerly held it in some degree of check. In speaking to what Apollo might still have to offer, I fixed on the program as a State-based undertaking whose expression of a social heroic pushes back against the contemporary privatisation of formerly public spheres. Space exploration is among the clearest cases in point. Once the exclusive preserve of ideological States, space is now a battleground for billionaires seeking to exploit its resources, offer sightseeing experiences to the mega-wealthy, and ensure that their ilk have somewhere to go when the Earth is used up by the unrestrained capitalism they espouse. In seeking to adequately mark Apollo's passing I explored ideas of the eschatological, of mortality and ritual remembrance. In all cases, the works tussle with ways to avoid revanchism by remembering my subject in ways that are sensitive both to it and to the surrounding commemorative context.

Along with a desire to address new subjects, there is a current view that traditional monumental forms are no longer apt for commemoration. While some monuments need to be torn down, another response has been to examine whether contested monuments can be sensitively re-interpreted. While my subject was located outside the commemorative mainstream, my strategies for remembering Apollo adopt this approach in re-interpreting Apollo's photographs. American photographer Michael Light has noted that Apollo's mission photographs:

*"...openly admit the biases and goals of their culture like few other documentary survey images made before or since... The program marshalled the full extent of human powers of measuring, organizing, testing, quantifying, navigating, sampling, and exploring, and focused them intensely on a famously elusive and difficult goal."*⁴

The photographs can thus be fairly described as a monument to the psyche of their makers. Photomontage allowed me to re-interpret this monument both in a literal sense, and in enabling me to dismantle, vandalise and rebuild Apollo's objective realities without ever quite destroying the *fact* of the photographs that comprised their raw material. Photomontage also enabled me to explore whether the visual language of 'big-State' propaganda could be rehabilitated to present Apollo as a symbol of the 'socially heroic' while simultaneously acknowledging the program's technological and political overreach. While NASA produced a vast archive of moving and still pictures during the Apollo program, I worked primarily with the still images given their wider role in lodging Apollo within the public mind and memory.⁵ While the trackers, for example, have described how they gathered transfixed around a monitor at Honeysuckle Creek as the first steps images were received, the technician immediately responsible for their safe reception grasped the point, taking a set of polaroids of the monitor screen which were handed out as keepsakes.

⁴ Michael Light, *Full Moon* (1999) (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), unnumbered page.

⁵ Historian Jennifer Levasseur has argued that "statistics show that millions around the United States and the globe watched live and recorded coverage of NASA missions on televisions, but still images, for their ease of reproduction and distribution beyond the reach of television, became the primary means by which most people viewed NASA's activities." Jennifer Levasseur, "Pictures by Proxy: Images of Exploration and the First Decade of Astronaut Photography at NASA" (PhD diss., George Mason University, 2014), 196, accessed February 14, 2022, https://mars.gmu.edu/bitstream/handle/1920/9158/Levasseur_gmu_0883E_10739.pdf;sequence=1. Levasseur has also noted the function of these images as physical commemorative items.



Fig. 2. Left to right: NASA logo; Danny Birchall, CND Badge ('peace sign'); Northern Sun, 'Not Flat We Checked' pin; QAnon symbol.

While the fiftieth anniversary turned attention to Apollo as a subject, it also marked an accelerated phase in the waning of cultural-political norms that Apollo represented. The program propagated these norms in its role as an epic work of Cold War soft power that sought to conquer the Moon for science and conquer the globe for democracy. To this end, it was officially presented as a voyage of neutral scientific discovery undertaken for the benefit of mankind and made possible by advanced technology and managerial practices. In seeking to influence the “minds of men everywhere” through appeals to logos, political universalism and expert knowledge it exemplified the mid-twentieth century institutional liberal mindset that created it.⁶ This worldview was challenged in its day by a counterculture whose peak coincided with the Apollo program. Fifty years later, the remnants of this worldview that survived into a less liberal, less institutional present are now under challenge from newer countercultural constellations. While the two countercultures may differ in their ultimate agendas, they are remarkably similar in the *Dionysian* nature of their objections to the *Apollonian* establishment. I therefore used the mythic dichotomy of Apollo-Dionysus to shake free Apollo’s current resonances and to develop tools for articulating them as a prelude to my more specific investigations into commemorative modes. This process, which underlays all of my creative works, allowed me to think deeply about how my subject might deserve commemoration while also accumulating the visual strategies and materials that would allow me to commemorate it sensitively.

⁶ “Minds of men everywhere”: President John F. Kennedy, “Special Message to the Congress on Urgent National Needs, 25 May 1961,” audio, 30:48, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, accessed February 10, 2021, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/JFKWHA/1961/JFKWHA-032/JFKWHA-032>.

I approached my remembering of Apollo through lenses of collective memory and commemorative practice which is the most visible means through which collective memory is shaped. Working from a definition offered by Australia’s best-known institutional exponent of commemoration, the Australian War Memorial, my creative works experiment with two primary commemorative modes as a means of grafting a new version of Apollo’s complex legacy onto collective memory: *celebration* and *solemn ceremony*. I harnessed the rays of the anniversary to explore celebration through works that posit Apollo as a remnant of the socially heroic. These works draw on the visual language of ‘sutured’ Soviet propaganda posters to present Apollo as a locus for small-scale civic pride salvaged from the background ruins of the Honeysuckle Creek site. Outside the glare of the anniversary, I explored solemn ceremony with its associated ideas of leave-taking and empathy for the past. Working backward from depictions of a super-heated eschatological reckoning, the works become progressively quieter and less sutured, focussing on mortality and earthly rot, before finding their final form as physical relics that reveal themselves only through human tending. Some of the works overstep: their astronauts are too triumphal, even as they are depicted flaming out or crumbling away. In most of the works, however, they speak quietly or in combination with less laden subjects while ceding increasing prominence to the earthly site of Honeysuckle Creek.

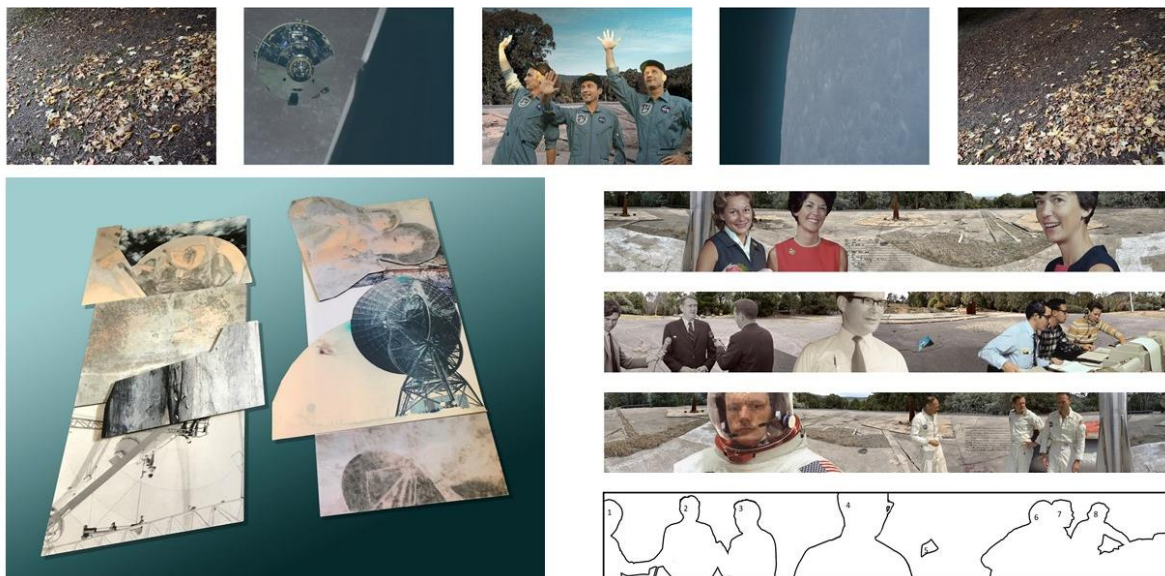


Fig. 3. Selection of creative works, 2019–22.

While this thesis is a practice-led research project, it is also informed by auto-ethnographic insights as I analysed my own journey through the anniversary and surrounding events in terms of my research question. Apollo astronauts died while I worked with images of their younger selves, while the trackers fought their own battles with time, directing my attention to mortality and endings considered both in broad terms and in more personal contexts. Six months after the anniversary, most of Namadgi National Park, in which the Honeysuckle Creek site is located, was incinerated during a summer of unprecedented bushfires, which were still insufficient to persuade climate-change deniers that something was terribly wrong. One month later, the Coronavirus saw a further territorial and personal drawing inwards, but also a brief blooming of active government. During my last pass over this exegesis, the counterculture came to town as the ‘Convoy to Canberra’ honked up and down the capital’s thoroughfares to protest Covid mask-wearing laws and air a miscellany of grievances rooted in radical distrust of establishment institutions and experts. As a final horrible full stop, Russia invaded Ukraine in a shocking display of unchecked ideological revanchism while forcing the West—that Apollo once crowned—to reckon with what, if anything, it actually stood for anymore beyond greasing the wheels of global capital.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter 1 records my efforts to identify what Apollo might mean in the present and particularly within the context of new countercultures as a means of considering what aspects of it might be worth commemorating. It begins by considering how the Apollonian and Dionysian have been theorised as inter-dependent poles of Western culture. It then progresses through three Parts that respectively consider objectivity, political universalism, and expertise as three Apollonian qualities exemplified by the Apollo program that seemed most beleaguered in the present. The Parts proceed to consider shifts within Western culture towards the Dionysian counter-qualities of subjectivity, localism, and intuition. Each Part concludes by exploring how Apollo also contained these counter-qualities while recording my insights into how various qualities and counter-qualities might be emphasised to serve my commemorative purposes.

Chapter 2 situates my research by considering artworks and debates that informed key strands of my own creative works. It investigates how Apollo was committed to memory in its day, focussing on works produced for the NASA Art Program by Robert Rauschenberg and Norman Rockwell. It then considers collective memory as a concept and contemporary debates around commemoration as central to framing my remembrance of an outgoing hegemon. Within this context, it also addresses artists who have remembered Apollo during its current and previous anniversaries or who have otherwise dealt with commemoration, particularly of hegemonies and hegemonic forms. It concludes by considering photomontage as a medium commonly linked to statist propaganda, particularly as practiced by early Soviet artists, before investigating the medium's potential for more critical deployment.

Chapter 3 describes the development of my creative works and my search for commemorative 'sweet spots' that did justice to my subject without overstepping. The first half of the Chapter outlines my early efforts to celebrate Apollo as an artefact of the socially heroic. It describes my early experiments through a set of analogue collages, *Remember Kindly Honeysuckle Creek!* (2017). It then considers triptychs, digital collage and panoramas as techniques that I primarily developed for sizing-up my works, but which also presented additional research leads. It goes on to explain how I applied these techniques in more resolved works for the group show *Promised the Moon* (2019) that coincided with the fiftieth anniversary of Apollo 11. The second half of this Chapter details my exploration of solemn ceremony as an alternative commemorative mode through three solo shows. *Apollo 8* (2018) visualises Apollonian demise by evoking a super-heated end-of-times through which my characters parade. *Air-to-Ground* (2019) is an elegy for Apollo that took solace in the natural and enduring beauty of the Honeysuckle site. My final works, *LOS* (2022), re-make Robert Rauschenberg's *Stoned Moon* series in three-dimensions and at smaller scale while incorporating 'exploded views' and a performance in which the works are tended by an industrious Apollo technician.

Chapter 1

Apollo and Dionysus: the stakes



Fig. 4. NASA, Apollo 17 mission patch featuring Apollo the Sun God, 1972.

Overview

This Chapter explores the stakes in remembering Apollo in an attempt to make a case for why this project is newly relevant in the context of current countercultures. It also details how I equipped myself with the insights and raw materials to respond by incorporating various Dionysian elements into my commemoration of Apollo. NASA was aware of the connotations of naming its Moon landing program after Apollo, the ancient Greek God of the Sun, who is represented on the patch for the final Apollo mission, Apollo 17, at fig. 4 above.⁷ Apollo the Sun God has been theorised post-antiquity in symbolic contrast to Dionysus, god of wine. In *The Birth of Tragedy* (first published in 1872) Frederick Nietzsche described the Apollonian and Dionysian as mutually balancing potentials within Western culture while arguing that the Apollonian has become overly ascendent. In Nietzsche's account, Apollo represents culture, reason, order, and individuation while Dionysus represents nature, instinct, chaos and primordial unity. Contrarian feminist Camille Paglia developed these ideas in *Sexual Personae* (first published in 1990) in linking Apollo to the masculine and Dionysus to the feminine. Describing Apollo's outstretched arm as "the horizon line of sky-cult", Paglia suggests that:

⁷ Lewis Research Center, "1969 Apollo 11 News Release," press release dated July 14, 1969, Glenn Research Center/NASA, accessed February 14, 2021, https://www.nasa.gov/centers/glenn/about/history/apollo_press_release.html.

*“...Dionysus is identification, Apollo objectification. Dionysus is the empathic, the sympathetic emotion transporting us into other people, other places other times. Apollo is the hard, cold separatism of western personality and categorical thought... Apollo makes the boundary lines that are civilization but that lead to convention, constraint, oppression. Dionysus is energy unbound, mad, callous, destructive, wasteful. Apollo is law, history, tradition, the dignity and safety of custom and form. Dionysus is the new, exhilarating but rude, sweeping all away to begin again. Apollo is a tyrant, Dionysus a vandal.”*⁸

Within Apollo’s day, libertarian thinker Ayn Rand, despite her struggles with Apollo as an achievement of the collective, invoked this dichotomy to characterise the launch of Apollo 11 as a victory of reason over the Dionysian counterculture whose children partied in the mud of Woodstock less than one month later.⁹ NASA Administrator Thomas O. Paine made a similar comparison in speaking of a war between the ‘Squareland’ of the establishment and the ‘Potland’ of the counterculture in a commencement address at Worcester Polytechnic the following year, opining that:

*“Philosophically, Squareland is outward-looking and mathematical, while Potland is inward-looking and metaphysical....For Squareland truth is pragmatic and powerful – its intellectual triumphs ensure that crops yield, lights light, bridges carry loads, children avoid polio, and men walk on the moon...[Potland’s] truth is subjective and aesthetic, non-mathematical, oriented to individual emotional perception.”*¹⁰

From the other side of the barricades, author Norman Mailer, identified by Paine as one of the ‘historians’ of Potland, railed against NASA’s dispassionate techno-managerialism in his reportage of Apollo 11 for *Life Magazine*, subsequently published as *Of a Fire on the Moon*,

⁸ Camille Paglia, *Sexual Personae* (London and New Haven: Yale Nota Bene/Yale University Press, 2001), 146 (“horizon line of sky-cult”) and 136, Google Books.

⁹ Ayn Rand, “Apollo and Dionysus,” transcript of lecture delivered at Boston’s Ford Hall Forum 1969, Ayn Rand Institute, accessed February 14, 2022, <https://courses.aynrand.org/works/apollo-and-dionysus>. For Rand’s struggles with Apollo as an achievement of the collective see: Ayn Rand, “Apollo 11,” in *The Voice of Reason - Essays in Objectivist Thought by Ayn Rand (Vol V)*, ed. Leonard Peikoff (New York: Meridian, 1990), 161–178, 168–172.

¹⁰ Dr. Thomas O. Paine, “Squareland, Potland and Space,” Worcester Polytechnic Institute Commencement Address, June 7, 1970, NASA Program Office, accessed February 14, 2022, [Remarks by NASA Administrator Thomas O. Paine: Squareland, Potland and Space - Commencement Address, Worcester Polytechnic Institute, June 7, 1970.](#)

from which I have drawn extensively in this exegesis. Recent histories, particularly Matthew D. Tribbe's *No Requiem for the Space Age*, have also documented how the Apollo program served more widely as a focus for countercultural antipathy towards the blind spots and obsessions of the establishment mind.

Dionysus is a god who dies and is re-born. The 1960s counterculture's excesses have largely blown themselves out and its more measured aspirations have become political orthodoxy. NASA, whose t-shirts can now be spotted in inner-city bars, whose latest inter-planetary program is named after Apollo's sister, Artemis, and whose astronauts now represent all colours and creeds, has arrived at this orthodoxy from the opposite direction. But the West has lately witnessed the rise of a new counterculture that values feelings over thoughts, tribal loyalties over more abstract civic duties, and intuitive rather than expert knowledge. NASA has again become a countercultural *bete noir*. Ignored or ridiculed by the 1960s counterculture for its squareness, it is now viewed as a mouthpiece of the deep-State that falsely claims the Earth is round and rapidly warming.

Against this background, this Chapter uses dichotomous pairings to prise open my subject and identify some of the underlying concerns of this thesis. I am conscious that this strategy involves an over-simplification of historical processes along with a flattening of Apollo's original meanings to suit my ends. My binaries, however, serve two related stylistic purposes. First, they seemed true to my subject and its times. Oblivious to waves of subsequent relativisms, they proceed in a positivist, teleological manner, adopting the black and white or 'on-off' thinking attributed respectively to engineers and computers. Second, they push back against the 'alt-facts' of current countercultural discourse. This term was coined six weeks before I began this thesis, when former President Donald Trump's Counsellor Kellyanne Conway, interviewed by journalist Chuck Todd, sought to explain White House Press Secretary, Sean Spicer's remarks on the size of the crowd at Trump's inauguration:

Todd: You did not...answer the question of why the president asked the White House press secretary to come out in front of the podium for the first time and utter a falsehood?

Conway: ...Don't be so overly dramatic about it Chuck. You're saying it's a falsehood [but he] gave alternative facts...

*Todd: Wait a minute - alternative facts? Alternative facts?...Look, alternative facts are not facts. They're falsehoods.*¹¹

A mere five years later, the concept seems strangely benign: in a certain light, it reflects no more than an incremental embrace of multiplicity while demonstrating a refreshing honesty as to how truth is manufactured by the powerful. At the time, however, I agreed with the sputtering journalist whose reality had just been pulled out from under him. As a *stylistic device*, the dichotomies therefore revert to the Apollonian notion that two contradictory positions cannot both be 'correct' and that each must be sharpened, tested against the other and arbitrated upon. At a *substantive level*, however, this thesis resists ideas of either-or thinking in embracing my subject's ambiguities and nuances. While this Chapter presents the Apollo program as fundamentally Apollonian, at least in its official guise, it loops back at every turn to consider the program's Dionysian elements which, like facts and alt-facts, remain available to be written in and out of history as the concerns of the present require. My own decision to cast the Apollo program as I have draws on Apollo-era journalism and histories produced within the past decade which have also emphasised the program's rationalist universalisms. While this characterisation may not be stable, it is interesting that it occurred and has recurred against background Dionysian flourishes.

With the above provisos in mind, this Chapter considers Apollo's visual artefacts and narratives in terms of three conceptual pairings which place Apollonian-hegemonic modes of persuasion against their Dionysian-countercultural opposites: objective-subjective, universalism-localism, and expertise-intuition. **Part 1** addresses Apollo's objective and subjective tendencies. It recounts how Apollo was officially presented as fundamentally fact-based and objective before considering how Western culture has shifted over the past fifty years towards a greater valuing of subjective experience and affect. It concludes by outlining my response in seeking to commemorate Apollo affectively and searching for visual materials that would allow me to accomplish this end. **Part 2** considers Apollo in terms of

¹¹ The NBC transcript is reproduced in Tim Hains', 'Chuck Todd to Kellyanne Conway: "Alternative Facts Are Not Facts,"' *Real Clear Politics*, January 22, 2017, accessed May 28, 2022, https://www.realclearpolitics.com/video/2017/01/22/chuck_todd_to_kellyanne_conway_alternative_facts_are_not_facts.html#.

political universalism and the local. It addresses Apollo's official presentation as an undertaking for all mankind before considering the West's retreat from universalism and internationalism. It concludes by outlining my response through an early focussing of this thesis on Honeysuckle Creek Tracking Station and my gathering of imagery that spoke to the station's forgotten history. **Part 3** considers Apollo's privileging of expertise against the program's more intuitive strands. It illustrates how Apollo exemplified notions of expert knowledge before outlining recent moves away from expertise towards a "new Medievalism." It concludes by outlining how my creative works emphasised the spaces that Apollo created for bodily knowledge and the metaphysical in an attempt to contain my subject's rationalist hubris and make it more suitable for commemoration.

1.1 Objective-subjective



Fig. 5. NASA, Apollo 13 mission patch ('From the Moon, Knowledge'), 1970.

Apollo and objectivity

Apollo's monumental photographic archive is overwhelmingly documentary and technical. While other great voyages of discovery enlisted artist-photographers to translate and showcase their achievements, NASA, as a matter of practical necessity, trained its pilot-engineers to press the camera shutter at pre-arranged points on mission plans. While there was allowance for "targets of opportunity", historian Jennifer Levasseur notes that the stated purposes of the mission photographs were "technical review of operations, information for later missions, discover where cameras could replace people, and as tools of scientific investigation."¹² Photographs taken by personnel other than astronauts before and after

¹² Jennifer Levasseur, "Pictures by Proxy: Images of Exploration and the First Decade of Astronaut Photography at NASA" (PhD diss., George Mason University, 2014), 15, accessed February 14, 2022, https://mars.gmu.edu/bitstream/handle/1920/9158/Levasseur_gmu_0883E_10739.pdf;sequence=1.

missions reveal related motivations and outcomes. The Apollo photographs thus document machines, parts of machines, the mechanics of training exercises, blank expanses and the vacant lunar surface. They show what happened and ensure that things can happen more efficiently in future while exuding an overarching assurance that things can be understood.

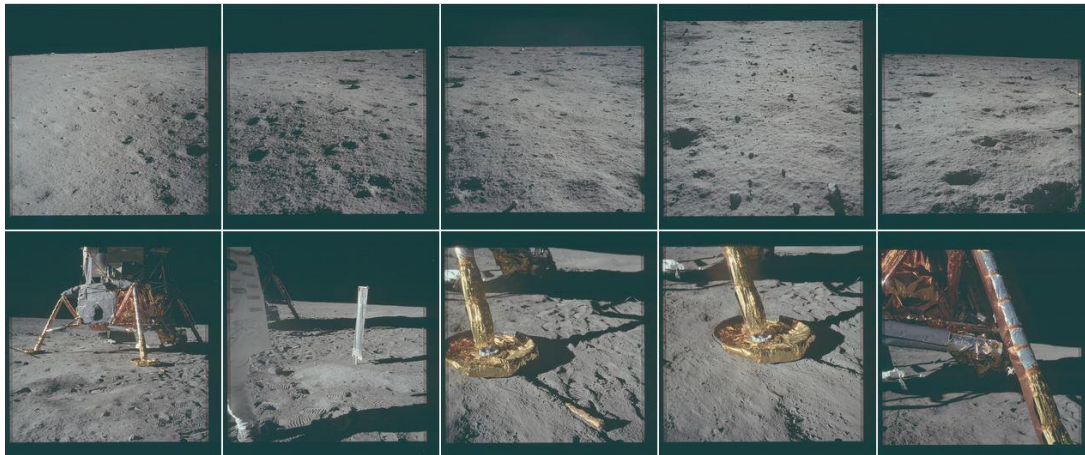


Fig. 6. NASA, Sequence from Apollo 11 Magazine 40/S (v2), 1969.



Fig. 7. NASA, Sequence from Apollo 11 training, Johnson Space Centre scans, 1969.

This treatment extended even to the astronauts who starred in Apollo's show. In mission photographs, they are vastly outnumbered by the minutia of their spacecraft or the lunar surface as in fig. 6 above. While astronauts feature more prominently in photographs taken by other personnel, they are mostly suited abstractions as in fig. 7 above. With faces glazed by their helmets and gestures muffled by bulky spacesuits they resemble interchangeable components, ready to be mated with or monitored by other pieces of equipment, incapable of the bodily gestures that might signal their inner workings. The only photographs of Armstrong on the Moon are partial or incidental. Armstrong and Aldrin

shared the camera duties, but Aldrin took no proper portrait of Armstrong and a selfie would have been unthinkable. The famous image at fig. 8 below is of Aldrin, as taken by Armstrong, while the best photographic record of Armstrong's presence on the Moon is his reflection in Aldrin's helmet.

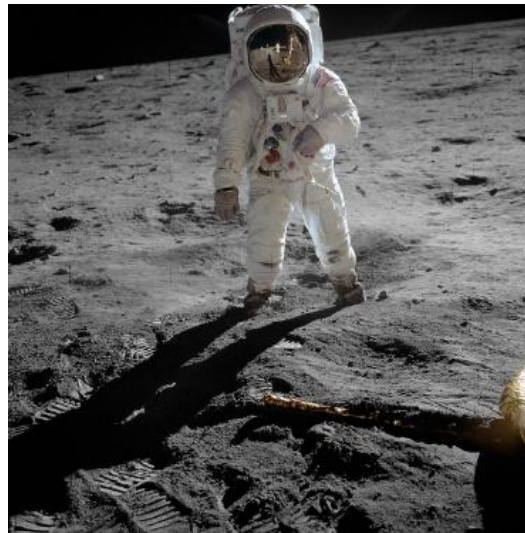


Fig. 8. NASA, Aldrin on the Moon, 1969.

In demeanour as well as imagery, the Apollo astronauts famously resisted public attempts to plumb their emotional depths. In a catalogue essay for *Promised the Moon*, space archaeologist Dr. Alice Gorman observes that “[w]e expected an articulateness of them, as if going to the Moon could unlock new powers of speech. Cocooned in their massive white helmets, they were like severed heads that prophesy; only the prophecies were often banal and leaden.”¹³ The astronauts represented a break from a more romantic history of aviation.¹⁴ As narrated by Tom Wolfe in *The Right Stuff*, they were mocked by earlier pilots as impotent “spam in a can” whose fates were managed by the technicians in mission control. In this regard they resemble Roland Barthes’ “jet man” who is “defined less by his courage than by his weight, his diet, and his habits (temperance, frugality, continence).”¹⁵

¹³ Dr Alice Gorman, “Everything We Know About the Moon Begins on Earth,” catalogue for *Promised the Moon*, ANU School of Art and Design Gallery, Canberra, June 20 through July 26, 2019, 7.

¹⁴ Apollo 11 crew-member Michael Collins noted that a pilot who inspired him in his youth “had flown with a waxed moustache and a pet lion named Gilmore; we flew with a rule book, a slide rule and a computer” in *Carrying the Fire: An Astronaut’s Journey* (1974) (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2001), 16.

¹⁵ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (1957), trans. Annette Lavers (New York: The Noonday Press, 1991), 72.

In *No Requiem for the Space Age – The Apollo Moon Landings and American Culture* historian Matthew D. Tribbe details the Dionysian counterculture’s dismay not only with Apollo’s politics but at how NASA could turn space exploration into something so *boring*—like an Andy Warhol movie.¹⁶ Apollo was promoted as a voyage of exploration but the discoveries it trumpeted were to be purely scientific. While NASA preened over its Moon rocks, journeys through inner space and the mind-warping aspects of space travel were left to others. David Bowie’s *Space Oddity*, released in the weeks before Apollo 11, was inspired not by the square Apollo missions but by Stanley Kubrick’s *2001: A Space Odyssey* released the previous year.¹⁷ Apollo’s pursuit of scientific knowledge, with its potential for broad inquiry into the stuff of the universe, was also limited in practice by NASA’s engineering culture in which demonstrations of *applied* knowledge frequently trumped dreamier research goals.¹⁸ In distilling these themes, Norman Mailer observed of the Apollo 11 astronauts as they prepared for their ‘Moonwalk’ that “[it] was as if on the largest stage ever created, before an audience of half the earth, a man of modest appearance would walk to the centre, smile tentatively at the footlights, and read a page from a data card.”¹⁹

Trends towards subjectivity

The intervening years have seen a trend towards more subjective and affective ways of relating to each other and the world. Apollo’s silent generation was followed by the baby boomers with their injunctions to talk about emotions and “let it all hang out” while social imperatives to fit in have been replaced by a desire to stand out. NASA has changed its approach to mission photography, including more unguarded and relatable photographs of crews in its public relations materials while its astronauts no longer appear stumped by questions about their emotional responses to their missions. It also now involves amateur communities in selecting and adapting raw space-probe imagery based on aesthetic considerations for publication on its social media sites.²⁰ Imaging practices have contributed

¹⁶ Matthew D. Tribbe, *No Requiem for the Space Age – The Apollo Moon Landings and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

¹⁷ Stephen Dalton, “David Bowie, Film Fan,” *BFI*, January 5, 2022, accessed April 24, 2022, <https://www.bfi.org.uk/features/david-bowie-film-fan>.

¹⁸ Matthew H. Hersh has also detailed how later Apollo-era astronauts chosen for their scientific qualifications failed to find traction within a culture moulded by test-pilots in Matthew H. Hersh, *Inventing the American Astronaut* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), particularly Chapter 3.

¹⁹ Norman Mailer, *Of a Fire on the Moon* (1970) (New York: Random House, 2014), 377.

²⁰ Gaia Tedone, “Space Probe Photography: Cassini’s Human and Non-Human Constellations,” conversation with Bill Dunford, *Post-Photography* 10 (May 2021): 104–111.

to and reflected this shift. The ubiquity of photography invites us to ‘bespokify’ iconic places and experiences previously understood in terms of authoritative images such as Apollo’s.²¹ Selfie-culture too encourages us to view the world as background scenery enlivened purely by our presence.

There has also been a shift from history, with its connotations of objectivity, to memory, as an openly subjective arena, as the lens through which the past is mediated. This is in part an acceptance that history is not singular and that the past is constantly understood anew in the context of the present. It also reflects an emphasis on the past as trauma that cannot be *made sense of* or overcome by a set of agreed facts but must be dealt with in more emotive ways. This shift towards memory may encourage empathy across time and place and allow for more immediately productive engagement with the past. However it has also been suggested that at some point, it may leave us wallowing in an affect-addled past, unable to discern or explain historical cause-and-effect or imagine a collective future. These debates have, for example, featured strongly in discussions about the role of museums, once assumed to be keepers of public histories, but now viewed increasingly as possessing commemorative functions. According to historian Charles S. Maier for example, “[i]n the twilight of Enlightenment aspirations to collective institutions, we build museums to memory, our memory.”²² I will return to discuss my decision to commemorate Apollo in terms of collective memory, which was informed by these developments, in Chapter 2.

Visualising Apollo’s subjectivities

If affective modes have both benefits and risks when considered more broadly, they are central to commemoration which relies on a felt response to the past. I therefore determined that my creative works should present Apollo more affectively than the program’s documentary photographs, while noting this would also allow me to highlight the background cultural shifts described above. In gathering raw materials that could allow me to visualise Apollo’s subjective threads I initially sought to locate NASA photographs whose affect

²¹ This trend is one of several themes explored by American artist Penelope Umbrico in *Everyone’s Photos Any License* (2015–16) which features multiple near-identical images of the Moon culled from social media over which many photographers aggressively asserted their ownership.

²² Charles S Maier, “A Surfeit of Memory? Reflections on History, Melancholy and Denial,” *History and Memory*, 5, no. 2 (1993), 149, accessed February 14, 2022, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25618655>.

seemed excessive for a documentary archive. My search for these images involved trawling of online archives, purchasing images from private collectors and field work at the US National Archives in 2019. I eventually discovered, however, that Apollo's more technical photographs could also be used to generate affect, including by contrasting them with other imagery or by harnessing the nostalgic patina in which they now seem inevitably coated as cultural artefacts. I also realised that they could be used to reign in the affect of images that were otherwise overbearingly sentimental. I therefore broadened my search to include a mix of affective and documentary images to use as raw materials.

I will note here the existence of an archive of affective Apollo images that I elected not to pursue. Starting with pre-Apollo programs, *Life Magazine* negotiated exclusive access to the 'personal' or 'unofficial' stories of the astronauts and their families. *Life's* lush, polished images feature astronauts sock-footed and dangling children by their ankles, lobbing balls for dogs and pruning their roses along with many photographs of astronaut wives. Unlike NASA images, which are not subject to copyright, these photographs are managed privately and creative licences were unavailable off the shelf. While I considered attempting to license these images early in my thesis, I concluded that they would contaminate the public or quasi-public materials I was otherwise working with to address ideas of public remembrance and the social heroic. I therefore resolved to wring affect from Apollo in ways that were truer to its nature and my research ends.



Fig. 9. NASA, Apollo 8 aboard *Yorktown*, 1968.



Fig. 10. NASA, Marilyn Lovell watching launch of Apollo 8 (detail), 1968.

Within the NASA archives, I located a small number of affective photographs of astronauts. These were generally images of crews taken immediately before or after their missions as they visibly transition between supra-human and human worlds such as the image at fig. 9, which I used in work for my 2018 solo show *Apollo 8* (see fig. 60). This photograph shows the Apollo 8 crew shortly after returning to Earth. They are welcomed onto the USS *Yorktown* which winched them out of the Pacific and are at ease among their military peers who will not ask them how it felt. The ship's crew stand stiffly or informally in the background, depending on their rank and right to intimate participation in the occasion. James Lovell and William Anders (right and centre) rest their hands on their hips, like victorious athletes on the podium, spent and complete. They are thin and bearded from their time off-Earth although Frank Borman, their impossibly Apollonian commander, has managed to shave. The ship's flags flutter in the background. Borman looks upwards, eyes shining, like a saint. The ship's commander steadies the microphone for him like a watchful father but Borman needs no help. He appears to still be floating.

I also located a very small number of NASA photographs of astronaut's wives and families. I have noted in the introduction to this Chapter that Camille Paglia has equated the Apollonian with the masculine and Apollo's was a masculine world. Its version of masculinity was interrogated in the lead-up to the fiftieth anniversary in the Neil Armstrong bio-pic *First Man*, which probes the toll Apollonian values took on Armstrong and his family, while highlighting the emotional labour performed by his wife, Janet. The *Life* archive includes photographs of wives watching launches with shaded eyes and tense mouths, with heads bowed and kneeling before NASA communication boxes, and celebrating splashdowns with friends and families. While the wives never appear in their own right, and while my finds from the NASA archive were much slimmer, I was concerned to include them in the record. Apart from acknowledging their significant unseen contributions to the program, I also used them as cyphers for Apollo's visceral and emotional depths. The image at fig. 10 above, for example, features prominently in my final works, *LOS*. It shows Marilyn Lovell, wife of Apollo 8 crew member James Lovell, watching the Apollo 8 launch while clutching her youngest child like a Madonna. She is beautiful and beautifully groomed for the occasion but in higher magnification a thread of saliva is visible between her glossy lips and her pupils are pinpricks of fear.

Given my focus on commemorating a local version of Apollo, which I will explain in Part 2 of this Chapter, I also sought to locate a range of images covering Honeysuckle Creek Tracking Station. My main source was Colin Mackellar's *A Tribute to Honeysuckle Creek* website which is considered the authoritative source on Honeysuckle's history and has been fundamental in bringing the station's role to public attention. This website includes many documentary photographs taken by tracker Hamish Lindsay as part of his official duties. It also features photographs and mementos contributed by other trackers and their families. Scanned from private albums and slide cases, these materials are infused with their own particular pathos as personal mementos. But if Apollo's documentary photographs had gathered nostalgic affect over time, this category of materials seemed to have undergone a reverse transition, now functioning not only as private memory objects but also as part of a sustained and determined effort to broaden the historical record.

Apart from the *A Tribute to Honeysuckle Creek* website, I searched for Honeysuckle materials through the National Archives of Australia, the National Library of Australia and the ACT Heritage Library. The National Archives yielded photographs of 'Migrants at Work', featuring newly arrived trackers in white shirts, thin ties and thick spectacles stunned and squinting in the Australian sun; Prime Minister John Gorton visiting Honeysuckle Creek on the day of the first Moon landing; and some previously unscanned images of tenderly posed trackers demonstrating their work for their camera. These images appear in my works for *Promised the Moon*. I was also offered direct access to materials held by the daughters of two Honeysuckle trackers. These included an exquisite set of slides by tracker and keen amateur photographer Martin Geasley taken at a luncheon for Honeysuckle Creek's opening showing personnel and wives relaxed and half off-duty which I used in my works for *Remember Kindly Honeysuckle Creek!*. While these slides were already available on *A Tribute to Honeysuckle Creek*, I re-scanned them to reveal additional details that had previously been cropped out of the images.²³

²³ These scans have now been added to the *A Tribute to Honeysuckle Creek* website.

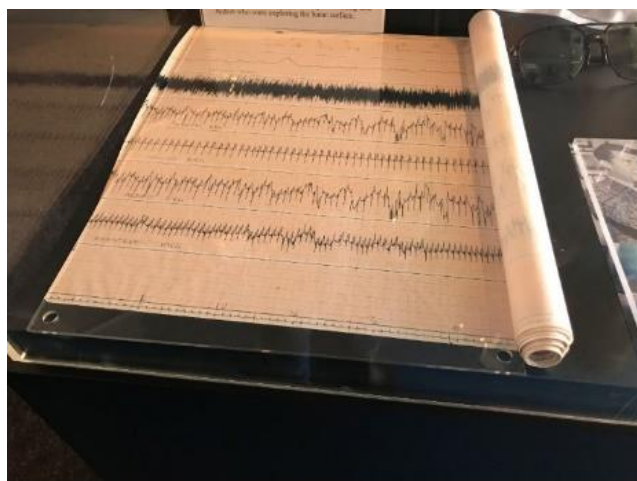


Fig. 11. Printout of Apollo 11 astronauts' EKGs at Canberra Deep Space Communication Complex Visitor Centre, 2019.

In searching for photographs to use as raw material I noticed other Apollo ephemera with affective potential. Fig. 11, for example, shows a print-out of the Apollo 11 astronauts' EKGs generated at Honeysuckle Creek and displayed at the Canberra Deep Space Communication Complex Visitor Centre at Tidbinbilla which previously served as Honeysuckle's wing station. The print-out struck me as a perfect admixture of the technological and the human. While the astronauts may not have articulated their emotional responses, their nervous systems were on full display to ground stations—at the end of a pen-nib connected by myriad ingenious links designed to check that these systems are not malfunctioning are three bodies viscerally registering an intense human experience. For all its artefactual dignity, this exhibit weirdly pre-figures emotion-sensing technologies that I will discuss in Part 3 of this Chapter. I was, however, unable to scan the print-out for use in my works as it was considered private bio-medical information. I had better luck with other artefacts. Apollo's participants may have expressed themselves in the technical language of their milieu but other responses occasionally forced their way through the gaps. The Apollo mission transcripts, for example, which I used in my works for *LOS*, make heavy reading for the layperson as the astronauts, themselves identified by abbreviations for their mission roles, report in dense strings of acronyms on the health of their machines and accuracy of their manoeuvres. But there are also moments of delight, awe and profanity. And while the Honeysuckle trackers were also most comfortable talking about the technical aspects of their work, Honeysuckle's log book for Apollo 11 at fig. 12 below, maintained by Operations Supervisor John Saxon, shows their enthusiasm bursting through the acronyms: "TV ON

CDR (Commander, i.e., Armstrong) on Moon!!!!²⁴ Extracts from the log book appear in my works for *Promised the Moon* where their date stamps and acronyms balance out their own affect while also helping to contain the Dionysian subjectivities that I was otherwise seeking to draw out in commemorating my Apollonian subject.

23255289

DATE 21 JUL (GMT) LOG KEEPER SAXON
 725
 MISSION Lunar Surface & CSM vers 17 Apr 22

993
 033924
 030324
 36

GMT	EVENT
	CSM 1/0 17 (cont)
0143	Nascom relay verified.
0146	CSM FM dump -96 from 0143 13 THRU. 15° ELEV prime 014905.
0150	FM off
0152	TV off test signals ON.
0154	Go for cabin depress.
0201	CSM LOS wing
0202	" AOS ") to LBR & B/U voice. watch pseudo nascom
021127	HS TD 00222 0904 2105
021906	1st Sun MCC.
0221	0.15 Deg offset in A
0223	-140 CSM droppings
022330	CSM LOS wing
	-0.25 X -0.5 Y
0228	CSM AOS HGA
0244	-100 FM on LM. EVA EKG & worse on LBR.
0251	CDR on LM porch.
025400	TV ON
025626	CDR on Moon !!! Processing HSK & GDS TV alternately.
0306	Starts up using their TV & PAM -90dbm
0325	Video recorder VR 1100 red cannot ETO & K
	40 18.
0340	AOS start
034252	CSM FM ONCMD.
034440	FM carrier.
034525	Dump mod 32:1
0346	2106 LM H/S & 0023
03475	Los & FM &
0349	Nixon uplinking

LM
 Surface
 PLSS
 1
 9 8
 80 50
 12

JPL 0307 DEC 60

Fig. 12. Extract from Honeysuckle Creek station log, 1969.

²⁴ Note also the 'Nixon uplinking' at the very bottom. While the logs are published on Colin Mackellar's site, I re-scanned the originals from John Saxon's collection, maintained by his daughter Penny Neuendorf.

1.2. Universalism-localism



Fig. 13. NASA, Apollo 11 mission patch, 1969.

Apollo and universalism

Apollo's various histories include its function as a work of cultural diplomacy directed to entrenching Cold War Western/American hegemony and its success in this regard contributes significantly to making it such a vexed subject for commemoration.²⁵ Joseph Nye has theorised cultural diplomacy as a form of soft power that involves influencing other nations' governments through their citizens, describing it as "the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments" and as arising from "the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals and policies."²⁶ Historian Teasel Muir-Harmony has addressed the universalist culture and ideals that Apollo was made to manifest in *Project Apollo, Cold War Diplomacy and the American Framing of Global Interdependence*. She describes the extraordinary and meticulous efforts by US government agencies to deploy Apollo and its precursor programs not merely to demonstrate American technological superiority but to "[foster] an imagined global community, built on a technocratic rationalist vision of progress."²⁷ Muir-Harmony observes of Apollo 11 in particular that:

²⁵ For a summary of other Apollo histories see Roger D. Launius, "Interpreting the Moon Landings: Project Apollo and the Historians," *History and Technology* 22, no. 3 (2006), accessed September 20, 2021, doi: 10.1080/07341510600803143.

²⁶ Joseph S. Nye, Jr, "Soft Power and American Foreign Policy," *Political Science Quarterly* 119, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 256, accessed February 14, 2022, [Soft Power and American Foreign Policy on JSTOR](#).

²⁷ Teasel Muir-Harmony, "Project Apollo, Cold War Diplomacy and the American Framing of Global Interdependence" (PhD diss., Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2014), 32, accessed February 14, 2022, <https://dspace.mit.edu/handle/1721.1/93814>.

*“In order to make the flight an effective instrument of US foreign relations, government officials downplayed nationalistic discourse, stressed that the mission was “for all mankind”, established an infrastructure to encourage global “participation” in the flight, and employed a rhetorical framework that linked unity and progress with American science, technology and global leadership”.*²⁸

Consistent with this effort, Apollo narratives, artefacts and imagery were disseminated internationally through a public relations machine that provided briefings for journalists, space capsules and Moon rocks for temporary exhibit and photographs on request to children throughout the world.²⁹

These artefacts and imagery, along with accompanying gestures, invoked global common purpose in conscious and subconscious ways. NASA’s Committee on Symbolic Activities oversaw the more deliberate gestures including the plaque left on the Moon by Apollo 11 with its famous declaration that “...[w]e came in peace for all mankind”. Apollo 11’s mission patch at fig. 13 above was closely vetted to ensure that the eagle holding an olive branch appeared sufficiently peace-loving.³⁰ The mission carried miniature flags of all nations and left a disk on the Moon containing messages from world leaders.³¹ The Apollo 11 crew completed a goodwill world tour shortly after their mission, greeting world leaders and cavalcading through streets thronged with cheering crowds although Muir-Harmony notes concerns to ensure they were presented as ‘science ambassadors’.³²

²⁸ Ibid, 142.

²⁹ E.g., NASA’s Chief Historian Bill Barry recalled writing to NASA “about once a month” receiving “a package of stuff in return, pictures and lithographs of spacecraft and astronauts” in Jim Daley, “Watching *Apollo 11* with NASA Historian Bill Barry,” *Scientific American*, May 2, 2019, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/watching-apollo-11-with-nasa-historian-bill-barry/>. Closer to home, Canberra artist Martyn Jolly “wrote away to NASA and got back cutaway diagrams of Saturn V rockets and portraits of the astronauts with their crew cuts and their helmets tucked under their arms” noting he “gazed into their handsome faces for hours” in Martyn Jolly, “Moon Map” submission to *Promised the Moon* website, accessed February 14, 2022, <https://promisedthemoon.net.au/moon-stories/moon-map/>.

³⁰ Michael Collins, *Carrying the Fire: An Astronaut’s Journey* (1974) (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2001), 332–334. Apollo crews had surprisingly wide leeway in designing their own patches. However, Collins notes that while designs were normally rubber-stamped, Apollo 11’s patch attracted more official interest than usual given the stakes.

³¹ NASA, “Apollo 11 Goodwill Messages,” press release dated July 13, 1969, accessed February 14, 2021, https://www.nasa.gov/centers/glenn/about/history/apollo_press_release.html.

³² Teasel Muir-Harmony, “Project Apollo, Cold War Diplomacy and the American Framing of Global Interdependence” (PhD diss., Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2014), 121, accessed February 14, 2022, <https://dspace.mit.edu/handle/1721.1/93814>.

Apollo's photographs pursued official goals more subtly. Jennifer Levasseur notes that while the photographs were not originally intended to form part of NASA's public outreach project, their potential was discovered "when the images became available to non-technical eyes."³³ Their odourless documentary *neutrality* would presumably have allowed for their seamless integration into official agendas.

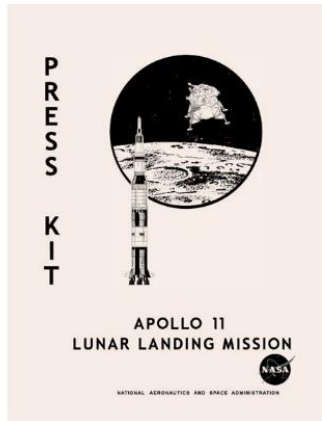


Fig. 14. NASA, Apollo 11 press kit, 1969.

Fig. 15. Unknown photographer, Apollo 11 astronauts visit Sydney, 1969.



Fig. 16. NASA. *Earthrise*, 1968.



Fig. 17. Ed Von Renouard, monitor at Honeysuckle Creek during Apollo 11, 1969.

While originally taken for other purposes, Apollo's photographs of Earth from space fitted neatly into universalist paradigms. The first and probably most famous of these, *Earthrise*, was taken by Apollo 8 in December 1968 (fig. 16 above).³⁴ The most familiar

³³ Jennifer Levasseur, "Pictures by Proxy: Images of Exploration and the First Decade of Astronaut Photography at NASA" (PhD diss., George Mason University, 2014), 15, accessed February 14, 2022, https://mars.gmu.edu/bitstream/handle/1920/9158/Levasseur_gmu_0883E_10739.pdf;sequence=1.

³⁴ The other candidate for 'most famous' is *Blue Marble* taken by the final Apollo mission, Apollo 17.

telling of this image asserts that from the distance of space, national rivalries appeared petty and Earth's fragility loomed large. On leaving office, President Lydon B. Johnson sent copies to world leaders with a letter observing that:

*“As the enclosed photographs of our recent lunar flight suggest, this shrinking globe is rapidly becoming a single neighbourhood....Countries are learning that we all must work together for common ends if any are to survive and prosper in the new world of interdependence which science and technology are helping to create.”*³⁵

More poetically but with the same underlying refrain, Apollo 8 commander Frank Borman quoted poet Archibald MacLeish in addressing Congress after his flight:

*“To see the earth as it truly is, small and blue and beautiful in that eternal silence where it floats, is to see ourselves as riders on the earth together, brothers on that bright loveliness in the eternal cold – brothers who know now we are truly brothers.”*³⁶

Earthrise is also commonly credited with galvanising the nascent environmental movement with its notions of a shared fate and mutual responsibility for the Earth.

The television broadcast of the first Moon landing depicted Apollo's crowning moment while simultaneously revealing a world newly connected by technology. Muir-Harmony relates how US agencies ensured worldwide access to “the first global broadcast in history” through positioning of satellites and providing equipment for public screenings throughout the world. The Apollo 11 broadcast is estimated to have been watched by six-hundred million people worldwide. In a phone call to the astronauts during the broadcast, President Nixon entertained the possibility that “[f]or one priceless moment in the whole history of man all the people on this earth are truly one—one in their pride in what you

³⁵ In Teasel Muir-Harmony, “Project Apollo, Cold War Diplomacy and the American Framing of Global Interdependence” (PhD diss., Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2014), 145, accessed February 14, 2022, <https://dspace.mit.edu/handle/1721.1/93814>.

³⁶ Archibald MacLeish, “Riders on Earth Together, Brothers in Eternal Cold,” *New York Times*, December 25, 1968, accessed February 14, 2022, <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/library/national/science/nasa/122568sci-nasa-macleish.html?scp=1&sq=%252522seen%252520it%252520not%252520as%252520continents%252520or%252520oceans%252522&st=cse>.

have done and one in our prayers that you will return safely to earth.”³⁷ While I have noted my focus on Apollo’s photographs for their more enduring role in Apollo remembrance, it has been suggested that “the entire effort to go to the moon should be rightly understood as an elaborate apparatus for the production of a single television image.”³⁸ The message in the medium was a powerful one, framing the possibility of global connectedness, common feeling and mutual participation in terms of simultaneous attendance to electronic screens.

The television images transmitted by Apollo 11 mirrored the liminal qualities not only of the occasion but of the technologies that I will discuss further in Part 3 of this Chapter as contributing to the unmaking of the Apollonian. The images were ghostly, broken and see-through as in fig. 17 above. Norman Mailer, viewing the feed from mission control in Houston, described them as barely decipherable but as nonetheless generating “a ripple of extraordinary awareness” among a cynical press corps.³⁹ Around the globe, Australian schoolchildren squirmed in front of classroom television sets wheeled out in the knowledge that something vitally significant was happening while struggling to make sense of the pictures:

*“...we were all herded into the class room to watch events unfold. The TV, having prime position, provided nothing more than a grainy image. Through various shades of black and white, similar to a snow storm, we watched history in the making.”*⁴⁰

But the moment could have been even harder to decipher. As flagged in my introduction, Honeysuckle Creek’s feed of Armstrong’s first steps on the Moon was the version selected for transmission to the world. The broadcast of the first Moonwalk had begun with feed from Goldstone Tracking Station in California. However, as Armstrong balanced on the ladder leading from his landing vehicle to the lunar surface, it became apparent that Goldstone’s technicians had neglected to flip a switch to re-orient the images, with the result that they

³⁷ Apollo 11 Technical Air-to-Ground transcript, 392, accessed February 14, 2022, https://www.hq.nasa.gov/alsj/a11/AS11_TEC.PDF.

³⁸ Nicholas de Monchaux, *Spacesuit – Fashioning Apollo* (Cambridge Massachusetts & London: MIT Press, 2011), 147.

³⁹ Norman Mailer, *Of a Fire on the Moon* (1970) (New York: Random House, 2014), 122: “It was as if the audience felt an unexpected empathy with the sepulchral, as if a man were descending step by step, heartbeat by diminishing heartbeat into the reign of the kingdom of death itself and he was reporting, inch by inch, what his senses disclosed. Everybody listened in profound silence.”

⁴⁰ Country Kid, “Moon Walk in the Classroom,” submission to *Promised the Moon* website, accessed February 20, 2022 <https://promisedthemoon.net.au/moon-stories/moon-map/>.

appeared on screens across the globe upside down. Even once reversed, Goldstone's images were too high-contrast to be readable. But Honeysuckle's video-technician Ed Von Renouard had made no such mistakes and NASA switched to Honeysuckle's feed shortly before Armstrong's first step. This feed was used for the first eight minutes of the Moonwalk before NASA switched to images from Parkes Radio Telescope.⁴¹

Trends towards localism

The West's assumption that its culture and ideals are universal goods representing an end point of history has of course been roundly discredited. What is new, however, is its own apparent loss of interest in disseminating itself at an ideological level. The US and other Western nations have more recently withdrawn into themselves and there is a greater ambivalence about the internationalism that they once espoused. According to RAND Corporation's *Measuring the Health of the Liberal International Order*, published at the time I began this thesis:

*"A growing, global populist rebellion against economic and political integration and the spread of a homogenizing cosmopolitan ethic is beginning to have very dangerous implications for the [post WWII liberal international] order."*⁴²

Relevantly to my interest in Apollo's social heroic, it has been argued that this "rebellion" may speak to a craving for society that the liberal international order in its present 'neo-liberal' guise can no longer presume to deliver. Economist Wolfgang Streeck, for example, suggests that liberal States have been nobbled as collective decision-making entities by global capital which has slipped their control, observing that "[n]ow States [are] located in markets, rather than markets in States [his italics]."⁴³ Space travel is now fronted by billionaires who

⁴¹ See e.g., Andrew Tink, *Honeysuckle Creek: The Story of Tom Reid, a Little Dish and Neil Armstrong's First Step* (Sydney: Newsouth, 2018), 265–281; "The Apollo 11 Television Broadcast" on Colin Mackellar's *A Tribute to Honeysuckle Creek* website, accessed February 2022, https://www.honeysucklecreek.net/Apollo_11/.

⁴² RAND Corporation, *Measuring the Health of the Liberal International Order* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2017), xvi, accessed February 20, 2022, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR1900/RR1994/RAND_RR1994.pdf.

⁴³ Wolfgang Streeck, *How Will Capitalism End? – Essays on a Failing System* (London & New York: Verso, 2016), 22. Streeck argues (at 21–22) that in post-war economies, capital "had to content itself with low profits and confinement in a strictly delimited economic sphere, a condition it accepted in exchange for economic stability and social peace as long as it saw no way out of the national containers within which its hunting licence had been conditionally renewed after 1945. With the end of post-war growth, however, the profit-dependent

have led and profited from this shift. Jeff Bezos, for example, recently applied the proceeds of *Amazon's* controversial labour practices to fly into Low Earth Orbit and is now offering the same experience to paying passengers. Back on Earth, citizens have been reimagined as atomised gig-economy contractors or global consumers and thrown back on their personal resources. For those for whom a trip to space is beyond reach, Streeck foreshadows “a society devoid of reasonably coherent and minimally stable institutions capable of normalizing the lives of its members and protecting them from accidents and monstrosities of all sorts.”⁴⁴

RAND's rebellion may also represent nostalgia for broader ontological security. In its vertiginous depiction of the Earth as a random sphere spinning through a gaping void, *Earthrise* could readily incite nostalgia for a feeling of *groundedness*. This possibility is amplified by the original orientation or ‘pilots-eye-view’, as shown in fig. 16 above, where there is no longer even a stable up or down.⁴⁵ Perhaps only an astronaut can viscerally experience the whole-Earth as home in the way that Frank Borman describes:

*“I happened to glance out one of the still-clear windows just at the moment the earth appeared over the lunar horizon. It was the most beautiful, heart-catching sight of my life, one that sent a torrent of nostalgia, of sheer homesickness, surging through me. It was the only thing in space that had any color to it.”*⁴⁶

For the rest of us, ‘home’ has traditionally been framed by more immediate horizons. Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci explored connected themes in *If the Sun Dies* (1967), in which she interweaves reportage of Apollo with accounts of her family's experiences as partisans during World War II (WWII) and imagined letters home to her father. In doing so she contrasts the old world of Europe, with its soil-based passions, histories and sufferings with Apollo's clinical drive towards a space-faring future where humans would evolve into “lichen, insects,

classes began to look for an alternative to serving as an infrastructure of social democracy, and found it in denationalization, also known as ‘globalization’.”

⁴⁴ Ibid, 36.

⁴⁵ Barry Vacker makes the point in criticising NASA's re-orientation of the image to “soothe humanity's existential ego” in Barry Vacker, “NASA's Icon of Human Narcissism: The 50th Anniversary of Earthrise and What it Means for the 21st Century,” *Medium*, July 25, 2018, accessed February 20, 2022, <https://medium.com/explosion-of-awareness/nasas-icon-of-human-narcissism-the-50th-anniversary-of-earthrise-and-what-it-means-for-the-21st-155082710212>.

⁴⁶ Frank Borman and Robert J. Serling, *Countdown* (New York: Silver Arrow Books, 1988), 212.

balls of fire”.⁴⁷ While she ultimately found an apocalyptic beauty in Apollo’s will to shrug off the Earth, she was also grieved and terrified by it. While my early takes on Apollo also moved between these poles, my thinking about the program, and my efforts to commemorate it, were ultimately concerned with re-earthing its expansionary visions within local soil.

Visualising Apollo’s local

Of its varied sins and omissions, Apollo’s universalist overreach was perhaps the hardest to overcome in my attempts to remember the program sympathetically. I found my solution, however, in the site of the former Honeysuckle Creek Tracking Station located a short drive from my hometown of Canberra. Apart from the site’s physical mixture of Dionysian-local and Apollonian-universal elements, the station’s forgotten history offered me a degree of commemorative latitude that I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 3. The ruined site itself also clearly evoked the return of Apollo’s hegemony to the clay. Alice Gorman has argued that the “cultural landscape of space” has human-made elements, organic elements, and “intangible elements, such as the ideologies, cultural representations and associations of the people who participated in or were impacted by space exploration.”⁴⁸ The remains of the human-made station are now embedded in the crisp organic stillness of Namadgi National Park, the footings of the antenna that captured the images of Armstrong’s first steps standing metres away from the snow gums that have shielded and distilled the site’s energies.⁴⁹ Apollo’s high universalism and internationalism intersects, too, with ancient earth still sacred to the Ngunawal people. The station was built during a period when Canberra was rapidly expanding into the ‘worthy capital’ of Prime Minister Robert Menzies’ imaginings and many of the trackers joined this expansion as British migrants, mixing legacies of colonial mastery with Australian life and American work practices. Post-Apollo, the station’s workload wound

⁴⁷ Oriana Fallaci, *If the Sun Dies – A Woman’s Journey Among the Men Preparing to Go to Distant Planets*, translated by Pamela Swinglehurst (London: Collins, 1967), 26.

⁴⁸ Alice Gorman, “The Cultural Landscape of Interplanetary Space,” *Journal of Social Archaeology* 5, no. 1 (2005), 85-107, 103. doi: 10.1177/1469605305050148.

⁴⁹ Background information on the site prepared by the ACT Heritage Council includes the following description: “A large concrete footing remains from the former two storey operations building, above which are two terraces. The top terrace is the site of the former dish marked by a circular footing and road. Below the operations building are the remains of various support structures. Stone retaining walls and garden edging remain in situ in several areas. The original road network and building foundations remaining at the facility indicate its former layout, enabling ongoing interpretation.” ACT Heritage Council, “Background Information - Honeysuckle Creek Tracking Station (Block 120 Tennent),” accessed February 20, 2022, https://www.environment.act.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0010/779626/Background-Information-Honeysuckle-Creek-Tracking-Station.pdf.

down and it was closed in 1981. Honeysuckle's official photographer, Hamish Lindsay, recalls visiting the main building a few years later:

*“It had been attacked by vandals—smashed panels, broken bricks, and litter lay around the floors. I walked down the corridor, and remembered the many times I had walked down it carrying a Styrofoam cup of coffee to the sound of voices on the Moon’s surface....I stood there for a while—looking at the slight glow of daylight from the one window looking out on the old antenna pad, throwing just enough sombre, grey light over the floor, walls and ceiling to make out the rooms.”*⁵⁰

The buildings were demolished in 1992 and the site was given interim heritage status in 2016.

This thesis originally proposed to consider Honeysuckle Creek as one of several Apollo-related subjects for remembrance but I became engrossed early in my research with the Honeysuckle site's cultural and visual richness. I began photographing it at regular intervals, initially as a form of respectful, observational practice that connected me to my subject. On weekdays I generally had the site to myself with only occasional interruptions from motorists who would make a brief, dutiful tour of the interpretative signage before heading back to Canberra. On weekends, the sounds of birds and rustling creatures was overlaid by the chatter of families camped a short way down the road. I chronicled how the site changed with the seasons. I took landscape images and I photographed the ground. I documented strange constructions made by children from chunks of crumbling concrete and burn-out marks that appeared one day on the antenna pad. My shutter-finger froze in winter and I was bitten by horse-flies in summer. While my visits produced an extensive collection of photographs, I also came to know something of the *feel* of the place.

I had not initially intended to use my own photographs in my photomontages. However, while I had located images of Honeysuckle personnel and infrastructure there were relatively few existing photographs of the site that could be used to ‘stage’ my creative works. I therefore began incorporating my own photographs of the site into my works while devising photographic ‘wish-lists’ for my next visit based on the results. Strangely perhaps, it

⁵⁰ Hamish Lindsay, “Epilogue” on A Tribute to Honeysuckle Creek Tracking Station website, accessed February 20, 2022, https://www.honeysucklecreek.net/last_days/hl_epilogue.html

took me some time to fully register that the site was a ruin. Apart from addressing Honeysuckle Creek’s forgotten history, my photographs therefore allowed me to speak to the crumbling away of Apollo’s grander narratives, thereby removing a significant obstacle to my commemorative goals.



Fig. 18. Honeysuckle Creek site, 2017–19.

1.3 Expertise-intuition



Fig. 19. NASA, Apollo 8 mission patch, 1968.

Apollo and expertise

If the Apollo program preferred objective over subjective modes of persuasion, it also designed its systems and conducted its official operations in ways that largely sought to entrench expert rather than intuitive knowledge. The recent loss of trust in expertise is a significant countercultural development that was considered by economist and sociologist William Davies in *Nervous States: How Feeling Took Over The World* (2018).⁵¹ Davies argues that modern Western politics separated thoughts from feelings to create a public

⁵¹ William Davies, *Nervous States: How Feeling Took Over the World* (2018) (London: Vintage, 2019).

sphere of potential consensus through which interminable wars could be replaced with a state of peace while seeking to identify the features of expert knowledge that led and flourished during this process. Among other things, Davies argues that expert knowledge is reflective, in being produced away from the heat of the moment; published, allowing it to be verified, contested, and built upon; and abstracted, in smoothing away the particulars of human experience. I will briefly consider how the Apollo program exemplified these imperatives before addressing how it also supplemented them with more intuitive types of knowledge.



Fig. 20. Master Steve Rapport, *March for Science*, 2017.

As documented and aided by its photographic archive, the Apollo program was built through a methodical and cool-headed accretion of knowledge. Preceded by the Mercury and Gemini programs as well as uncrewed probes, each mission stepped incrementally forward, doing everything possible to avoid decision-making on the fly. Redundancies were built into every system. Astronauts trained for all conceivable emergencies in simulators while endless, serried rows of technicians compiled thick manuals to which they could instantly resort if something went wrong. If the astronauts' determination to play down the dangers of their missions seemed like emotional muteness, in most cases they were offering an expert assessment of the odds.

One of Apollo's key selling-points as a work of cultural diplomacy was its transparency which was contrasted with the secrecy of the Soviet space program. Again, photographs and television were key. While the inner workings of its machines remained classified, Apollo was enacted in full public view—its publication was its *purpose* but also its proof. Its missions were live broadcast, risking failure in front of a global audience. It was

verifiable by anyone who cared to *look*. A standard retort to Moon landing deniers is to note that the Soviet Union, with all its skin in the game, never questioned Apollo's achievements, although even this has changed recently.⁵²

Apollo's photographs of Earth from space may have served to highlight human geopolitical interconnectedness but they also offer us an abstraction, and even negation, of lived and earthed human experience. Like so many of Apollo's photographs, they have no *people* in them. Writing in the run-up to Apollo, Hannah Arendt suggested that from an astronaut's viewpoint of "an observer freely poised in space", our activities "will indeed appear to ourselves as no more than 'overt behaviour,' which we can study with the same methods we use to study the behaviour of rats."⁵³ The photographs may also invite us to understand the Earth in similarly abstract terms, as only one possible home among many from which we might choose rather than, as Arendt describes it, "the very quintessence of the human condition" and "the mother of all living creatures under the sky."⁵⁴

Trends towards intuition

If the 1960s counterculture considered Apollo boring it did not claim that it was not true. This second claim, however, is linked to the new counterculture that asserts the primacy of pathos not only over logic, but over expert knowledge as a persuasive mode. I have noted certain trends since Apollo's time that balanced objective with subjective modes of persuasion without completely upsetting the Enlightenment apple cart. However, the recent combination of a now well-established licence to subjectivise with current cultural-political conditions, including new technologies, is resulting in new epistemic challenges. Davies argues that we now privilege the acquisition of quasi-military *intelligence* over expert knowledge. This intelligence values quick decisions based on gut responses over reflection; secrecy over accountability; and individual, frequently painful bodily circumstances over statistical data demonstrating that everything is fine. Davies suggests that in the current

⁵² See Rick Noack, "Russia Calls Investigation Into Whether US Moon Landings Happened," *The Independent*, June 18, 2015, accessed March 10, 2022, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/russia-calls-investigation-into-whether-us-moon-landings-happened-10327714.html>.

⁵³ Hannah Arendt, "The Conquest of Space and the Stature of Man," (1963) *The New Atlantis*, 18 (Fall 2007), 43–55, 54, accessed March 10, 2022, <https://www.thenewatlantis.com/publications/the-conquest-of-space-and-the-stature-of-man>.

⁵⁴ In Robert Poole, *Earthrise – How Man First Saw the Earth* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2008), 141. Poole also precedes this quote with a summary of Arendt's *The Conquest of Space*.

setting, narratives of peace and progress are replaced by the language of war while among those on whom the Enlightenment peace has soured, there is yearning for heroism and a meaningful death. While Davies identifies a web of causes, he focusses on technologies that seek to read not our minds but our nervous systems.

In a similar vein to Davies, art historian Barbara Stafford argues that the digital world increasingly serves the needs of “[n]eurological marketing services” built on “emotion-sensing technologies addressing the thalamus, amygdala, hippocampus, and more generally the primal limbic system.”⁵⁵ Mark Zuckerberg’s injunction to “move fast and break things” ceased to sound so hip when it became apparent that the damage potentially extended to public debate and the democracy that ostensibly depends on it. Enlisted by Apollo to make us smarter, the machines are turning us into emotional wrecks, hunting for whatever set of facts or alt-facts trigger the strongest emotional response, content to just *feel* that climate change isn’t happening, the Earth is flat, or the Moon landings were faked. A similar trend has arisen at the edges of identity politics where it is deemed impossible to seek understanding with others unless one shares their particular embodied experience, and where people are encouraged to speak *their* truths.⁵⁶

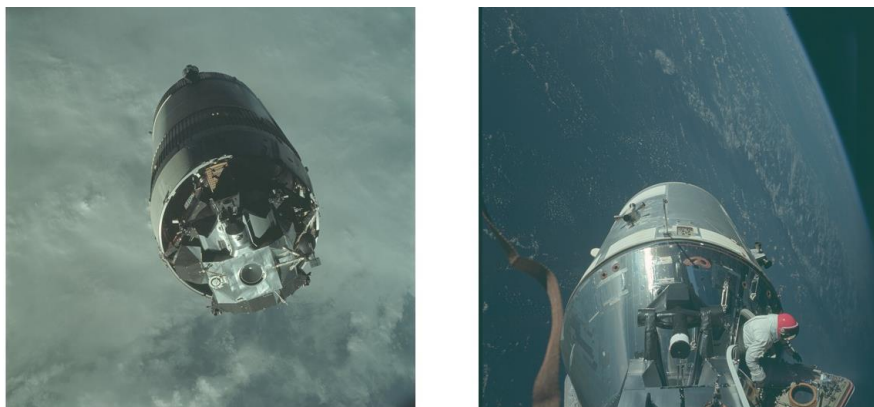


Fig. 21. NASA, Apollo 9 Earth orbit and extra vehicular activity, 1969.

⁵⁵ Barbara Stafford, “Seizing Attention: Devices and Desires,” *Art History: Journal of the Association of Art Historians*, 39 no. 2 (2016), 422–427, 423. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8365.12245>.

⁵⁶ Wolfgang Streeck acerbically highlights the links between traditionally left-wing imperatives and anti-factual thinking in observing that, “[a]fter decades of constructivist hegemony in the faculties of literature [there has been] a sudden rediscovery of objective truth for the purposes of insulting non-academic fellow-citizens” in “The Return of the Repressed,” *New Left Review*, 104 (March/April 2017), footnote 11, accessed March 13, 2022, <https://newleftreview.org/issues/ii104/articles/wolfgang-streeck-the-return-of-the-repressed>.

Amplified by the systems into which they are fed, manipulated and machine-made imagery inflame this thinking. The theory that the Moon landings were staged in an earthly studio may once have seemed outlandish. However, with the proliferation of manipulated images and deep fakes that populate digital life, contemporary viewers could be entirely forgiven for assuming original NASA imagery is staged, photoshopped, or computer generated; it really *does* look too good to be true. The problem is compounded when original imagery is interspersed in Apollo documentaries with computer generated imagery without the different sources being noted, further suggesting that it just doesn't *matter* anymore. In considering a more recent conspiracy theory, Ana Peraica argues that belief in a flat Earth may be partly explained by post-digital photography's machine-composited, non-perspectival 'total' images, which present the Earth "with a flat surface and immediately present."⁵⁷ More generally, it has been noted that conspiracy theories are now less likely to originate in earnest attempts to probe the official record than to be generated purely as entertainment.⁵⁸

Historian Benjamin Lazier has also noted the "insidious" pre-Copernican potential of *Earthrise* and its successor images in showing the Earth as unique and uniquely beautiful.⁵⁹ The only canonical artist to address Apollo in depth in its day, Robert Rauschenberg, illustrates the point in collage text from his *Stoned Moon* book:

*"And finally, who, looking at our cloud-layered Earth—blue green and rich in the distance—rising over the barren horizon of the moon, did not weep at its fragile beauty? Who did not choose it again from among the knowns as home? Who did not cherish it more in the moment that it was a size that could be held in the hand? Who would crush it? The one true agate in the bag—super marble or our youth."*⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Ana Peraica, "The Age of Total Images: Disappearance of a Subjective Viewpoint in Post-Digital Photography," *Theory on Demand*, 34 (2019), accessed February 21, 2022, <https://networkcultures.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/TheAgeOfTotalImagesPDF.pdf>.

⁵⁸ E.g., Amanda Hess, 'They Kinda Want to Believe Apollo 11 Was Maybe a Hoax,' *New York Times*, July 1, 2019, accessed March 13, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/01/science/moon-landing-hoax-conspiracy-theory.html>:

"Some segment of the population has always been drawn to outlandish tales of government plots. But the internet has achieved something even more cynical. It has made belief irrelevant."

⁵⁹ Benjamin Lazier, "Earthrise; or, The Globalization of the World Picture?," *The American Historical Review*, 116, no. 3 (June 2011), 602–630, accessed April 15, 2022, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23308216>. Lazier is here considering the work of philosopher, Hans Blumenberg, who, according to Lazier, hoped "to vindicate the modern age against the critiques levied by those (such as Heidegger) who had discovered in modern technology a form of reason run amok."

⁶⁰ Catalogue for *Robert Rauschenberg: Stoned Moon*, Craig F. Starr Gallery, New York, May 30 through July 26, 2019, 45.

As the only beautiful object in the middle of a gaping void, historian Robert Poole has observed that *Earthrise* “gave visual force to the idea that the home planet was after all the most important thing in creation.”⁶¹ While not widely circulated, it is worth noting that the first photographs of Earth from space were taken not by Apollo astronauts but by uncrewed probes. These black and white images are grainy and cold, as if snapped by a malevolent alien intelligence. In presenting a series of these images in *Live from the Moon*, staged shortly before the Apollo 11 fiftieth anniversary, Geoffrey Batchen also notes that they were transmitted by bursts of radio signal and were in effect digital images.⁶² The fact that the first full-colour and *beautiful* photograph of Earth was taken by a human and captured on alchemical film may also have re-invigorated understandings of humanity’s central place in the Universe just as Apollo’s photographs were simultaneously pulling these notions apart.

Visualising Apollo’s intuitive

I had initially considered that Apollo could at least be safely commemorated as a symbolic palliative to alt-facts and related extreme subjectivities that limit collectivity to the tribal. As noted in the overview to this Chapter, however, the early shock of these subjectivities faded during the course of this thesis. Over the same period, I also came increasingly to question the heartlessness and hubris of Apollonian expertise. I therefore searched for ways to express the Apollo program’s more intuitive and metaphysical facets, investigating how it invoked felt, bodily knowledge and experience along with its openness to ideas of the sacred. Apollo was intended to put a *man* on the Moon and return him safely to Earth. Given remote exploration via machine could have yielded comparable data at a fraction of the cost, this sits awkwardly with the idea of Apollo as science experiment.⁶³ While Hannah Arendt suggested that space is conquered only when humans can go “where up to now only human imagination and its power of abstraction” have been, she described the astronauts in their technological bubbles as weakly embodied observers in tow and in thrall to

⁶¹ Robert Poole, “Earthrise,” *Cultural Centre of European Space Technologies/Medium*, 24 December 2018, accessed April 15, 2022, <https://medium.com/@ksevt/earthrise-50cd023aa879>.

⁶² Catalogue for *Live from the Moon – An Exhibition of Photographs Curated by Geoffrey Batchen*, Suite Gallery, Wellington, April 30 through May 25, 2019.

⁶³ See e.g., Roger D. Launius, “Interpreting the Moon Landings: Project Apollo and the Historians,” *History and Technology* 22, no. 3 (2006), 225–255, 241, accessed September 20, 2021, doi: 10.1080/07341510600803143: “[for many scientists] the issue was one of where best to expend the resources appropriated for spaceflight to gain the greatest scientific return. For them, building robotic explorers clearly served that end the best.”

these faculties.⁶⁴ In a related vein, Norman Mailer portrayed the astronauts' bodies as sites of scientific experimentation which he describes a process of violation.⁶⁵ In *Spacesuit: Fashioning Apollo*, however, Nicholas De Monchaux takes a different approach in presenting astronaut bodies as sites of resistance to technology, systems engineering and dreams of engineering humans into cyborgs fit for life in space. The central thread of this work details how early prototypes of Apollo spacesuits were defeated by the quirks of the bodies they were required to house, with 'hard' suits whose components could be readily diagrammed, itemised, and re-produced eventually losing out to bespoke 'soft' suits hand-crafted by expert seamstresses from a company best known for producing women's undergarments. Among further bodily rebellions, De Monchaux considers how the astronauts pushed back against Apollo's systems to carve out space for their piloting skills which were *both* expert and intuitive, noting, for example, that all the Apollo commanders took manual control of their vehicles at landing. He also notes instances of astronauts removing sensors attached to their bodies as they sought to deal with in-flight crises too intimate to be committed to the record.

The astronauts' presence also inevitably invoked the bodily heroic in their baiting of death. I have noted above how Apollo's expert knowledge was deployed to minimise risk. I have also noted how Apollo's official narratives downplayed ideas of heroism and romance, causing Norman Mailer to complain that "it was if the astronauts were there to demonstrate that heroism's previous relation to romance had been highly improper—it was technology and the absence of emotion which were the only fit mates for the brave."⁶⁶ In considering Apollo's vernacular presentation, Edward Salo argues that *Life* presented the astronauts as a new form of hero, moving away from warrior paradigms to a hard-working family man who could still dream of bold adventures.⁶⁷ But despite their domestication, training and expert assessment of the odds, they risked death every time they flew. In *The Right Stuff*, Tom Wolfe, for all his tongue-in-cheek, describes the pre-Apollo astronauts as the last of the "single-combat warriors" coolly risking their lives "in a cause that means something to

⁶⁴ Hannah Arendt, "The Conquest of Space and the Stature of Man," (1963) *The New Atlantis*, 18 (Fall 2007), 43–55, 50, accessed March 10, 2022, <https://www.thenewatlantis.com/publications/the-conquest-of-space-and-the-stature-of-man>.

⁶⁵ Norman Mailer, *Of a Fire on the Moon* (1969; 1970) (New York: Random House, 2014), 46: "They were virile men but they were prodded, probed, tapped into, poked, flexed, tested, subjected to a pharmacology of stimulants, depressants, diuretics, laxatives, retentives, tranquilizers, motion sickness pills, antibiotics, vitamins, and food which was designed to control the character of their faeces. They were virile, but they were done to..."

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 106.

⁶⁷ Edward Salo, thesis, "Some People Call Me a Space Cowboy: The Image of the Astronaut in Life Magazine, 1959–1972," accessed February 21, 2022, <https://astate.academia.edu/EdSalo/Thesis>.

thousands, to a people, a nation, to humanity, to God.”⁶⁸ Norman Mailer, however, invoked deeper ideas of Thanatos or *ease* with death, divorced of any political context, in speculating that to land on the Moon the astronauts “would need not nerves of steel but some sense of intimacy with death, conceivably some sense of death as a pale ancestor one had met before.”⁶⁹

To precipitate the astronauts’ bodies from Apollo’s rationalist ether, some of my creative works briefly experimented with ideas of physical heroism in the sense Tom Wolfe describes, i.e., heroism “for a cause”. Russian art collective AES+F, whose photomontage works informed my own, have spoken of their “perpetual attempt to precipitate the ‘genome of heroism’ out of today’s world of glimmer reality” and I had hoped to achieve something similar.⁷⁰ My works for *Apollo 8* sought to draw out the physicality of the Apollo astronauts using images of the Apollo 8 crew, saucer-eyed with adrenalin, suiting up for their mission (fig. 22). I also experimented with works showing the astronauts backgrounded by flags. In the result, however, I found heroism for a cause too difficult to speak to within my commemorative context. Given the material I was working with, it suggested conquest, masculinity and ideological absolutes and I was unable to evoke these subjects without appearing to pine for them. I therefore determined to commemorate the astronauts in my more solemn works less as Cold War warriors facing death for a cause than as mortals facing death as a bringer of Dionysian de-individuation. To this end, my works included extensive experimentation with crash-landing astronauts into the Honeysuckle site or otherwise re-integrating them into the ground. The better of these works, including my video *Honeysuckle Traverse* produced for *Air-to-Ground*, evoke the vulnerability of the astronauts’ bodies to both the loftier goals they served and to their mortal, human condition.

⁶⁸ Tom Wolfe, *The Right Stuff* (1980) (Great Britain: Picador, 1991), 29.

⁶⁹ Norman Mailer, *Of a Fire on the Moon* (New York: Random House, 2014), 319.

⁷⁰ AES+F artist website, accessed February 21, 2022, https://aesf.art/projects/action_half_life/.



Fig. 22. NASA, Apollo 8 crew suiting up, 1968.

My works also drew out Apollo’s evocation of the sacred and its metaphysical manifestations to counter the program’s technological hubris and further embrace Dionysian ideas of de-individuation and dissolution as bases for commemoration. In an act that was and continues to be criticised as anti-science and anti-secular, the first humans to leave the Earth’s orbit, the crew of Apollo 8, read from the opening chapter of the book of Genesis during a television broadcast from lunar orbit on Christmas Eve, 1968.⁷¹ Michael Light has noted that the space traveller is simultaneously gigantically empowered and aware of his utter insignificance and in the midst of this duality, Apollo 8’s crew reverted to prayer. In Genesis, the Apollonian Judeo-Christian God methodically divides the Dionysian Earth, which is “without form, and void”, into its proper individuated parts which are readied for human dominion and these are apt verses for pilot-engineers. However, the reading is also an articulation of the limits of human creative powers, even as these powers were manifesting in seemingly limitless ways.⁷² It might also be read as a homage to the technicolour Earth as much as its creator, and an associated reverencing of earthly mortality as distinct from Light’s cosmic insignificance. I drew on the reading in evoking ideas of the eschatological in works for my *Apollo 8* exhibition. Beyond expressions of the Judeo-Christian metaphysical, Dr Edgar Mitchell, the sixth Moonwalker, founded an institute dedicated to the exploration of consciousness after his mind was blown on the journey back from the Moon:

⁷¹ In comparing the Genesis reading unfavourably to Armstrong’s first words on the Moon, Ayn Rand suggested that it had destroyed “the meaning and glory” of the moment: Ayn Rand, “Apollo 11” in *The Voice of Reason – Essays in Objectivist Thought* by Ayn Rand, ed. Leonard Peikoff (New York: Meridian, 1989) 161–178, 168. Barry Vacker has suggested that Apollo 8 “philosophically crashed when the astronauts read from Genesis to give the event meaning to one billion viewers on Earth” and that it used “humanity’s pretence to cosmic centrality to give meaning to a scientific triumph that showed the exact opposite...”: Barry Vacker, “Apollo 8 Crashed on Global TV: The 50th Anniversary of Apollo 8 and What It Meant,” *Medium*, July 20, 2018, accessed February 21, 2022, <https://medium.com/@barryvacker/apollo-8-crashed-on-global-tv-the-50th-anniversary-of-apollo-8-and-what-it-meant-fe2f497805f8>. As to anti-secular, Madalyn Murray O’Hair of the American Atheists unsuccessfully sued the US Government over the reading, alleging that it violated constitutional restrictions on making laws for establishment of a religion.

⁷² It may also have served to distinguish the US space program from the Godless Soviets, whose first man in Space, Yuri Gagarin, reportedly observed that, “I see no God up here” (noting this quote is unverified).

*"Billions of years ago, the molecules of my body, of [my crewmates'] bodies, of this spacecraft, of the world I had come from and was now returning to, were manufactured in the furnace of an ancient generation of stars like those surrounding us...I experienced what has been described as an ecstasy of unity. I not only saw the connectedness, I felt it and experienced it sentiently. I was overwhelmed with the sensation of physically and mentally extending out into the cosmos."*⁷³

Mitchell wrote in his earnest technical way about zero-point fields and how we can, and should, resonate with animals, plants and objects. As a means of unsettling Apollo's fixities and hierarchies, many of my creative works sought to evoke a similar churning of matter and a galaxy in which everyone and everything is equally, interchangeably, atomically alive.

Apollo's mysticism was paralleled by its invocations of the technological sublime as a thing exceeding all human understanding with notions of obliteration at its core. Accounts of Apollo 11's launch describe it as a *bodily* assault, with shaking earth, a cracking, rolling, roar of engines igniting and the smell of rocket fuel.⁷⁴ While she praised Apollo for its reason, Ayn Rand opined that the launch "could not be integrated with anything."⁷⁵ In speaking about his *Jetman*, Roland Barthes offers a more apocalyptic take on Mitchell's ecstatic dissolution:

*"...motion is no longer the optical perception of points and surfaces; it has become a kind of vertical disorder, made of contractions, black-ours, terrors and faints; it is no longer a gliding but an inner devastation, an unnatural perturbation, a motionless crisis of bodily consciousness."*⁷⁶

Norman Mailer, meanwhile, stressed the sublime's redemptive possibilities. He observed of Apollo that "[i]t was as if technology had determined to invoke the god of magic it had

⁷³ Dr Edgar Mitchell, *The Way of the Explorer*, (Franklin Lakes, NJ: Career Press, 2008), 75.

⁷⁴ E.g. David E. Nye, *American Technological Sublime* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: MIT Press, 1994), 246, discussing witnesses to Apollo and other launches: "What they see cannot be transmitted by television. The sheer scale of the event mocks the small frame of any camera; the blinding brightness and subtlety of the colours cannot be broadcast any more than one can transmit the violent roar of the engines, the smell of the fuel mixed with that of the surrounding swampland or the feel of rocket's thrust shaking the earth."

⁷⁵ Ayn Rand, "Apollo 11" in *The Voice of Reason – Essays in Objectivist Thought* by Ayn Rand, ed. Leonard Peikoff (New York: Meridian, 1989) 161–178, 165.

⁷⁶ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (1957) trans. Anne Lavers (New York: The Noonday Press, 1991), 71.

already slain” while describing the astronauts as “strange, plasticized, half-communicating Americans, [who] might still be the spine on which electricity breaks and restores the resonance of the stars.”⁷⁷

Closing observations

In attempting to formulate the stakes in commemorating Apollo, my exploration of its Dionysian and Apollonian elements flipped back upon itself. The Dionysian irrationalities and insularities that had flared at the beginning of this thesis following the introduction of alt-facts to the lexicon receded from such remorseless daily view, making my early thoughts on the sympathy potentially available for more Apollonian modes less immediately relevant. My own attachment to these modes also became more qualified. At the same time, my exploration of contemporary commemorative concerns, as discussed in the following Chapter, made it clear that rather than *emphasising* my subject’s Apollonian-hegemonic qualities, I would need to attenuate them or balance them out. If my Dionysian counter-qualities were initially formulated as a menace to be contained, they metamorphosed into the tools that allowed me to present Apollo as a subject deserving of commemoration. This was particularly the case in their invitation to focus on the forgotten history of Honeysuckle Creek Tracking Station and its earthly ruins. I also realised that commemoration itself is a Dionysian practice accomplished not through abstract argument but by affective attempts to show why something mattered, even if this includes an appeal to Apollonian qualities. Ultimately, I used the images and insights collected with my Apollonian-Dionysian binaries in mind to *blend* these modes and attempt an accommodation between them.

⁷⁷ Norman Mailer, *Of a Fire on the Moon* (New York: Random House, 2014), 159, 308.

Chapter 2 – Situating Remembrance

Overview

This Chapter situates my research within its wider art historical context. **Part 1** considers how Apollo was committed to public memory by artists participating in the NASA Art Program. It provides an overview of the art program, which sought to ‘humanise’ Apollo’s technology. It then examines works by two artists who ‘bookended’ the program, Robert Rauschenberg and Norman Rockwell. It explains how Rauschenberg’s *Stoned Moon* works informed my own through their exploration of Apollo’s romance and celestial-terrestrial tensions, while using Rockwell’s *Behind Apollo* to consider unselfconscious affect, sentimentality and nostalgia. **Part 2** explains how I framed my remembrance of Apollo in terms of collective memory and commemoration. It then considers remembrance of a hegemon in light of contemporary conventions which advocate for a focussing on forgotten histories and de-construction of monumental forms. It concludes by examining some creative precedents for commemoration, covering works by artists who have covered Apollo within commemorative contexts and who have otherwise dealt with remembrance of hegemonies and monumentality. **Part 3** explains how photomontage allowed me to re-interpret Apollo’s monumental photographic archive. It examines the association of photomontage with ‘big-State’ propaganda against my interest in Apollo’s social heroic. It then dissects the techniques of Soviet and other practitioners who have used photomontage to advance the interests of hegemonic states. It concludes by considering artists who have used photomontage ‘against itself’ to critique consensus in order to highlight the medium’s additional possibilities.

2.1 Committing Apollo to memory

In considering how Apollo should be remembered during its fiftieth anniversary, I sought to orient myself by investigating how it had been committed to public memory by visual artists in its day. In doing so, I focussed on works created for the NASA Art Program.⁷⁸ This was partly due to a paucity of privately auspiced works. However, it also seemed apt given the art program constituted an official deployment of creative works to

⁷⁸ I will return below to discuss works by On Kawara addressing Apollo 11 that were created outside of the NASA Art Program.

shape collective understandings of Apollo. A collection of art program works was exhibited in the United States to mark NASA's fiftieth anniversary in 2008. The introduction to an accompanying book, *NASA/Art: 50 Years of Exploration*, indicates that art program artists "ranged in style" from Robert Rauschenberg to Norman Rockwell.⁷⁹ I elected to focus on these two artists both as bookends of the art program and as different types of outliers whose approaches to Apollo contrasted, in ways directly relevant to my own work, with the more buttoned-down style of other program artists. After briefly addressing the art program's aims, this section therefore considers Rauschenberg's *Stoned Moon* series, particularly in its openness to Apollo's romance and local resonances, and Rockwell's *Behind Apollo*, particularly in its unabashed sentimentality and nostalgia.

The NASA Art Program

Most of the artworks produced for the NASA Art Program provide a homely gloss to Apollo's neutral narratives without greatly unsettling them. In *The NASA Art Program: Technology, Art and Contested Visions of Progress, 1962-1973* historian Tracee Haupt addresses the public relations role of the art program which commissioned thirty-eight artists between 1963 and 1972.⁸⁰ Haupt notes the art program was intended to 'humanise' Apollo's machines given growing concerns about the wider social impacts of technology, including against the background of the Cold War.⁸¹ Artists were seen as offering the potential for subjective renderings, attention to emotional states, aestheticisation of technology and depictions of the humans behind the technology, while their involvement asserted the existence of a beating heart behind NASA's engineering mind and a dutiful acquaintance with 'culture'.⁸² There appears to have been an implicit presumption that these ends could not be achieved through photographic practice, at least in the sense that NASA understood it.

⁷⁹ James Dean & Bertram Ulrich, *NASA/Art: 50 Years of Exploration* (New York: Abrams, 2008), 9.

⁸⁰ Tracee Haupt, "The NASA Art Program: Technology, Art and Contested Visions of Progress, 1962-1973," *Quest: The History of Spaceflight Quarterly*, 24 no. 1 (2017), 5-16.

⁸¹ Haupt suggests this goal was imperfectly met.

⁸² In a draft essay intended to accompany Robert Rauschenberg's unpublished *Stoned Moon* book which I discuss below, Michael Crichton suggested that "[t]he same inexorable logic that dictated the structure of the spacecraft concluded that artists could provide the meaning needed": Catalogue for *Robert Rauschenberg: Stoned Moon*, Craig F. Starr Gallery, New York, May 30 through July 26, 2019, 53.

Haupt notes that while initially only realistic painters were chosen for the art program, there was some attempt to move beyond this “illustrator phase” to introduce more “philosophical contemplation.”⁸³ Even so, the most common category of works in this collection are predictable, understated field-sketch-type paintings and drawings which, as Haupt observes do not even turn that often to humans. Haupt notes the wide exhibition of art program works within the US while their use in cultural diplomacy efforts directed to international audiences has also been noted. The art program works may not have displaced NASA’s technology as a subject or pushed the bounds of contemplation, however, their familiar, accessible style gives the technology a *homeliness* which belies its alienating potential and would also, presumably, have lessened the risk of aesthetic alienation that might have arisen had more experimental artists participated in the program.

Robert Rauschenberg’s *Stoned Moon*

In terms of avant-garde practitioners, the most notable artist commissioned for the NASA Art Program was Robert Rauschenberg. His commission resulted firstly in the *Stoned Moon* series of lithographs which I used as a starting point for my final works, *LOS*. The series consists of thirty-three stone lithographs made in collaboration with Gemini G.E.L. printers using a complex technical process and completed over an intense period between 1969 and 1970. The title nods to the lithographic stones along with the ‘trippiness’ of Apollo and the era. The lithographic stones reference the rocky face of the Moon and may also suggest stone tablets—Rauschenberg had previously declared that “now is not the time to be writing on rocks” but his process links Apollo’s epic voyage to more ancient attempts to systematise and delineate human behaviour. The National Gallery of Australia holds a set of the *Stoned Moon* lithographs and I was able to view several of them in the Gallery’s vaults early in my research. To accompany the lithographs, Rauschenberg also produced a set of collages and drawings for a *Stoned Moon* book. While the book was never published, these works were displayed with the lithographs for the fiftieth anniversary of Apollo 11 by Craig F. Starr Gallery in New York. The catalogue for this show includes a draft essay by science fiction writer and art collector, Michael Crichton, intended to accompany the book.

⁸³ Tracee Haupt, “The NASA Art Program: Technology, Art and Contested Visions of Progress, 1962–1973,” *Quest: The History of Spaceflight Quarterly*, 24 no. 1 (2017), 5–16, 9–10.

The lithographs use NASA photographs, diagrams and other materials, along with photographs of Florida bird-life and “regional ephemera” while also featuring direct mark-making and a hurried working into and over the photographic images. Rauschenberg was the only program artist to make direct use of photography in covering Apollo, ignoring the presumption that the medium was incapable of generating affect. As reproducible works that combine photography with handmade interventions, they humanise the technology and technologise the human in a manner that at least partly meets the formal remit of the NASA Art Program. While the works are not illusionistic, some images are layered to create a sense of three-dimensions and some passages offer a sense of perspectival space. The works are diverse, free-flowing and rough-hewn and some are not easy on the eye, but their high-tech subject matter and technical complexity give them a tightness and control.



Fig. 23. Robert Rauschenberg, works from the *Stoned Moon* series, 1969-70, left, *Sky Rite*, right, *Moon Rose*.

The *Stoned Moon* works were most instructive for me in their embrace of Apollo’s complexities and their drawing out of its more Dionysian strains including its romance and local resonances. According to a chronology of Rauschenberg’s life on the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation website, “Rauschenberg had always admired the space program for being one of the few technological projects not involved in war and destruction.”⁸⁴ Rauschenberg took exuberant delight in his subject and his joy in the moment is clear.⁸⁵ Even

⁸⁴ Robert Rauschenberg Foundation website accessed March 11, 2022, <https://www.rauschenbergfoundation.org/artist/chronology/all/all> (entry for July 16, 1969).

⁸⁵ For example, his ecstatic description of an Apollo launch that appears in one of the *Stoned Moon* works, which was also published as “A Collage Comment” in *Studio International* in 1969 runs as follows: “The bird’s

so, the works resist easy closure by presenting Apollo as both a collision and fusion of disparate physical and cultural elements and tendencies. According to the Starr catalogue:

*“The overarching themes of the Stoned Moon series centre around the interconnectivity and opposition of art and science, and of nature and technology, with an emphasis on ecology and conservation, as well as on a kind of global internationalism...all in the spirit of the peaceful exploration of space for the potential benefit of all mankind.”*⁸⁶

While the catalogue suggests that this vision of Apollo downplays “the militaristic and colonizing aspects of the Space race and the heroism of the individual astronauts”, I am not quite so sure.⁸⁷ At minimum, Rauschenberg touches on these themes, making his work more complex and complete still. Cold War militarism is latent within the NASA imagery itself while NASA’s “citizen soldiers” are depicted in *Sky Rite* at fig. 23 above, which features an oversized technician pointing skyward in exhortation.⁸⁸ Apart from images of footprints on the Moon, colonisation is addressed in ways outlined below. As to heroics, the astronauts float God-like, or appear as angelic visions, in a number of pieces (e.g., *Moon Rose* at fig. 23) while Rauschenberg appears to allude to his own hero-worship of one of the astronauts in pages from his *Stoned Moon* book.⁸⁹ I would thus agree with Crichton that the ultimate result is that Rauschenberg “is the only artist who can retain the mystery but abandon the fantasy, and thus get to the romantic core of the NASA program.”⁹⁰

nest bloomed with fire and clouds / softly largely slowly silently / Apollo started to move up / then it rose being lifted on light / standing mid-air, it began to sing happily loud / in its own joy wanting the earth to know it was going / saturated, super-saturated and solidified air with / a sound that became your body / for that while everything was the same material / power over power joy pain ecstasy there was no inside no out / then bodily transcending a state of energy / Apollo 11 was airborne / lifting pulling everyone’s spirits with it.”

⁸⁶ Catalogue for *Robert Rauschenberg: Stoned Moon*, Craig F. Starr Gallery, New York, May 30 through July 26, 2019, 77.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Howard E. McCurdy notes that “the engineers and scientists who ran NASA were cast as citizen soldiers in the Cold War” in Howard E. McCurdy, *Space and the American Imagination*, (Washington & London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997), 96.

⁸⁹ Catalogue for *Robert Rauschenberg: Stoned Moon*, Craig F. Starr Gallery, New York, May 30 through July 26, 2019, 19 (proposed page 2 of *Stoned Moon* book): “When exactly did Edward White [the first US spacewalker and Apollo 1 crew member] become his man/poet hero replacing the athlete of the past?”

⁹⁰ Ibid, 65 (page 19 of draft Crichton essay).



Fig. 24. Robert Rauschenberg, works from the *Stoned Moon* series, 1969–70, left, *Local Means*, right, *Banner*.

Rauschenberg’s interest in Apollo’s sky-earth tensions also related directly to my own wish to ground Apollo in the local. Jaklyn Babington’s catalogue essay for a showing of the *Stoned Moon* lithographs at the National Gallery of Australia in 2010 highlighted how Rauschenberg “contrasted the local with the galactic, the Earth-bound with the celestial.”⁹¹ *Local Means*, at fig. 24 above directly inquires into what the local might mean within this wild, internationalist, interplanetary context. The *Stoned Moon* works refer firstly to the landscape and bird-life of Cape Kennedy (now Cape Canaveral) from which Apollo missions launched and which was built on a bird sanctuary. During a fieldwork visit in 2018 I learned that colonised nature was still very much a presence in what is still a working space-port. The place is hot and steamy. Palm trees line the roads and beachfronts. Alligators wallow in water-filled furrows lining the approach. Fences have lips on them so the alligators cannot climb over although apparently it happens from time to time. There is a huge eagle’s nest within the complex that tour guides proudly note has been continuously inhabited since the time of Apollo.

The works also refer to emblems and ephemera of the State of Florida, as both a place and an administrative unit superimposed over earlier landscapes and cultures. In *Banner* (fig. 24), the Florida seal dialogues with the seal-like object in *Local Means* which references text from the plaque Apollo 11 left on the Moon, and what might be an ancient sundial in another work, *Ape*. They are all symbolically-laden but earthly orbs. The Florida seal features

⁹¹ Jaklyn Babington, “Robert Rauschenberg’s *Stoned Moon* series 1969–70,” catalogue for *Stoned Moon: Robert Rauschenberg*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 2010, 7.

a Seminole woman spreading flowers on a shoreline presumably welcoming an approaching steamer. This benign vision of colonisation is at odds with the ‘DO NOT [ENTER]’ sign at left. Florida is known as the Orange State and a box of oranges, juicy Earth-reared orbs, occupies the centre of the work, playing against the NASA image at bottom right of the Apollo 11 astronauts waiting out their time in quarantine so their Moon-germs do not pollute Earth’s bounty. The word ‘HORNET’ references the USS *Hornet* that retrieved the astronauts from the Pacific but also the insect. Perhaps Rauschenberg answers the question about the role of earthly and more particular locals in text from his *Stoned Moon* collages: “TO LOOK UP FACE WITH THE SUN FOOT ON THE MOON AND HEART IN THE EARTH.”⁹²

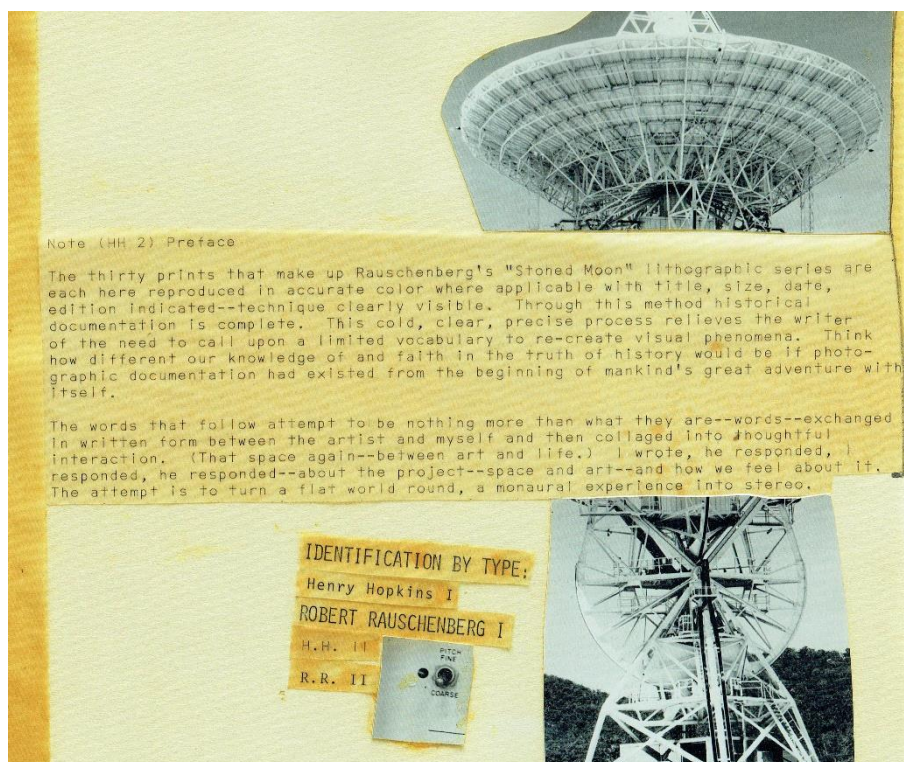


Fig. 25. Robert Rauschenberg, page from *Stoned Moon* book showing Honeysuckle Creek antenna, 1969.

When read with the works for the *Stoned Moon* book the lithographs acquire additional meanings. These works juxtapose NASA materials (including a photograph of the Honeysuckle Creek antenna as shown in fig. 25), photographs documenting the making of the lithographs, and strips of type-written words. The words include poetic conversations

⁹² Catalogue for *Robert Rauschenberg: Stoned Moon*, Craig F. Starr Gallery, New York, May 30 through July 26, 2019, 39 (proposed page 9 of *Stoned Moon* book).

between Rauschenberg and Henry Hopkins (Director of the Fort Worth Art Centre Museum) in the days surrounding the Apollo 11 launch while referencing the collaborative efforts involved in making *Stoned Moon*. As others have observed, they analogise the immense collective labour of Apollo with Rauschenberg's own epic and collaborative art-making.⁹³ The analogy may run both ways—his is a monumental technical undertaking, but Apollo is also a monumental work of art. The works also clearly point to a creative *documenting* of Apollo and Rauschenberg's involvement in it. His thoughts are not handwritten but typed, like a journalist on a deadline. There is a genuine sense of *being there* and of capturing time as it unfolds. I will discuss the centrality of timing to commemoration in considering works about Apollo by On Kawara produced outside of the NASA Art Program in the following Chapter.

Norman Rockwell's *Behind Apollo 11*

Norman Rockwell was an immensely popular propagator of vernacular mid-century American values and shaper of American collective memory. He is widely known for his sentimental and nostalgic illustrations for popular magazines such as *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Life* and *Look* between World War I (WWI) and the 1970s. Through this medium, he presented an illustrated history of a particular version of American life spanning half a century. While his works are more complex than is sometimes assumed, they generally depict ordinary small-town white Americans in tender or trouble-free moments, while linking domestic contentment to its civic underpinnings. As illustrations, his works inhabit a world increasingly subsumed by photography while their subject matter also invokes a mythical simpler time.⁹⁴

I will focus here on *Behind Apollo 11* shown at fig. 26 below as the most nakedly sentimental and nostalgic work produced by Rockwell for the NASA Art Program. The work is an oil painting which was also produced as a large fold-out poster accompanying *Look Magazine's* 15 July 1969 edition with an accompanying key to identify individual

⁹³ E.g., see catalogue for *Robert Rauschenberg: Stoned Moon*, Craig F. Starr Gallery, New York, May 30 through July 26, 2019, 7: “[Rauschenberg] makes explicit in the project the parallel connection between his practice of working by doing – his instincts for experimentation and physical contact with materials, his enthusiasm for working in tandem with a team such as the printers at the Gemini workshop – and the monumental collective effort of the engineers, scientists and administrators of NASA.”

⁹⁴ Although some of Rockwell's later and more interesting work explores more difficult territory in its coverage of de-segregation.

subjects.⁹⁵ The work portrays the Apollo 11 astronauts, their back-up crew, flight directors, Chief Engineer, key personnel, workers with hard-hats, and the astronauts' wives, stressing the contributions of all elements of society to Apollo's achievements. All eyes are fixed on the same distant goal which washes them with a second light. Expressions range through blazing determination, quiet purpose, open-mouth wonder and tilt-headed curiosity. Curiously, the compositional devices used to stress the astronauts' 'backing' by the collective result in the subjects collectively facing 'backwards' as if to a simpler past and the astronauts already look much older than in life.⁹⁶



Fig. 26. Norman Rockwell, *Behind Apollo 11* and accompanying key published in *Look Magazine*, 1969.

While Rockwell's style excluded him from consideration as a serious artist, I wanted to investigate whether the sentimentality and nostalgia that he deployed could be mobilised in commemorating Apollo to encourage identification with positive forms of community. At its broadest, sentimental art is affective and uncomplicated, seeking to tug at our heart-strings with easy-to-read, one-directional cues. Oscar Wilde defined a sentimentalist as "one who desires to have the luxury of an emotion without paying for it" while further suggesting that only those with sufficient aesthetic coin are entitled to purchase the real thing.⁹⁷ In *Avant-*

⁹⁵ The work was completed with assistance from illustrator Pierre Mion: see Pierre Mion, "Norman Rockwell's Ghost: The Most Artistic Collaboration of the Entire Apollo Program," *Smithsonian Magazine, Air & Space Magazine* (September 2006), accessed March 13, 2022, <https://www.airspacemag.com/space/norman-rockwells-ghost-9092689/?page=2>.

⁹⁶ The positioning of the subjects 'in reverse' is noted in Vitruvian Astronaut, "Astronauts in Art," dated July 30 (without year), *Tumblr* blog, accessed April 24, 2022, <https://vitruvianastronaut.tumblr.com/post/125450315886/astonauts-in-art-norman-rockwell-behind-apollo>.

⁹⁷ The Letters of Oscar Wilde in Michael Tanner, "Sentimentality," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, 1976–1977, New Series*, 77 (1976–1977), 127, accessed March 13, 2022, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4544903>: "The intellectual and emotional life of ordinary people is a very contemptible affair. Just as they borrow their ideas from a sort of circulating library of thought – the Zeitgeist of an age that has no soul – and send them back soiled at the end of each week, so they always try to get their emotions on credit, and refuse to pay the bill when it comes in."

Garde and Kitsch (1939), Clement Greenberg nominated Rockwell as an arch-purveyor of *kitsch* (which he broadly defined as sentimental, storytelling art) in arguing for a version of art concerned purely with its own formal critique. Greenberg appears to suggest that this type of art is not merely tasteless, but dangerous because it can be mobilised by totalitarian regimes to brainwash the masses. It is certainly important to worry about *over*-identification with a collective. However, I was troubled by the elitism of these arguments, which put me in mind of Wolfgang Streeck's suggestion that if the left has any role to play in transcending the excesses of neo-liberalism it must, among other things, learn that "the outcasts of the self-appointed 'knowledge society' must not be abandoned for aesthetic reasons to their fate and, hence, to the right."⁹⁸

Some more recent thinkers have, I believe, offered more useful and positive insights into sentimentality. Author Leslie Jamison suggests that sentimentality makes us afraid that "our feelings will resemble everyone else's" and that our abhorrence of sentimentality may be rooted in its bodily resonances:

*"The hunger for unmitigated and uncomplicated sensation carries on its tongue an unspoken shame. "You are a little soul carrying around a corpse," Epicetus once said. The body is a monstrous thing that turns the soul grotesque, and that sentimental craving for a quick fix of feeling, or sudden rush of sweet, feels like the emotional equivalent of that cumbersome luggage – corporeal and base – an embarrassing set of desires that our ethereal, higher selves have to lug around."*⁹⁹

Sociologist Sam Binkley suggests that *kitsch*, of which he sees sentimentality as the most important feature, has positive social functions:

"...kitsch, which glories in its embeddedness in routines its faithfulness to conventions, and its rootedness in the modest cadence of daily life, works to re-embed its consumers, to replenish stocks of ontological security, and to shore up a sense of cosmic coherence in an unstable world of challenge, innovation and creativity."

⁹⁸ Wolfgang Streeck, "The Return of the Repressed," *New Left Review*, 104 (March/April 2017), accessed March 13, 2022, <https://newleftreview.org/issues/ii104/articles/wolfgang-streeck-the-return-of-the-repressed>.

⁹⁹ Leslie Jamison, "In Défense of Saccharin(e)," in *The Empathy Exams: Essays*, Leslie Jamison (London: Granta Publishing, 2014), Google Books, 125, 115–116.

Particularly where kitsch makes its most aggressive demands on our aesthetic sensibilities, in its appeals to sentiment, kitsch aims to re-embed its consumers on the 'deepest' personal level."¹⁰⁰

There has also been a recent revaluating of nostalgia. Nostalgia is often understood as a warm, indulgent and selective remembering of the past frequently involving shared reminiscences with others. In highlighting the passage of time and the inevitability of death it can be tinged with sadness. Its more complex meanings circle around "homesickness" and a gut-sick awareness that a place of safety, familiarity and *mutual* recognition has been irretrievably lost. Nostalgia is disabling when it involves an excessive sentimental pining for a past, whether real or imagined, that cannot be recovered. It can also be destructive when it glosses too lightly over the sins of the past or inspires ugly cultural-political revanchism. Apollo is particularly susceptible to these risks in symbolising a time of American power when white Anglo men were confident of their place in the hierarchy and ran things on their own terms.¹⁰¹ However, according to psychologists Constantine Sedikides and Tim Wildschut, who have led recent research in this field, nostalgia can play an important role across different cultures in building a sense of connection with others while acting as the "perfect internal politician, connecting the past with the present, pointing optimistically to the future."¹⁰²

I drew on these ideas in seeking to produce creative works that affectively embedded memories of Apollo within my local polity of Canberra. While I experimented with sentimental and nostalgic works, I was also conscious of the need to balance these affects with cautionary notes of objectivity. Rockwell's work as published in *Look Magazine* included a key to the personnel pictured. In emulating this technique for stopping affective works from running completely emotionally amok, I retrofitted a key to my works for

¹⁰⁰ Sam Binkley, "Kitsch as a Repetitive System: A Problem for the Theory of Taste Hierarchy," *Journal of Material Culture* 5, no. 2 (2000), 135.

¹⁰¹ The point is made, e.g., in Roger Launius, "Perceptions of Apollo: Myth, Nostalgia, Memory or All of the Above?," *Space Policy* 21 (2005) 129–139, from 135, accessed April 24, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.spacepol.2005.02.001>. It was also made more recently in reviews for the Armstrong bio-pic *First Man*, e.g., Richard Brody, "'First Man' Reviewed: Damien Chazelle's Neil Armstrong Bio-Pic is an Accidental Right-Wing Fetish Object," October 10, 2018, *The New Yorker*, accessed April 24, 2022, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/the-front-row/first-man-reviewed-damien-chazelles-neil-armstrong-bio-pic-is-an-accidental-right-wing-fetish-object>.

¹⁰² In Tim Adams, "Look Back in Joy: the Power of Nostalgia," *The Guardian*, November 9, 2014, accessed March 13, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/nov/09/look-back-in-joy-the-power-of-nostalgia>

Promised the Moon. For completeness, I noted that the key appears to have been referenced in one of Rauschenberg's drawings produced in conjunction with his *Stoned Moon* works (fig. 27). If Rockwell's composition turned the crowd towards the past, in this work, Rauschenberg has reversed them and—whether deliberately or otherwise—turned them towards the future.



Fig. 27. Robert Rauschenberg, *Untitled*, 1969, with detail showing Rockwell key.

2.2 Commemorative contexts

My research question inquires into how Apollo might be best remembered during its fiftieth anniversary and this section considers my search for appropriate recollective modes. At its simplest, 'remember' means only to recall or recollect. However, I decided relatively early in my research that as a starting point, Apollo would be best remembered in terms of its location in public or collective memory. As I have noted above, public memory can be viewed as a Dionysian challenge to Apollonian history as a primary means of collectively relating to the past. It also embraces affect, which is central to commemoration. It further reflected my interest in Apollo's meanings as contextualised by current culture wars which have seen heightened contestation around what it is appropriate to collectively remember. This Part therefore begins by briefly explaining collective memory as a concept before considering commemoration as one of the most visible ways in which collective memory is nurtured. It then considers the placement of my work within current commemorative practice. It concludes by considering relevant creative precedents, including On Kawara's *Date Paintings* which point to timing as a cornerstone of commemoration, creative works that have addressed Apollo during its anniversaries, and artists who have addressed remembrance of other hegemon.

Collective memory and commemoration

Maurice Halbwachs theorised collective memory as a process by which groups and sub-groups constantly re-imagine the past to create and re-enforce themselves in the present.

David Manier and William Hirst neatly summarise the concept in observing that:

“[c]ollective memories...are *representations* of the past in the minds of members of a *community* that contribute to the *community's sense of identity* [my italics].”¹⁰³ They also note that collective memory contains both representations of shared first-hand experiences and of experiences that are otherwise mutually imbibed and re-enforced through a range of re-tellings and practices without specific awareness as to their sources.¹⁰⁴ Similarly, while Apollo was witnessed in real time by millions of people, it also forms part of the collective memory of those who did not witness it directly, with the manner of its representation informed by personal, media, academic and institutional re-tellings. Susan Sontag has observed that “[w]hat is called collective memory is not a remembering but a stipulation: that this is important, and this is the story about how it happened, with the pictures that lock the story in our minds.”¹⁰⁵ This suggests a top-down and instrumental process, which rings true, for example, of efforts by state-based institutions to shape civic mythologies. However, the literature generally describes a more fluid process by which different groups simultaneously (*re*)-negotiate and are (*re*)-formed by memories that they accept as representative of themselves. In either case, collective memory, like cultural diplomacy, carries within it ideas of group identification and collectivity, whether near or far-reaching, and whether shaped from above or below.

While collective memory is formed from an accretion of happenings and practices, I will focus here on commemoration as perhaps the most visible means by which it is created and re-enforced. Commemoration is broadly understood as an act or practice involving a deferential calling to mind of a person or event. It generally, although not exclusively, suggests an act of shared remembering undertaken within a public context. It is a form of ritual observance, almost always timed to coincide with an anniversary, that primarily pays

¹⁰³ David Manier and William Hirst, “A Cognitive Taxonomy of Collective Memories,” in *Cultural Memory Studies – An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, ed. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning in collaboration with Sara B. Young (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, Berlin, 2008), 253–262, 253.

¹⁰⁴ I have here summarised their more complex argument that breaks the second category of memories into further subcategories.

¹⁰⁵ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London: Penguin, 2003), 76–77.

respects to people and days that have passed while also re-asserting their importance to the present. The Australian War Memorial (AWM), which has played an outsized role in shaping ideas around Australian commemorative practice, offers the following definition:

*“Commemoration means to remember, honour, or show respect to a person or event. This can be done through a special action like a ceremony or celebration, but commemoration can also occur through the creation of an object, work of art, writing, music or a memorial. Commemorative events include joyful celebrations and solemn ceremonies.”*¹⁰⁶

The AWM has been criticised for making commemoration of Australia’s war dead a gold standard of national identity. While I had no wish to attempt something similar with Apollo, this definition helped me to refine my own approaches to Apollo as something that could potentially be both celebrated and remembered more solemnly. I will return in Chapter 3 to consider how my creative works drew on the AWM’s definition to address Apollo in these terms.

Contemporary commemorative conventions

The subjects of public commemoration have changed as ideas of readily-agreed histories have receded and communities who have experienced the past as trauma demand acknowledgement and redress. Historian Jay Winter has written about a “memory boom” originating in collective remembrance of WWI which has recast paradigms for remembering war and other violent conflicts in terms of impacts on their victims to whom collective remembrance offers psychic redress that cannot be rendered through mere corrections to the historical record.¹⁰⁷ Winter and others have discerned a focus on ethnic rather than “state-bound” memories within this context. This focus has been maintained in recent debates around contested monuments, particularly in the United States. In 2021, for example, Philadelphia-based studio Monument Lab completed a National Monument Audit in partnership with the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to assess “the current monument

¹⁰⁶ Australian War Memorial website, accessed April 7, 2022, <https://www.awm.gov.au/learn/schools/resources/commemoration/whatis>

¹⁰⁷ Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War Between Memory and History in the 20th Century* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2006). Note that Winter himself generally rejects the idea of collective memory as obfuscating, preferring to focus instead on acts of collective remembrance.

landscape across the United States.”¹⁰⁸ Defining ‘monument’ as “a statement of power and presence in public” the project analysed a dataset of 48,000 monuments to reveal the prejudices and blind spots of their makers, as a starting point for re-making the commemorative landscape.¹⁰⁹ There is a broad view arising from this and related work that new monuments are needed to commemorate previously invisible subjects. For example, Senior Editor of *Public Art Review*, Jon Spayde, describes the first purpose of re-imagined monuments as to “clearly represent and celebrate formerly ignored or undervalued people and communities.”¹¹⁰

Along with a desire to address new subjects, there is a view that traditional monumental forms are no longer apt for commemoration. Spayde describes the second purpose of re-imagined monuments as “to avoid the old paradigm of monumentalizing, which presents single, permanent images of heroic figures.”¹¹¹ This subject was addressed locally, for example, in Rose Hawker’s *A Memorial to the Monument* at fig. 28 below which won the Rockwood Cemetery Hidden Prize in 2018. The artist statement for the work indicates a wish to “honour the traditional monumental form in style and material” while noting that “the emptiness references the redundancy of traditional monuments and how their style over substance enables the collective forgetting of history as opposed to engaging the viewer and encouraging reflection.”¹¹² While the suggestion that traditional monuments enable collective forgetting struck me as potentially incomplete in the context of recent protests over some of these monuments, the allusion to different commemorative forms reflects surrounding debates. Spayde, for example, notes an emerging interest in open-ended, complex, ambiguous and temporary monuments as ways to commemorate forgotten histories in the present. I will return below to the further possibility of re-purposing existing monuments.

¹⁰⁸ Monument Lab website, *National Monument Audit*, accessed April 7, 2022, <https://monumentlab.com/audit>.

¹⁰⁹ Monument Lab, *National Monument Audit* (2021), 4, accessed April 7, 2022, <https://monumentlab.com/monumentlab-nationalmonumentaudit.pdf>

¹¹⁰ John Spayde, “Monumental Changes,” *Public Art Review* 57 (2018): 40–49, 47–48. Accessed April 7, 2022, <https://forecastpublicart.org/monumental-changes/>.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 47–48.

¹¹² Rose Hawker, artist statement for *A Memorial to the Monument*, on Hidden Rookwood Sculptures website, accessed April 7, 2022, <https://www.hiddeninrookwood.com.au/winners/2018>.



Fig. 28. Rose Hawker, *A Memorial to the Monument*, 2018.

My remembrance of Apollo sat awkwardly against current paradigms regarding subjects for commemoration. Apollo in its day *could not* be ignored or undervalued—it was a vast manifestation of establishment power located on the ‘winning side’ of history whose mindset permeated the Western cultural-political ether. I have noted that this thesis was not an attempt to argue with the concerns of contemporary commemoration. It was, however, an attempt to supplement these concerns with a search for what might still be salvaged from Apollo’s mixed legacy and an attempt to pay adequate respect to the past where this remains viable. I endeavoured to remain sensitive to the ramifications of remembering a former hegemon within the current context. I was acutely aware, for example, that Apollo was as white as its astronauts’ suits and that its triumphs played out against the vicious inequalities captured, for example, in poet and musician Gil Scott-Heron’s 1970 spoken word poem, *Whitey on the Moon*.¹¹³ I was also conscious that my claims to the Honeysuckle Creek site as part of *my* local were meagre and shallow-rooted when considered against the connections of Ngunawal people whose Country had been blithely appropriated by Apollo and its local instrumentalities. As detailed in the following Chapter, my creative works implemented a range of strategies and safeguards to avoid revanchism and ensure that my subject spoke quietly about why it, too, might nonetheless deserve to be remembered.

¹¹³ Gil Scott-Heron, “Whitey on the Moon”, from the album *Small Talk at 125th and Lenox*, accessed on YouTube, April 7, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=goh2x_G0ct4.

My creative works align more closely with current discourse, however, in seeking to re-purpose monuments as an alternative to removing or destroying them. Apollo built few physical monuments to itself but it recorded its deeds and its discoveries for posterity in minute detail through its photographs. These images may not occupy town squares but they represent their own distillation of institutional and public investment and the more famous images, at least, are everywhere lodged in memory. I therefore determined that I would conceptualise these photographs as Apollo's monument to itself and its creators. Within this context, my chosen medium of photomontage allowed me to re-interpret the photographs and make them speak to the present without silencing them altogether.

Creative precedents: commemoration

In considering creative precedents for remembering Apollo I will firstly mention work by On Kawara who, like Robert Rauschenberg and Norman Rockwell, addressed Apollo in its day but who did so outside of the NASA Art Program and as part of a larger body of work that seemed to deal more squarely with commemoration and the significance of timing as one of its components. I will then discuss artists who have recalled Apollo in conjunction with its anniversaries. Two artists addressed Apollo during its thirtieth anniversary in 1999: Michael Light, whose *Full Moon* book reproduces Apollo's photographs to reveal their conscious and subconscious motivations, and Aleksandra Mir, whose *First Woman on the Moon* re-enacts Apollo to include women as previously overlooked subjects. Of works produced for the fiftieth anniversary I will discuss a deep fake video by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). I will conclude by considering recent work by Melbourne artist Nina Sanadze which addresses the monumental and commemoration of hegemony apart from Apollo.



Fig. 29. On Kawara, *Moon Landing*, 1969 from the *Today* series, 1966–2013.

On Kawara covered the first Moon landing, literally as it unfolded, in his *Today* series (fig. 29). This series includes around 3,000 Date Paintings made between 1966 and the artist's death in 2014. Each painting records the date of its making and is accompanied by a handmade cardboard box of newspaper clippings from that date. While all other works are relatively small, Kawara chose a larger size for three dates covering Apollo 11's launch and landing and the first steps on the Moon. While these complex works have multiple meanings, they struck me as a form of commemorative practice honouring each day and its happenings while acknowledging that some rare days are bigger than others. In this context, they demonstrate the ritual importance of *timing* as an element of remembrance. A concern with timing also underlies my work. I began this thesis in 2017, fifty years after the crew of Apollo 1 was killed during a launch-pad simulation, and held my final exhibition in 2022, fifty years after the final Apollo mission, Apollo 17, returned to Earth. Fiftieth anniversaries are said to be golden like the Sun-God for which Apollo was named. The golden rays of attention that spot lit Apollo during at least a part of the anniversary period are inevitably reflected back through my works, just as the immensity of the original occasion is baked into Kawara's pieces. I would submit that this automatically lends my works a commemorative authenticity to which they could not otherwise have laid claim.



Fig. 30. Michael Light, *Full Moon* book, 1999.



Fig. 31. Aleksandra Mir, *First Woman on the Moon*, 1999.

American photographer Michael Light produced his *Full Moon* book, which includes an artist's essay, to mark the thirtieth anniversary of Apollo 11 in 1999 (fig. 30). Light was permitted to make digital scans of original NASA films which are rarely released from their canisters. As he notes in his essay, this allowed him to reproduce many previously unseen images to add to the smaller stock of Apollo images previously in circulation and it is worth remembering here that Apollo's photographic archive was not published more extensively until the advent of the internet. *Full Moon* strongly influenced my decision to propose Apollo's photographs as a monument to their makers. The book reproduces and curates Apollo's mission photographs to both aestheticize and probe the program's techno-rationality and expansionary urges as manifestations of Western-American psyche. In noting their obsession with measuring and recording, Light observes that the photographs "openly admit the biases and goals of their culture like few other documentary survey images made before or since."¹¹⁴ However, he also positions the photographs within American mythologies of endless frontier and manifest destiny, pointing to Apollo's romantic subconscious that I was also seeking to plumb. In addition, his selections reflected my own interests in including some of the rare, affective off-world photographs of astronauts-as-people along with 'out-takes' which highlight the fallibility of the human photographers and the ghosts within Apollo's machines. Light ultimately re-presents Apollo's photographs and their makers in a way that is questioning but sympathetic and perhaps even hesitantly nostalgic.

¹¹⁴ Michael Light, *Full Moon* (1999) (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), unnumbered page.

In the same year but in a different vein, Swedish-American artist Aleksandra Mir staged a re-enactment of Apollo 11 on a Dutch beach in her video *First Woman on the Moon* (fig. 31).¹¹⁵ As monuments, Apollo's photographs are accompanied by its iconic footage of Armstrong's first steps on the Moon which Mir has re-interpreted in this work. Made on a shoestring budget, the video shows bulldozers preparing the 'landing site' which is ultimately surmounted by a female crew and accompanying children. While the work points to the exclusion of women from Apollo, it also speculates about how women might have managed things differently, and to the need for them to marshal their own resources to reach their goals. The video is made in a documentary style but it is rough and playful, showing children, friends and project volunteers enjoying their day on the beach and photographing each other in between the serious business of conquering new worlds. The astronauts wear stylish frocks that echo *2001: A Space Odyssey*. The video was accompanied by a *Museum of Lunar Surface Findings* comprising rubbish found on the beach as the landing site was created. The work thus questions not only Apollo's maleness but its blokey pomposity and blinkered focus on its own ends.¹¹⁶



Fig. 32. MIT Center for Advanced Virtuality,
In Event of Moon Disaster, 2019.

¹¹⁵ Aleksandra Mir, *First Woman on the Moon* (1999). Artist website accessed April 7, 2022, <https://www.aleksandramir.info/projects/first-woman-on-the-moon/>.

¹¹⁶ Mir has described this work as concerned with the mediation of the Moon landing through Apollo's images and a broader mocking of power (see Tate entry for the work, accessed April 24, 2022: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/mir-first-woman-on-the-moon-t13704>). However, I have concentrated here on the work's feminist aspects in the context of the other concerns of this Chapter.

For the fiftieth anniversary of Apollo 11, MIT produced a different type of re-enactment which like my work is heavily informed by current culture wars, including as fomented by new technologies. *In Event of Moon Disaster* (fig. 32) is a deep fake featuring President Nixon, who inherited Apollo from President John F. Kennedy, reading a speech prepared for public consumption if the Apollo 11 astronauts failed to return from the Moon.¹¹⁷ The video intersperses Apollo film clips of the journey to the Moon, contemporaneous media coverage and a family watching the television broadcast with a Six-Million Dollar Man-type crash sequence that ends with a television test pattern. The President then appears behind his desk to gravely deliver words never actually spoken about events that never actually came to pass. In a process akin to requiring one's parents to recant their sins before publicly executing them, the work's technical cleverness, which traces its lineage back through Apollo, presents Apollo as a failure and a tragedy. At the risk of over-reading this work in light of my own concerns, if Nixon's speech was incipient public mourning for the astronauts, this work could perhaps be described as incipient public mourning for their rational, objective legacy.



Fig. 33. Nina Sanadze, *Apotheosis*, 2021.

Beyond artists who have remembered Apollo, Georgian-born Melbourne artist Nina Sanadze has produced several recent works that re-purpose monuments in a manner that I considered to be highly successful and relevant to my own practice. These include

¹¹⁷ While this work has been presented as part of a 1960s loungeroom installation, the video itself is viewable at *In the Event of Moon Disaster* website, accessed April 7, 2022, <https://moondisaster.org/film>.

Apotheosis (fig. 33) which won the Churchie Emerging Artist Prize in 2021. This work is constructed from casts and moulds from the studio of a family friend of the artist, Valentin Topuridze, whose monumental Soviet works were torn down when the Soviet Union collapsed. The work points to the failures of ideology and the impermanence of grand narratives while retaining a sensitivity towards the past. The Churchie Emerging Art Prize website notes that this work “[t]ransforms the once victorious into a tumbling morphyic vortex of fragility.”¹¹⁸ There is also an attempt, literally and metaphorically, to *save* something from the past, no matter how tainted, whether to overcome it, find meaning in it, or honour its sufferings. Sanadze deflates the monumental in a number of ways. The epic originals are replaced by toy-like figurines. Monumental injunctions give way to affective interactions between sculptural elements which appear random but have been carefully generated. The artist’s links to the original sculptor create a personal conversation between two makers, situated at different moments in history, and there is an associated respect for the skills and labour that created the original work which inform the process of unmaking it.



Fig. 34. Nina Sanadze, *Call to Peace*, with composer Misha Doumnov delivering volunteer peace performance, 2022.

¹¹⁸ The Churchie Emerging Art Prize website, *Nina Sanadze Takes Out the 2021 Major Prize*, October 26, 2021, accessed April 7, 2022, <http://churchieemergingart.com/news/56397/nina-sanadze-takes-out-2021-major-prize>.

Sanadze's latest work is a replica of a monumental work by Topuridze, *Call to Peace*, which is being presented as a temporary installation in South Melbourne (fig. 34). Here, Sanadze deflates the monumental by rendering it in polystyrene, and presenting it in "[s]caffolding on wheels [which] creates uncertainty about whether the monument is being repaired, constructed or pulled down."¹¹⁹ The artist has indicated that the work is her own call for peace, particularly given world events which developed during the work's planning. It has been suggested that Sanadze, "has subverted the original sculpture's intended message – one of war and victory, to one of peace and humanity."¹²⁰ However, for me, this work is particularly interesting because it does not dispute the original monument's narrative injunction so much as highlight that it is unlikely to be honoured when it is mandated by a monumental statue. Sanadze could be seen as *perfecting*, rather than *rejecting* the original monument's purported meaning by humanising it and highlighting its fragility.

While I do not presume to link Sanadze's specific concerns to my own, this work reminded me of my visit to President John F. Kennedy's grave at Arlington Cemetery during fieldwork in 2018. The grave is surrounded by an amphitheatre with slabs of granite on which extracts from Kennedy's liberal-utopian speeches are engraved. Despite the jarring Cold War language and condescension toward peoples-less-fortunate, it seemed somehow churlish to fault their idealistic visions of a world rid of tyranny, poverty and war. The problem lay more, perhaps, with their selective observance, their failure to ask, and their inscription in stone. These reflections confirmed for me that while it was essential in commemorating Apollo to acknowledge its overreach and blind spots, it was also important to remain mindful of its worthier aspirations, however selectively conceived or realised. This seemed particularly relevant amidst calls for the West to *do something* in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.¹²¹ Against this backdrop, the slabs of granite suggested sleeping dogs, lain down to die beside their master.

¹¹⁹ Nina Sanadze, quoted in Media Release on Call to Peace website, accessed April 7, 2022, <https://calltopeace.net/>.

¹²⁰ Kerrie O'Brien, "Melbourne Monument of Woman Raging Against War is 'Like a Prayer'," March 27, 2022, *The Age*, accessed April 24, 2022, <https://www.theage.com.au/culture/art-and-design/melbourne-monument-of-woman-raging-against-war-is-like-a-prayer-20220324-p5a7oe.html>.

¹²¹ The text on one of the granite slabs, for example, reads: "Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and success of liberty."

2.3 Photomontage

I was attracted to photomontage as a medium that I could use to re-work Apollo's monumental photographic archive for three main reasons. First, it allowed me to work *with* these materials, situating my work among efforts to re-interpreting contested monuments as an alternative to removing them where this remains viable. Second, certain types of photomontage are strongly associated with 'big-State' propaganda and a view that it is appropriate for the State to manage the lives of its citizens. While the big States in question have generally been totalitarian and empiricist, managing their own and other citizens with contempt, this is not always the case. I therefore wanted to explore whether the language of big-State propaganda, particularly as perfected by early Soviet photomontage artists, could be enlisted to speak to Apollo's social heroic. Third, this language allowed me to present Apollo's odourless cultural diplomacy in a more Dionysian guise that suggested appeals to hearts over minds and to Apollo's subconscious ideologies. With these ends in mind, this Part firstly considers the parallels between Apollo's social heroic and the concerns of Soviet photomontage, including the continuum between cultural diplomacy and propaganda. It then closely examines the techniques of Soviet photomontage artists and other practitioners who have used photomontage in the service of different hegemonies. It closes by briefly noting other artists who have used a similar style of photomontage to critique dominant ideologies.

Photomontage and the social heroic

I have noted my wish to celebrate Apollo as a State-based project whose expression of a social heroic contrasts with the subsequent gutting of collective endeavour as an organising cultural-political principle.¹²² I therefore sought to establish whether the language of big-State propaganda, with its arguments for *collective*, could be used to draw out this aspect of Apollo as something deserving of commemoration. Despite the mish-mash of eras and ideologies, Soviet photomontage had a number of resonances with Apollo and my approach to it. Both

¹²² My casting of Apollo in this role is backed by Roger Launius's summary of John Logsdon's *The Decision to Go to the Moon* (1970) in Roger D. Launius, "Interpreting the Moon Landings: Project Apollo and the Historians," *History and Technology* 22, no. 3 (2006), accessed September 20, 2021, doi: 10.1080/07341510600803143. Launius describes this work as one of two classic studies of Apollo in terms of policy history and analysis. He notes that "[a]t a fundamental level, Logsdon's study celebrates the use of federal power for public good" and observes that "[w]ithout perhaps seeking to do so, Logsdon offered an important perspective on a debate that has raged over the proper role of the federal government since the beginning of the republic, with no end in sight."

present a widely-circulated argument *for* their respective versions of a utopian society through a state-based cultural-political agenda.¹²³ Both are paeans to State-organised labour and to all qualifying citizens having a role to play in building and exporting a new world. Like early *ideas* of Soviet socialism, these programs were underwritten by notions of contributive justice and social democracy and this aspect of Apollo is raised in the works by Robert Rauschenberg and Norman Rockwell that I have discussed above. There is also a mutual veneration of technology and the building of *big things* to showcase cultural virtue. But if Apollo's visual propaganda fetishised ideas of objectivity, the Soviet works create a parallel Dionysian reality that is loud, affective, glorious.

At its broadest, propaganda means only to propagate a view, although it is broadly understood as involving an appeal to hearts over minds and it can carry additional suggestions of coercion or manipulation through use of lies, exaggerations or half-truths. It has been further suggested that it serves a need for “psychological closure, whether rational or not.”¹²⁴ Whether something is characterised as propaganda or cultural diplomacy may depend only on the sophistication of the packaging. The respective agendas of Cold War-era USA and USSR were different and I do not in any way suggest that they were morally equivalent. However, they were both informed by their own utopian belief in large-scale social engineering and their own underlying mythologies. Working with all three of my Apollo-Dionysian dichotomies, I offered Apollo an opportunity to speak about these matters from the heart.

I began my research into Soviet photomontage firstly by considering the works of early Soviet photomontage artists, including Alexander Rodchenko, Varvara Stepanova, Gustav Klutis, Valentina Kulagina and El Lissitzky against those of European Dada artists such as Hannah Hoch, Raoul Hausmann, and Kurt Schwitters. Both groups began experimenting with photomontage during the interwar years. Both linked its strategies to the fracturing of visual and lived experience by new media technologies and both saw it as a revolutionary weapon against bourgeois notions of artistic production. But here the

¹²³ Teasel Muir Harmony has noted, for example, how President Lyndon B. Johnson enlisted Apollo for his Great Society programs. Teasel Muir-Harmony, “Project Apollo, Cold War Diplomacy and the American Framing of Global Interdependence” (PhD diss., Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2014), Chapter 3, e.g., at 107–108, accessed February 14, 2022, <https://dspace.mit.edu/handle/1721.1/93814>.

¹²⁴ Jay Black, “Semantics and Ethics of Propaganda,” *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* 16, nos. 2&3 (2001), accessed February 27, 2022, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08900523.2001.9679608>.

similarities ended. The Soviet and Dada works have different rhetorical starting points and audiences. As agents of the new socialist state apparatus, the Soviet artists were uniquely positioned to produce art that was *for* a utopian state agenda. They saw themselves not as artists absorbed in modernist debates but as engineers lending their technical skills to the education of the proletariat through pro-State propaganda. Aiming for a “simultaneous collective reception” of their messaging, their works consisted of magazine illustrations and posters which drew openly on design and advertising techniques to exhort an illiterate and multi-lingual Soviet public, as well as foreign audiences, to internalise or take heed of their visions.¹²⁵ In doing so, they unselfconsciously seek to forge a collective identity through mutual imagining of the society they depict. By contrast, the Dada works were against the dystopia wrought on the world by states warring over their empires. While its practitioner’s approaches and politics were diverse, at a broad level, they present ideas of social-political consensus as dangerously *mindless* and full of *lies*. With the notable exception of John Heartfield’s photomontages, which advocate consensus through communist ideology directed against fascism, these works also remain largely moored in high-art discourse and are directed to a fine art audience.¹²⁶

With these different imperatives came distinct aesthetics and takes on objectivity. Katarzyna Weichert draws on work by Stanislaw Czekalski that suggests that Dada and Soviet photomontage “represent two different approaches to objectivity of photography.” In doing so, she endorses Czekalski’s observation that Dada photomontage functioned by “creating a critical distance to reality and freeing utopian imagination” while later Soviet photomontage operated by “raising the awareness above the wretchedness of everyday reality and inspiring enthusiasm towards the visions it clearly defined and with which it replaced reality.”¹²⁷ The Dada works implicitly critique photography’s claims to objectivity. They are usually pointedly two-dimensional and non-pictorial, with constituent images creating meaning through their interplay rather than their whole. They are also frequently dull-

¹²⁵ “Simultaneous collective reception”: Benjamin Buchloh, “From Faktura to Factography,” *October* 30 (Autumn 1984): 82–119, 94, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/778300>.

¹²⁶ E.g. Benjamin Buchloh, “Gerhard Richter’s “Atlas”: The Anomic Archive,” *October* 88 (Spring 1999): 117–145, 131 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/779227>: “The very avant-garde artists who initiated photomontage (e.g. Heartfield, Hoch, Klutis, Lissitzky, and Rodchenko) now diagnosed this anomic character of the Dadaist collage/montage technique as bourgeois avant-gardism, mounting a critique that called, paradoxically, for a reintroduction of the dimensions of narrative, communicative action, and instrumentalized logic within the structural organisation of montage aesthetics.”

¹²⁷ Katarzyna Weichert, “Photomontage: Between Fragmentation and Reconstruction of Experience,” *Eidos: A Journal for Philosophy of Culture*, 4, no. 1 (2020), 7–22, 13. doi:10.14394/eidos.jpc.2020.0002.

coloured, rough, and visually uneasy and use magazine and newspaper images to disrupt rather than submerge themselves in popular media narratives and constructions of reality. Soviet photomontage, by contrast, weaponises photography’s truth-claims to fabulate alternative realities. The Soviet artists (and Heartfield) use three-dimensional spaces and loosely or tightly ‘joined-up’ images to create works with what Katerina Romanenko has described as “both the documentary power of photography and the illusionism of painting and drawing.”¹²⁸ In a related vein, Benjamin Buchloh has described the inherent potential of these works as “iconic, documentary information.”¹²⁹



Fig. 35. Varvara Stepanova, *The Results of the First Five-Year Plan*, 1932.

Fig. 36. Ilya Kabakov, *The Man Who Flew Into Space From His Apartment*, 1985.

Buchloh and others have noted the shift in the techniques of Soviet photomontage as the worker’s paradise of early imaginings hardened into Stalinism. According to Buchloh, “the seams and the margins where the constructed nature of reality could become apparent – and therefore its potential for change obvious” were replaced by “the awe-inspiring monumentality of the gigantic, single-image panorama.” Buchloh notes the style of later Soviet works was appropriated by fascist regimes and American capitalism and appears to

¹²⁸ Katerina Romanenko, “Photomontage for the Masses: The Soviet Periodical Press of the 1930s,” *Design Issues*, 26 no. 1 (Winter 2010) 29–39, 34. She goes on to observe that “When the call for truthful, direct, and comprehensible imagery initiated by more traditional artists was enthusiastically supported by the masses and promoted by the government, photomontage provided avant-garde artists with a way of showing reality without returning to painterly realism.”

¹²⁹ Benjamin Buchloh, “From Faktura to Factography,” *October* 30 (Autumn 1984): 82–119, 103 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/778300> while noting a “gradual return to the iconic functions of the photograph, deleting altogether the indexical potential of the photograph.”

rely on this finding to dismiss illusionistic photomontage as an irretrievably corrupted form. A different view is offered by Heartfield scholar Sabine Kriebel who has argued for the critical potential of more “sutured” styles of photomontage both in discussing Heartfield’s works and highlighting photomontage’s present potential. In an article for a special issue of *History of Photography* devoted to the question “*Is Photomontage Over?*” Sabine Kriebel points to the “untapped potential” of its more illusionistic forms to advance left-wing agendas, linking back to Hartfield’s practice to make the point:

*“...the visually welded picture absorbs viewers’ attention in ways that are particular to illusionism – an illusionism exploited by the news media (then and now) to create image and information worlds that serve a particular agenda. But by internalising and ventriloquising those very terms, it was possible to issue a subversive critique and truly destabilise from within – to sing them their own song in a mutinous key.”*¹³⁰

I agree with Buchloh to the extent that illusionistic photomontage inevitably invites questions about its associations with totalitarianism. However, I considered this a positive in allowing me to moderate my arguments for Apollo as an emblem of the socially heroic by alluding to the program’s ideological excess. I also agree with Kriebel to the extent of her conclusion that illusionistic photomontage can serve a range of political imperatives. Beyond totalitarian ideologies and Kriebel’s “subversive critique” it has been used, for example, to promote Australian national mythologies, to critique colonial archives and legacies and to speak to the collapse of ideology as discussed further below. I was therefore re-assured of its potential to present my outgoing hegemon in terms of a socially heroic critique of the current hegemony of de-socialised global capital. Even so, I knew I was potentially playing with fire. In using photomontage, I sought to remain respectfully aware of the darker ends it has served as depicted, for example, in *The Man Who Flew to Space From His Apartment* by Ilya Kabakov (fig. 36 above). This work shows a Soviet bedroom from which the occupant has slingshotted themselves into space to escape the grim realities that can no longer be papered over by propaganda posters shouting from the bedroom walls. My abandonment of attempts to produce my own propaganda posters on this basis is discussed in Chapter 3.

¹³⁰ Sabine T. Kriebel, “Sparks of Discomfiture: On the Promise of Photomontage (or Back to Suture),” *History of Photography* 43 no. 2 (2019), 221–226, 225. doi: 10.1080/03087298.2019.1691863.

Creative precedents: constructing the hegemon

My creative works draw mostly on Soviet works that represent a mid-way point between initial constructivist photomontage experiments and later illusionism. These works still generate a sense of heightened, hallucinatory realism.¹³¹ However, realism is simultaneously disavowed through visible seams, distorted perspectives, flat blocks of colour, repeated images, or combinations of images clearly derived from different sources. Varvara Stepanova's *The Results of the First Five-Year Plan* (fig. 35) for example, combines photographic images with flat and illustrative blocks of bright red, white and muted yellow. Of the crowd assembled in the square, some are sepia toned while some are black and white, declaring their diverse origins while also giving the impression of a massing and meshing of different regiments into a single purpose. The largest photographs, which exceed the rules of perspective to tower above the crowd, are of Lenin (pictured furrow-browed and mid-oration) at top right and a pair of megaphones at top left which together suggest both speaking loudly and speaking down. A group of normal-sized individuals, who may be ordinary citizens or officials, occupy a raised dais which acts as a reminder of revolutionary hierarchies. A two-dimensional red silhouette of an electricity pylon is also given prominence. While a cynic might wonder whether there were no real ones to photograph, the crisp diagrammed design is perhaps a glimpse of the orderly technological future that the five-year plans will eventually yield. The red triangle at front acts as a road-block, barring entry to the square. While there is room to breathe in the top of the work, the scene below is claustrophobic, and the whole is tilted. The people at bottom left slide down and out of view, following the direction of Lenin's gaze.

Some of my subsequent creative works combined fewer elements and moved towards heightened illusionism, drawing on later Soviet works such as Valentina Kulagina's *Panel for the Siberian Pavilion* (fig. 37) which looks at first glance like a photographic post-card. The crowds and urban setting of fig. 35 have been replaced by a hazy, bucolic depiction of toiling peasants. The landscape and clouds in the background are softly-focussed and shimmering. But the euphoric, crackling sunflowers at front, with their slightly wilted leaves, evoke the

¹³¹ See e.g. Katerina Romanenko, "Photomontage for the Masses: The Soviet Periodical Press of the 1930s," *Design Issues*, 26 no. 1 (Winter 2010), 37–38: "Following the Socialist Realist doctrine's insistence on highlighting a celebratory mood in every aspect of social construction, editors consistently relied on the photomontage artist's ability to condense and heighten the emotional impact of images."

heat that created them and the technology that captured them—they are in sharp-focus and high-resolution contrast to the remainder of the scene. This contrast, along with the doubling of the peasant at front, signals the scene’s constructed nature more tentatively. The identical peasants also suggest a joyful merging of identity through labour, or, less benignly, their de-individuated interchangeability. *Young Gliders* (fig. 38) by Alexander Rodchenko and Varvara Stepanova is another late era work that I found interesting because it is both so obviously constructed and so weirdly ‘believable’.



Fig. 37. Valentina Kulagina, panel created for the entrance of the Siberian Pavilion at the VDNKh (All-Union Agricultural Exhibition), 1938.

Fig. 38. Alexander Rodchenko and Varvara Stepanova, *Young Gliders*, 1933.

The styles pioneered by Soviet photomontage artists have also been used close to home to promote Australian national agendas and mythologies. Gert Sellheim used a relatively unsutured version of the style in design work for *Australia 1788-1938 Historical Review* to propagate an official version of nation-building achievements and ambitions.¹³² The work relies mostly on the arrangement of multiple ‘whole’ images within a work to create meaning. This technique was also utilised by the Soviet photomontage artists, particularly in works for *USSR in Construction*, and I experimented with a similar approach in my works for *Air-to-Ground*. Five-year plans and glorious leaders may be absent from Sellheim’s work, but there are some familiar tropes which echo Buchloh’s concerns about

¹³² Oswald L Ziegler under the authority of Australia’s 150th Anniversary Celebrations Council and in collaboration with its Publicity Committee, *Australia 1788-1938 Historical Review* (Sydney: Simmons Limited, c. 1938).

photomontage. On the page reproduced at fig. 39, marking the Empire Games of 1938 (which followed Hitler's 1936 Olympics), a parade of athletes resembles a line of tanks while the athlete at bottom right appears straight from fascist central casting. On the whole, however, I took this book as supporting the notion that photomontage, while it may frequently signal an argument for the collective, can serve a range of political systems and agendas.

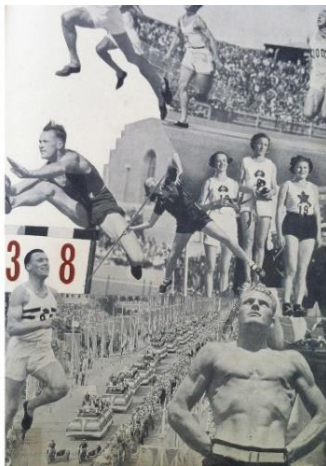


Fig. 39. Gert Sellheim, page from *Australia 1788-1938 Historical Review*, c 1938.

Fig. 40. Frank Hurley, *Over the Top*, c 1918.

Official Australian WWI photographer Frank Hurley used a highly illusionistic style in making montages from multiple negatives in the context of creating and cementing national mythologies (fig. 40 above). The literature notes the clash between the Dionysian Hurley and the Apollonian Charles Bean, Australia's official WWI historian. In *Australian First-World-War Photography: Frank Hurley and Charles Bean*, Martyn Jolly notes Hurley shared Bean's concerns to do justice to the Australian Imperial Force's (AIF's) sacrifices while differing utterly as to means. Bean was adamant Hurley's "fakes" mocked the imperative to collect "sacred records" of the AIF's activities. According to Jolly, "[i]f Bean revered the photograph as inviolable historical record and immutable spiritual artefact, to Hurley it was a manipulable, spectacular showcase."¹³³ Jolly describes a limited compromise based on Bean's understanding that the composites would be labelled as such and would at least be made from photographs taken in action. This search for an accommodation between Dionysian and Apollonian versions of authenticity reflected my own investigations into how

¹³³ Martyn Jolly, "Australian First-World-War Photography: Frank Hurley and Charles Bean," *History of Photography*, 23, no. 2 (Summer 1999), 141.

my works could enlist Dionysian elements to commemorate my subject while retaining an Apollonian spine, including by limiting core source materials to original NASA photographs.

Creative precedents: challenging the hegemon



Fig. 41. Sammy Baloji, *Untitled 21* from the *Memoire* series, 2006.



Fig. 42. Yee I-Lann, *Picturing Power #4: Wherein one tables an indexical record of data-turned assets and rules like the boss you now say that you are*, from the *Picturing Power* series, 2013.

Beyond work that has sought to create consensus, I identified a number of practitioners who have used illusionistic photomontage to critique cultural-political status quos. Kriebel has mentioned Martha Rosler, whose original ‘*House Beautiful: Bringing the War Home*’ series (1967–72), from the same era as the Apollo program, highlighted America’s disconnection from the war it was waging in Vietnam.¹³⁴ Artists have also used illusionistic photomontage to address colonialism and the colonial gaze including through a re-appropriation of colonial archives. For example, Sammy Baloji’s *Memoire* (fig. 41 above) uses a mix of archival photographs of Congolese labourers and contemporary photographs of mining sites to link the brutality of colonialism with the continuing exploitation of capital. Yee I-Lann’s *Picturing Power* (fig. 42 above) uses a less sutured style along with biting, pseudo-documentary titles “to tease out the narratives that are occluded from dominant viewpoints.”¹³⁵ Michael Cooke’s tightly sutured *Majority Rule* (fig. 43 below) highlights the omission of First Nations people from the Australian polity while inserting them into it, using multiple images of a single subject to point to the constructed nature of this reality. Leah King-Smith’s *Patterns of Connection* (fig. 44 below) offers a more classically commemorative take, which the artist describes as “an attempt to recover Aboriginal people from the archives and reposition them in a positive, living, spiritual realm”.¹³⁶



Fig. 43. Michael Cook, *Parliament* from the *Majority Rule* series, 2014.

Fig. 44. Leah King-Smith, *Barak* from the *Patterns of Connection* series, 1991.

¹³⁴ Rosler revisited this series between 2004 and 2008 to produce a similar if less successful take on America’s wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

¹³⁵ Catalogue for *Picturing Power*, Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York, February 27 through April 12, 2014, unpaginated, page 8 of pdf, accessed March 27, 2022, <https://www.trfineart.com/exhibition/yee-lann-picturing-power/#info>.

¹³⁶ Libby Stewart, “Indigenous women artists: Leah King-Smith and Andrea Fisher,” July 6, 2018, Museum of Australian Democracy website, accessed March 27, 2022, <https://www.moadoph.gov.au/blog/Indigenous-women-artists-Leah-King-Smith-and-Andrea-Fisher/#>

Two-dimensional and video photomontage has also been deployed critically by Russian collective AES+F who use the aesthetics of high-end fashion advertising to reveal a Matrix-type world of globalised, capitalist, etherised nightmare.¹³⁷ The work at fig. 45 below features children in a video game, toying with heroism which the artists suggest is no longer available in today's "glimmer world". Through this piece and many other works, AES+F depict a *privatised* or neo-liberal version of Apollo's political internationalism which I read, in part, as a complex lament for banished idealism or even ideology. In the name of a process that cynically purports to bring prosperity and individual freedoms to all, AES+F's multi-ethnic model-characters are stripped of all historical and cultural connective tissue leaving only naked items of visual exchange. These items are jerked through eras, histories, mythologies and the nowhere-spaces of airports, perpetually available to colour the fantasies of those with sufficient coin. In their use of highly sutured photomontage, the works allude to ideology while also stripping it away to present a monumentalised reality of *surface* that is simultaneously seductive and repulsive, while signalling their construction through glitching video, the jarring absence of things cut out, and their preposterous excess.



Fig. 45. AES+F, *Episode 3, #8* from the *Action Half Life* series, 2003.

¹³⁷ The nightmare analogy is also used in Amar Toor, 'Meet the Russian Collective Making Nightmare Fuel,' *The Verge*, July 11, 2014, accessed February 27, 2022, <https://www.theverge.com/2014/7/11/5886887/aes-f-liminal-space-trilogy-interview>.

Closing observations

Many of my own concerns in remembering Apollo reflected those of outlier artists who documented Apollo in its day. Robert Rauschenberg addressed Apollo's complexities in a manner that combined data sets and diagrams with more romantic imagery, echoing my own interest in generating commemorative affect while remaining true to my subject. Norman Rockwell, meanwhile, linked Apollo to the social heroic in a frank embrace of its sentimental and nostalgic potentials that I sought to emulate more tentatively in my socially heroic works. My exploration of current commemorative concerns clarified the gap that I was seeking to fill in remembering Apollo as an outgoing hegemon while highlighting the need for me to present my subject in a manner that remained sensitive to these concerns. It also enabled me to situate my work among other attempts to re-interpret existing monuments and to understand Apollo's photographic archive as the monument I was seeking to re-interpret. While creative precedents in this area were slim, recent works by Nina Sanadze fortified my resolve that it was possible to successfully and subtly re-interpret mixed legacies. My studies of photomontage as my medium for re-interpreting Apollo's photographs suggested that while certain styles of photomontage evoke a bleeding of the social heroic into the totalitarian, this was not inevitable and could be used in any case to acknowledge the slipperiness of the distinction.

Chapter 3 – Creative Works

Overview

This Chapter documents the creative works produced for this thesis and my search for commemorative modes and visual languages that could adequately remember Apollo without lapsing into revanchism. The works fall into two broad categories that reflect the primary modes of commemoration identified in the AWM's teaching materials: joyful celebration and solemn ceremony. **Part 1** records my attempts to celebrate Apollo's local history in terms of an attenuated version of the social heroic. It covers some early analogue works, including the series *Remember Kindly Honeysuckle Creek!* and my subsequent exploration of digital collage, triptychs and panoramas. It then addresses my works for the group show *Promised the Moon* which applied these techniques and tested a range of approaches to celebrating my subject without overstepping. It concludes by analysing some 'out-takes' from the social heroic which in various ways, overshot their mark. **Part 2** details three solo shows in which I investigated solemn ceremony as an alternative commemorative mode that focussed more quietly on endings. It covers *Apollo 8* (2018) in which my characters roil through a churning end-times as I tested how hard I could push them. It then covers *Air-to-Ground* (2019) in which the astronauts accept their mortality and wait to be merged into the loveliness of the Honeysuckle Creek site. It concludes with my final works, *LOS* (2022) which re-interpret Robert Rauschenberg's *Stoned Moon* works to transform Apollo's documentary images into reliquial objects that can be adequately recalled only through physical tending.

3.1 The Social Heroic

Context

I began this thesis by investigating whether it was possible to celebrate Apollo as an assertion of local polity, with local citizens conceived as the primary group whose collective memory I was seeking to influence. This was an Apollonian aim to the extent it invoked ideas of governance, objective discourse and rational social progress. It pushed back, however, against Apollonian objectivity and universalism to affectively focus on a smaller sphere of

potential shared concern and the forgotten history of Honeysuckle Creek. I have noted moves away from traditional monumental forms, with their allusions to the heroic, within contemporary commemorative practice. My research was consistent with this impetus to the extent it sought to dismantle and re-imagine Apollo's monumental photographic archive. I have argued, however, that Apollo's concern to *avoid* the heroic was central to its projection of an official version of mid-twentieth century Western liberal psyche. Given my wish to visualise the fragmenting of this psyche, I therefore flipped back against contemporary currents to present Apollo in terms of a small-scale social heroic. In doing so, I sought to balance an acknowledgment of the dangers of heroic thinking, no matter how well disguised, with an assertion of the social heroic as a bulwark against neo-liberal excess, and an antidote to the nihilism and ideological relativism that characterise current culture wars.

I have noted that in its day, Apollo was not a subject that could be ignored or overlooked, and that it therefore falls outside the contemporary remit of including forgotten communities and people as subjects of commemoration. Honeysuckle Creek's role in the Apollo program, however, is also a neglected history. I therefore felt that exploring the socially heroic within the specific context of the station's history gave these works a degree of leeway that would not otherwise have been in play. In addition to the creative precedents mentioned in the preceding Chapter, these works are informed by American Post Office murals produced in the 1930s as part of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal. Apart from providing employment for artists, the murals were intended to lift community spirits during the great depression through their depictions of *local* historical narratives and their linking of these narratives to State instrumentalities. Like other monuments mentioned above, these murals are, to use the *Monument Lab* definition, statements of power and presence in public.¹³⁸ Some murals have also been the subject of recent protests centred on their depictions of African-American and First Nations people which undermine their ability to function as shared heritage or to speak to ideas of polity in the present.¹³⁹ While my works

¹³⁸ Monument Lab, *National Monument Audit* (2021), 4, accessed April 7, 2022, <https://monumentlab.com/monumentlab-nationalmonumentaudit.pdf>.

¹³⁹ See e.g., Vivian Ho, "San Francisco School Board Reverses Plan to Paint Over Mural Showing Slaves and Violence," August 15, 2019, *The Guardian*, accessed April 24, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/aug/14/san-francisco-school-board-mural-george-washington-high-school>

are not so overtly contentious, I am conscious that their assertions of polity may be limited by their relation of a fundamentally Anglo history.¹⁴⁰

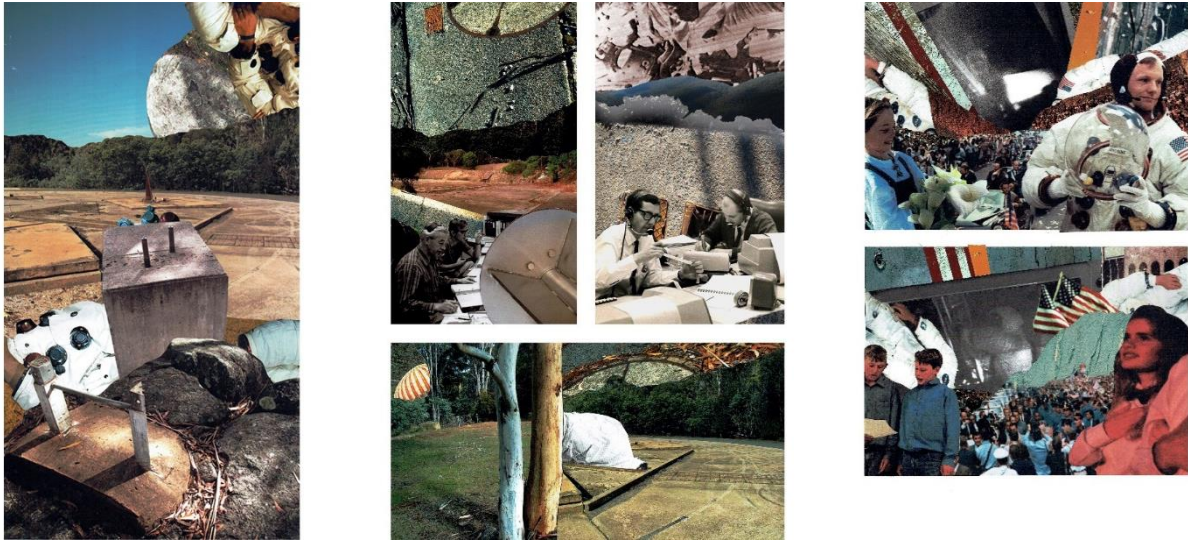


Fig. 46. Early analogue works, 2017.



Fig. 47. *Honeysuckle Creek Opening: Saxons* from the series *Remember Kindly Honeysuckle Creek!*, 2017.

¹⁴⁰ Anne Zahalka's works *The Bathers* (1989) and *The New Bathers* (2013) (from *Playground of the Pacific 2015*, Manly Art Gallery and Museum, Sydney, September 4 through October 25, 2015) are instructive here. These photographic works cleverly re-interpret Charles Meier's painting, *Australian Beach Pattern* (1940) with its heroic depiction of athletic Anglo-Australians on the beach to (among other things) include Australians from different backgrounds. Similar possibilities, however, were not available to me given I was working with historical images.

Small step: *Remember Kindly Honeysuckle Creek!*

My early works investigating the social heroic are small analogue collages that experiment with different emotional tones and source materials. They include one resolved set of eight works, *Remember Kindly Honeysuckle Creek!*, which depicts moments in the history of Honeysuckle Creek Tracking Station such as the station's construction and official opening. The title plays with the injunctive texts of propaganda posters to make a more limited plea. As highly sutured pieces, they embrace the visual language of Soviet photomontage to point to ideas of collectivity and social engineering. I used my own photographs of the present day station site as a stage-set for these works. This was originally a reluctant compromise given the absence of a suitable archive of photographs of the site from which I could draw. However, it proved apt in clearly situated my remembering within a fluctuating present that was also backgrounded by Apollo's ruins.

My foreground images were drawn mostly from Colin Mackellar's *A Tribute to Honeysuckle Creek* website and include personal stories within wider circles of history. The work at fig. 47 above, for example, features John Saxon, Honeysuckle's Operations Supervisor and his wife Elizabeth. They are presented here at a luncheon for the station's opening. While John gazes confidently towards the camera, Elizabeth looks distant, as though she can already sense her husband's absence as he submerges himself in Apollo over coming years. She wears a wedding ring around her neck, which is echoed in the aircraft engine at top centre-left. The couple re-appear at right on a cherry-picker with Ginette Geasley, wife of tracker Martin Geasley, whose slide photographs of the opening feature in this and other works. At left, Honeysuckle's first director stands with a security officer and a lady in a bright red dress. At back, a crowd gathers under the antenna to hear speeches from dignitaries including Prime Minister Harold Holt, while the crew of Apollo 1, who died in a launch-pad test two months earlier, look down on the scene like idols.



Fig. 48. Additional works from the series *Remember Kindly Honeysuckle Creek!*, 2017.

Questions of scale

These works raised an early question about the scale of my works which was less a deliberate choice than the result of the construction process that I had developed before commencing my thesis. This process involved sourcing large numbers of potentially useful images which I sifted through and discarded as part of my making process before combining a small number of selected images together with spray adhesive. There were aspects to working at smaller scale that suited my wish to visualise Apollo's subjectivities. When combined with my analogue processes, it spoke of scrap-booking with its feminine, craft-based connotations and its concern to preserve familial and intimate memories rather than broader societal histories. It also mirrored the intimate domestic scale at which Apollo imagery, in the form of photographs and magazine articles, was primarily consumed in its

day. However, given my interest in collective remembrance more generally, it seemed appropriate to experiment with works that were larger and more clearly public-facing.

I initially sought for ways to make larger works by building on my existing methods. My first challenge was the generally low resolution of images available from online sources which I had used to date. Scanning these images at higher resolution before re-printing them allowed me to enlarge some images but this was not generally effective where original photographs were technically less than perfect.¹⁴¹ While low-resolution images usefully suggested a loss of signal over time and sometimes worked well when combined with crisper images that gave the eye something to grab onto, they could also look lazy. I therefore worked to source higher-resolution images. I visited the US National Archives as part of my fieldwork in 2018 and scanned a large selection of NASA images from slides. Colin Mackellar also provided me with high resolution scans from his archive where available. In addition, I was able to re-scan photographs and slides from collections held by the daughters of two Honeysuckle trackers. A second challenge associated with scaling up works with my existing processes was that larger images became unmanageable and toxic once weighted with spray adhesive, while other adhesives did not produce the smooth finish I wanted. I addressed this issue in my final works through use of rigid substrates onto which images could be directly transferred through other means.



Fig.49. *Gemini 8* trilogy from the series *Life of Neil Armstrong*, 2016.

I also experimented with three additional methods for enlarging my works which produced further research leads: digital collage, triptychs and panoramas. I had initially envisaged using exclusively analogue processes for my thesis works. I had been working with analogue photomontage for some time, making works about Apollo using images clipped from National Geographic Magazines (e.g. fig. 49 above). I thought of these works as

¹⁴¹ Although I was eventually able to improve some images using Photoshop.

salvaging the sacred, scopic relics of the universalist West, and analogue works made from increasingly precious physical *things* made sense in this context. Analogue also initially appeared to resonate in a number of ways with my thesis project. While Apollo exulted in its technology, it was still pre-digital and its systems still had a degree of ‘handmadeness’ to it. This was confirmed through my interviews with Honeysuckle trackers who contrasted their hand-tuned machine interfaces with contemporary ‘front-end’ programming practices. As outlined in Chapter 1 Apollo also made room for human intervention even when it was not objectively necessary. Analogue seemed similar in requiring physical cutting and pasting when a superficially similar result could have been obtained more easily through digital means. Ultimately, however, I realised that unlike my earlier work, my thesis works relied on digitised images of artefacts rather than the artefacts themselves. Within this context, analogue had a weird structural nostalgia to it that I judged could still be mined but could also be departed from.

While I began making digital collages with Photoshop to avoid the challenges associated with gluing larger images together, I realised that it spoke eloquently to my dichotomies of objective and subjective knowledge, and expert and intuitive knowledge that I have outlined in Chapter 1. Photoshop’s disembodied machine mediation makes it a more calculated and ‘objective’ process than analogue. Its results are also verifiable, explicable and reproducible, as addressed, for example, in the exploded views for my final works. However, ‘photoshopping’ is also synonymous with doctoring of images and a resultant destruction of objectivity. The Soviet Union pioneered hand-doctoring of official photographs for directly political purposes, removing those who had fallen from grace and re-inserting them again as needed. This now seemed a relatively innocent practice given photoshopping and increasingly more extreme techniques are a daily digital reality used to manipulate election outcomes as well as personal ‘brands’.

My results with digital collage were mixed. As a total Photoshop novice, I was initially unable to control the program and it made some productive interventions I would never have thought of by myself. However, after six months of online courses and extensive trial and error, I broadly understood what it would allow me to do and could control my results within this framework. Technically, the program allowed me far greater flexibility in constructing works as I could now instantaneously re-size, reverse, or correct my constituent images. It also allowed me to move beyond size constraints associated with gluing

components together and gave me additional tools for making low quality images more useable. At times, however, the works exuded a dead, superficial, ‘blendedness’. I used digital processes for most of the works discussed below and concluded that they worked best when used in combination with other processes for sizing-up the works and with careful attention to other choices.

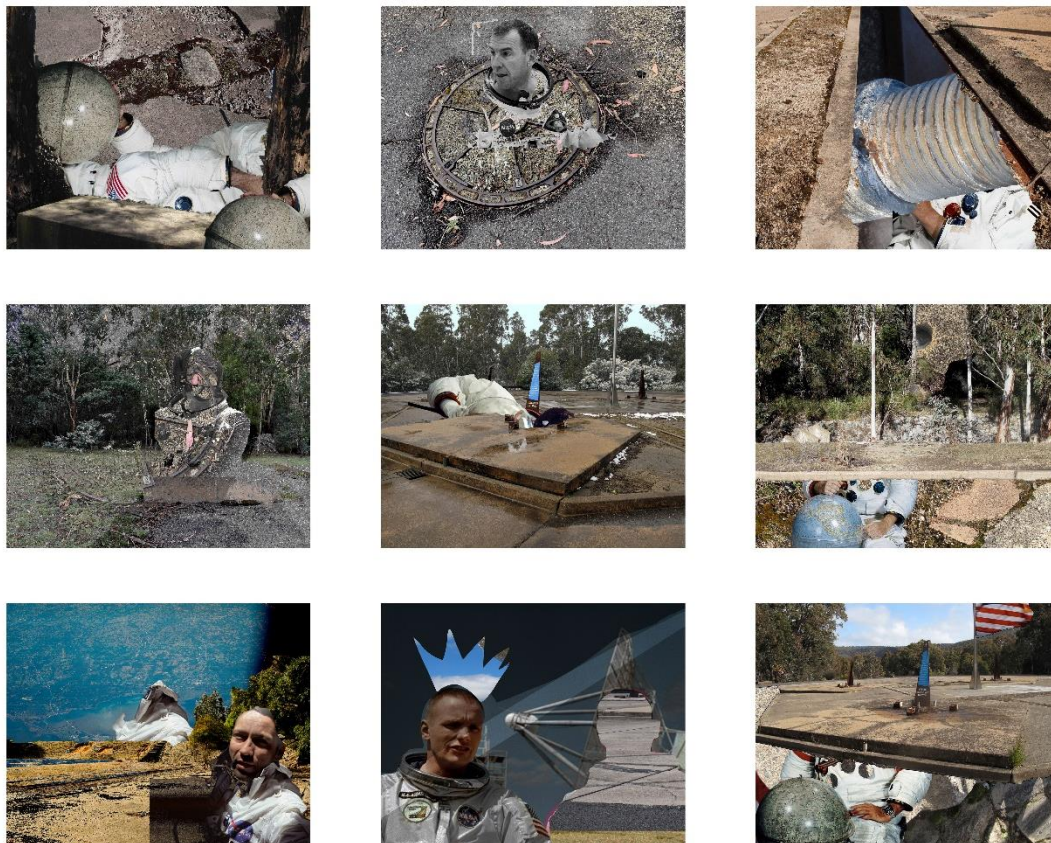


Fig. 50. Digital collage experiments, 2017–18.

While I also identified triptychs as a way to size up the works this process again proved useful in allowing me to propose ideas of the sacred and the bodily as counters to Apollonian hubris. Triptychs are strongly associated with Christian altar panels from the middle-ages and Renaissance. In this context, they represent the holy trinity while echoing the architectural layout of early churches through their hinged panels which were closed inwards when not in use, and folded outwards only when the altar was sanctified. They typically have a larger central panel which addresses the heart of a biblical story, with wing panels providing supplementary information. Artists such as Hieronymus Bosch, Max Beckman and Francis Bacon also used triptychs in ways which appear to link directly or

indirectly to Christian ritual through their exploration of violence, sin and bodily abjection. Beyond these direct metaphysical allusions, the number three struck me as breaking up rigid dichotomies without overly confusing things. It seemed Apollonian in its fundamental stability and intimation of core possibilities but Dionysian in its potential for disruption and for looking beyond givens. It also neatly reflected the make-up of Apollo crews: commander, command module pilot and lunar module pilot.



Fig. 51. *Jus Soli*, 2018.

I used these associations in the early orphan work at fig. 51 above, which follows a traditional alter-piece layout, to explore ideas of earthly rot as a counter to Apollonian hubris that I developed in *Air-to-Ground*. In this piece, an Apollo crew has fallen to earth at Honeysuckle Creek in the spot where the antenna that tracked them once stood. The centre panel is a ritual ground where something is playing out, like a *plein-air* Bacon or a Greek amphitheatre, pointing to Apollo as spectacle. The side panels pan in, like forensic photographs from a crash investigation. The work features three orbs that track unevenly downwards, from the red helmet at top left through the lunar globe in the centre panel that appears to be floating away from its keeper to the blue Earth at right with a defiant astronaut fist still upon it. The concrete beams in the side panels point directly downward in a ‘V’, into the earth, like the nose of an aircraft. The violence of the crash is ameliorated by the softness of the landscape and the afternoon shadows into which the crew will shortly be absorbed.

My third tool for enlarging my works, panoramas, yielded some surprising additional resonances which spoke to my local-universalist dichotomy (fig. 52). I initially sought to make panoramas purely to extend the ground of my ‘stage sets’ and thus mimic a public-mural layout. My first panoramas were thus shot as standard eye-level landscapes. I was

pleasantly taken aback, however, by the way that Photoshop stitched the component images together with scalloped edges and strange flattenings and tiltings of three-dimensional space. I returned to shoot many additional sequences of the ground which revealed the exquisite features of the site in a way that would not otherwise have been possible, giving them a simultaneous abstraction and coherence. Most pleasingly, I realised that they echoed NASA's use of panoramas stitched from individual photographs to document the objective features of lunar and Martian surfaces. I showed a set of the panoramas pinned to room-dividers at Namadgi National Park Visitor's Centre to coincide with the fiftieth anniversary of Apollo 11, experimenting with a 'citizen scientist' presentation. While some of these panoramas are landscapes, many focus exclusively on the ground, contemplating whether a heightened focus on the local is a troubling response to the failure of more outward-looking projects, whether the local has always deserved the same attention that astronauts once lavished on the Moon, or whether the local is now the only solid ground that is available.

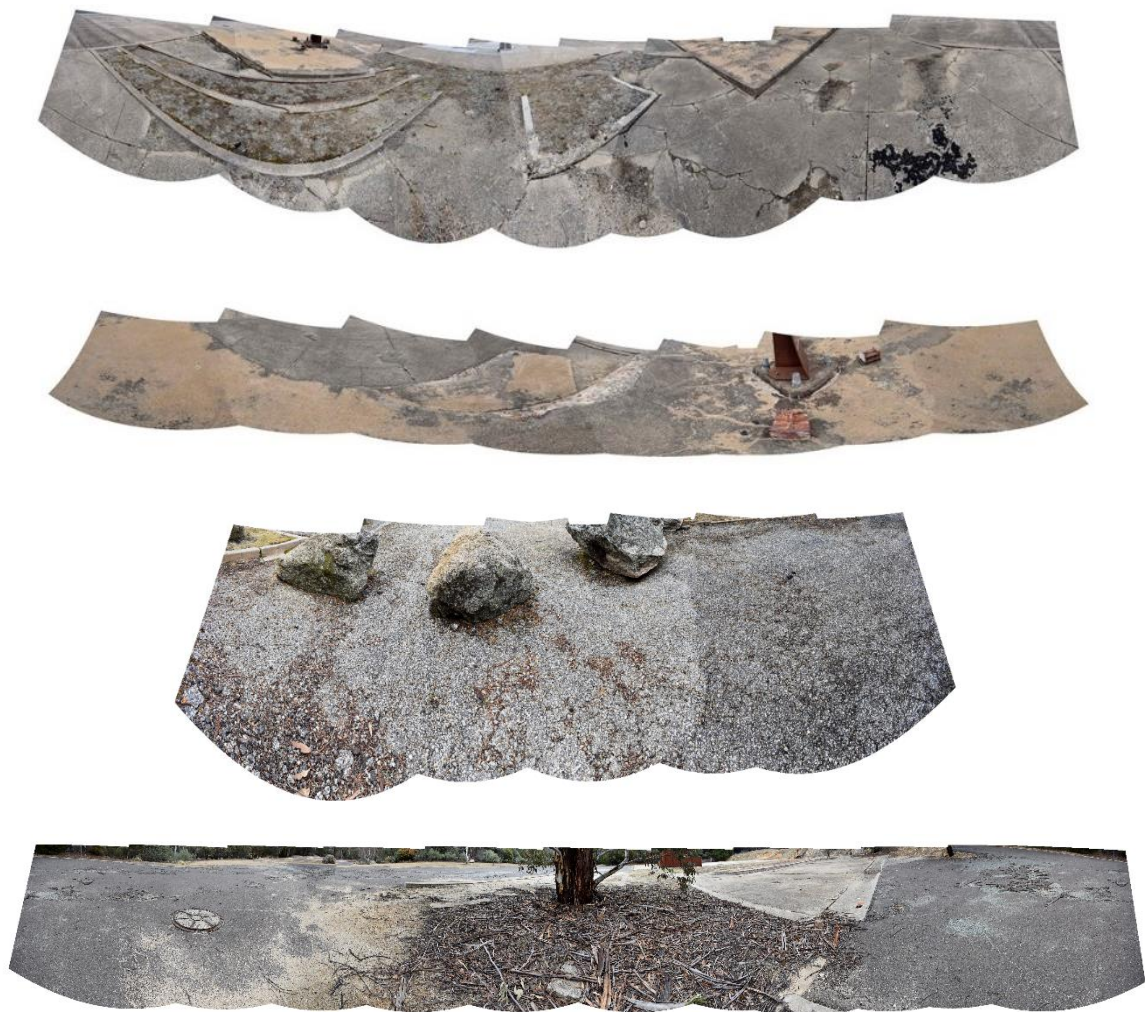


Fig. 52. Honeysuckle Creek panoramas, 2018–19.

Larger leap: *Promised the Moon*

Having developed the above techniques for sizing up my works, I returned to my investigations of the social heroic, commenced in *Remember Kindly*, through my works for the group show *Promised the Moon*. In early 2018 my office mate at the Australian National University (ANU), Ursula Frederick proposed a show of Canberra artists to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of Apollo 11. Ursula's father had been among the US personnel who worked at Honeysuckle's wing station, Tidbinbilla, during the Apollo era and she had previously made work about Honeysuckle Creek. Her work was cited in the decision to heritage list the site as evidence that the site was active in public memory. I assisted with most aspects of planning and execution for what would become *Promised the Moon*, which Ursula curated, and which ran over the period of the anniversary at the ANU School of Art and Design Gallery.

I have mentioned that Honeysuckle Creek's forgotten, or stolen history gave me a degree of leeway in exploring ideas of heroic commemoration. The process by which Honeysuckle's history was forgotten and remembered again during the period of the anniversary also offered a neat example of how public memory can be shaped, including by creative works, and how it can so blithely diverge from history. I will therefore briefly digress to explore these questions which are important to situating my works, particularly my works for *Promised the Moon*. I have mentioned the tenacious misconception that the footage of Neil Armstrong's first steps on the Moon selected for international broadcast was captured by Parkes Radio Telescope. This alt-fact was principally generated by the 2000 Australian film *The Dish*.¹⁴² The film, which describes itself as based on true events, is a light hearted take on Australia's contribution to Apollo 11, featuring small-town types, sheep grazing in the background and technicians playing cricket in the Parkes dish. In fairness to its creators, its storyline may reflect nothing more than Parkes' (but not Honeysuckle's) availability as a film set. But the persistence with which its storyline has been repeated as truth may speak to a willingness to ignore history for a better story.¹⁴³ Honeysuckle Creek was a NASA facility

¹⁴² Working Dog Films, 2020. See Honeysuckle tracker Mike Dinn's detailed critique at <http://members.pcug.org.au/~mdinn/TheDish/>.

¹⁴³ The reasons why the Honeysuckle feed was used are complex and are covered in depth on Colin Mackellar's website and in Andrew Tink, *Honeysuckle Creek: The Story of Tom Reid, a Little Dish and Neil Armstrong's First Step* (Sydney: Newsouth, 2018). A quick summary is also available on the National Museum of Australia's website, accessed April 10, 2022, <https://www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/honeysuckle-creek>.

whereas Parkes was Australian-built and owned. While attributing the first steps footage to Parkes may therefore feed a wish to foreground Australia's role in Apollo it also makes for a more colourful tale.

The Parkes myth was given further weight in the lead-up to the anniversary by some media outlets but history also made some decent ground. The Australian Broadcasting Commission, a supposed paragon of quality journalism, aired a shamelessly fake-news piece for *The 7.30 Report* which clearly implied that footage of Prime Minister Gorton's visit to Honeysuckle on the day of Apollo 11 was taken at Parkes. Most local and national TV and radio outlets, awash with the topic, eventually did better and many pieces included interviews with the Honeysuckle trackers. Politician turned author Andrew Tink released a history of Honeysuckle Creek. The Australian Mint produced coins with an illustration based on a photograph of Honeysuckle's Mike Dinn and John Saxon at a computer console. Australia Post issued a collection of stamps, one of which featured a television set showing the Honeysuckle feed captioned "Telecast via Honeysuckle Creek ACT." While the Parkes myth may never be entirely defeated, these were important victories.

Many public events and exhibits were staged throughout Canberra to mark the anniversary while the trackers arranged some additional commemorations. The National Museum of Australia exhibited images and artefacts from Australian space tracking facilities. Questacon hosted Luke Jerram's Museum of the Moon. Geoscience Australia allowed the public to touch its Moon rock and participated along with other local rock-holding institutions including ANU in a Moon Rock Trail. ANU ran a collection of beyond-Earth-themed events during a 'Moon Week', into which *Promised the Moon* was eventually incorporated. The Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation presented an open day at Tidbinbilla. ACT Heritage also offered grants for projects highlighting the ACT region's role in Apollo 11, funding, among other things, two short documentary films about key Honeysuckle trackers, and *Promised the Moon*. The trackers coordinated their own week of festivities including the site visit described in my prologue and a formal luncheon on the day itself. An historical message from Neil Armstrong and a video message from NASA mission-controller Gene Kranz were screened, acknowledging Honeysuckle's role in obtaining the first steps footage. The original footage of the first step was screened in exact synch with its timing fifty years ago, with Armstrong placing his boot on the Moon between mains and dessert at 12.56 pm AEST.

While many Australian and international art exhibitions were staged to coincide with the anniversary, most appeared to focus relatively widely on the Moon and space travel in cultural imaginings.¹⁴⁴ By contrast, *Promised the Moon*, curated by Ursula Frederick and supported by ANU and ACT Heritage, was a specific response to Apollo 11 as an historical event with a focus on the role of ACT facilities.¹⁴⁵ This show ran from June to July 2019 and featured works by 14 Canberra-based artists, including myself, whose works ranged across video, collage, portrait photography, scanning, installation, print-making and ceramics. The show aimed to activate heritage in the present, with broad sub-themes including the role of television in linking people to each other and to the astronauts; the Honeysuckle site and its resonances; glitches in transmission and memory; transmission between earth and sky, past and present; and commemoration and celebration.

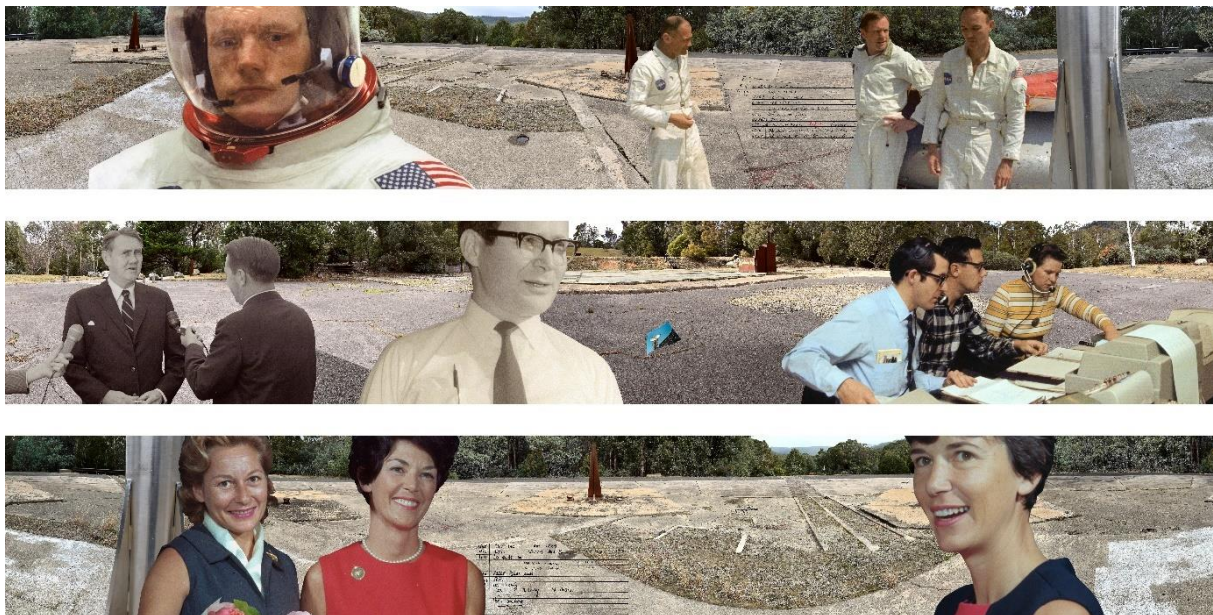


Fig. 53. *How Do You Read Me Through Honeysuckle Now?*, 2019.

¹⁴⁴ For an overview of Australian shows, including *Promised the Moon*, see Andrew Stephens, “Australia Remembers the Moon Landing, 50 Years On,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, May 31, 2019, accessed April 17, 2022, <https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/art-and-design/australia-remembers-the-moon-landing-50-years-on-20190524-p51qsa.html> (noting repetition of the Parkes myth). I have not dwelt here on additional Australian shows which focussed on Apollo artefacts and ephemera.

¹⁴⁵ While Craft ACT’s *Terra Celestial* was also within this category, it was not presented until 2020.



Fig. 54. *How Do You Read Me Through Honeysuckle Now?* (detail), 2019.

Within this wider communal context, my works for *Promised the Moon* develop themes of the socially heroic in highlighting Honeysuckle Creek’s role in Apollo 11. Drawing out the universalism-localism pairing discussed in Chapter 2, they assert and celebrate Apollo’s local history as a locus for civic pride salvageable from the background ruins of a wider Apollonian vision. The main work is a large triptych, *How Do You Read Me Through Honeysuckle Now?* (figs. 53 and 54) which takes its title from the Apollo 11 Air-to-Ground mission transcript as mission control addresses the astronauts on day five of their journey. It uses images sourced from NASA/US National Archives and the National Archives of Australia, extracts from Honeysuckle’s logbook and my own panoramas of the present-day station site. The work pictures trackers, astronauts and astronauts’ wives at the Honeysuckle site. The centre panel features Honeysuckle Creek personnel who link the astronauts to their wives and the rest of the world. Ed Von Renouard, Honeysuckle’s video-technician whose quick thinking ensured that Honeysuckle’s television feed of the first steps was available for broadcast, occupies the middle, presented both as an individual and an archetype of an Apollo engineer down to the pens in his pocket. Other trackers scramble at their desks while Prime Minister John Gorton at left pays an unexpected visit to Honeysuckle Creek (not Parkes) on the day of the landing. Armstrong, to the fore, is typically inscrutable. The full crew clustered at the base of their command module during a training exercise are more relaxed although as in life, Aldrin is at an awkward remove from his crewmates. The wives

appear at right in the concluding panel, their inner turmoil masked by immaculate grooming and dutiful smiles but at least occupying their own space in the story. A photograph of the Honeysuckle antenna, long since removed, floats across the site like mementos left by astronauts on the lunar surface.¹⁴⁶



Fig. 55. *Promised the Moon* install shots (credit: Brenton McGeachie), 2019.

How Do You Read Me? included a number of experiments that built on the outcomes of *Remember Kindly!* while deploying the techniques I had developed for sizing up my works. It investigates whether images of the *astronauts* could be incorporated into depictions of the socially heroic or whether they were too tainted by their previous accolades to avoid suggestions of revanchism. While I originally designed this work with the astronauts occupying the centre panel, I ultimately consigned them to a wing panel, thereby making the

¹⁴⁶ I was thinking here of Apollo 16 astronaut, Charlie Duke, who left a photograph of his family on the lunar surface.

triptych less about *them*. They are also made more manageable by being balanced in size and status by their wives and the trackers. In contrast to the romantic astronaut images I used in other works discussed in the next part of this chapter, the images chosen for this work further depict the astronauts in quieter attitudes. Beyond its triptych layout, the work also incorporates digital processes and panoramas to make it larger and more genuinely mural-like than the smaller works that constitute *Remember Kindly!* The work explores my local-universalist pairing though its focus on Honeysuckle Creek, but also though its vistas. While it does not focus on the ground like many of my panorama tests, its horizon moves down from the works in *Remember Kindly!* locking on the tilted terrestrial foreground and retaining only a sliver of sky.

While the work is openly nostalgic and sentimental, I implemented several countervailing measures as I traversed the territory of my objective-subjective pairing. While the title alludes to Apollo's changed local meanings in the present, it also incorporates the historical record of the mission transcript. The work's use of official photographs gives it a claim to institutionalism that contrasts with the more personal memories suggested by the photographs used in *Remember Kindly!* The work was printed on photo-rag as a conventional but decent-quality choice befitting the occasion and presented in blonde timber frames. The frames are reminiscent of mid-century government offices: official, bureaucratic and instructional.¹⁴⁷ The work also incorporates excerpts from the Honeysuckle station log. These excerpts ground the work's sentimental depictions of its human subjects in date stamps and acronyms, even as the trackers' excitement bursts through the logbook's technical language: 'TV ON/CDR [commander] ON Moon!!!' and 'SPLASH' [splash-down] underlined with a final flourish. Drawing on Norman Rockwell's *Behind Apollo* discussed in Chapter 2, I have since retro-fitted the work with keys to their subjects. For my final exhibition, I plan to print the updated version to adhesive textile paper and attach it directly to the gallery wall to suggest a set of instructional posters.

¹⁴⁷ After the fires, these frames read differently and they now fill me with guilt but this was six months into the future.

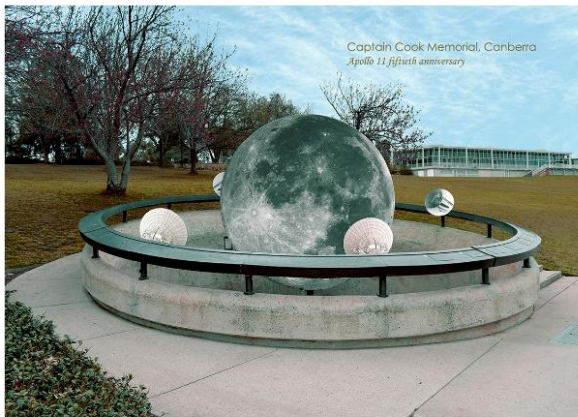
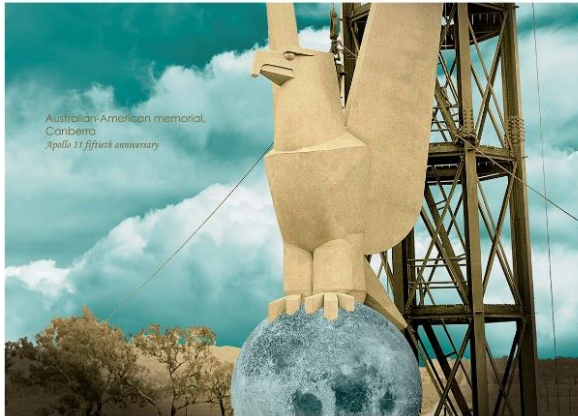


Fig. 56. Memorabilia for *Promised the Moon*, 2019.

How Do You Read Me? was supplemented by memorabilia, comprising postcards, stickers, pennants and a mission-patch printed using cheap commercial processes (fig. 56). The memorabilia explores more vernacular ways in which collective memories are shaped, including through keepsakes that offer proof of participation in shared moments of space-time. A set of postcards re-interpret three well-known Canberra monuments, which also spoke to aspects of my research, by grafting the anniversary onto them. The Australian-America Memorial was built to commemorate the sacrifices of US troops in defending Australia during WWII but its eagle also keeps watch over Canberra's Parliamentary zone. The eagle is offered a Moon to perch on before being hoisted back onto its eighty-metre pedestal to resume its stony surveillance. *Ethos* stands outside the ACT Legislative Assembly holding a sun aloft to represent culture and enlightenment. Her sun is replaced with a moon, pointing to Apollo's Enlightenment values and institutionalism, along with the complementary roles of politics and collective memory in constructing social spheres. The Moon replaces the Captain Cook Memorial's present earthly globe as a site of exploration tainted by universalist overreach in place of colonisation. Patches, stickers and pennant flags feature a Honeysuckle 'mission patch' which draws on the colours and structure of the Apollo 11 patch. But while the Apollo patch presents a view of Earth from the Moon, this patch depicts the Honeysuckle antenna tracking the astronauts' progress from deep within the local landscape. The photograph of the antenna was taken by Honeysuckle's photographer, Hamish Lindsay, shortly before Armstrong stepped onto the lunar surface.



Fig. 57. Monument 1: Legislative Assembly, 2019.

I have noted that Apollo built few monuments to itself and the memorabilia also gently inquires into why there are no actual monuments to Apollo within Canberra. I learned early in my meetings with the trackers of their wish for a public artwork to mark the achievements of ACT, or at least Australian, facilities. Despite intense lobbying, their efforts were unsuccessful. However, at the request of their Fiftieth Anniversary organising committee, I made some digital renderings of hand-drawn engineering designs that the trackers provided. The piece at fig. 57 above for example, which is based on a design by Tidbinbilla tracker John Heath, imagines a monument shaped like the monolith from *2001: A Space Odyssey*. It includes a still from Honeysuckle's video monitor at top and Hamish Lindsay's photograph of the Honeysuckle antenna at bottom. This work required compromises between the trackers' wish to accurately and adequately record, in text, the roles played by various facilities and my wish to avoid making a monument that looked like an oversize PowerPoint slide. In the result, this work was shown as part of a slide show at the luncheon for the anniversary which I took as evidence that the final compromise was successful. I built on this project in developing my memorabilia for *Promised the Moon*.

Out-takes from the social heroic

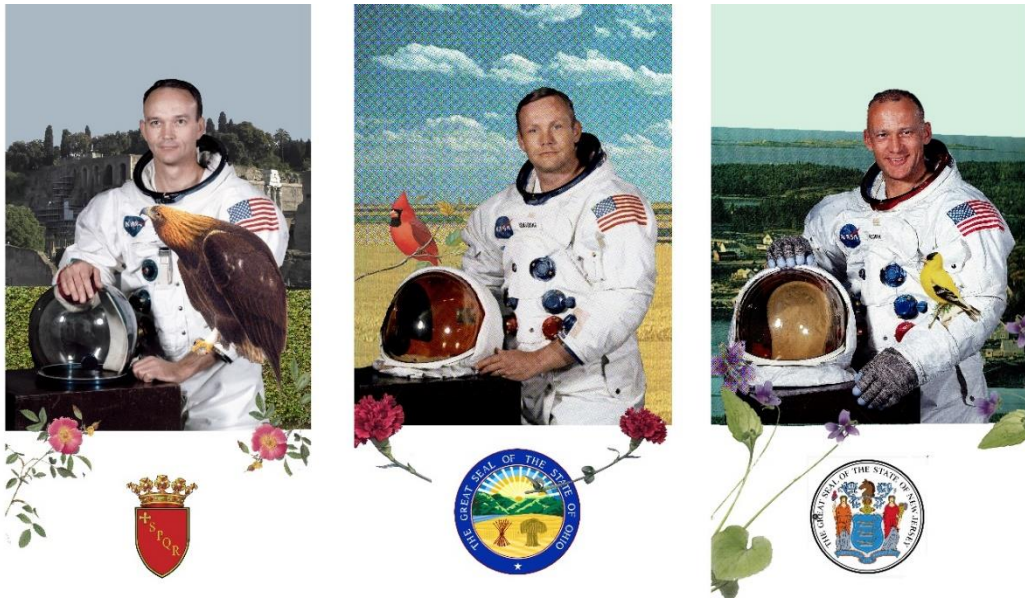
I will conclude this part by mentioning some 'out-takes' from my investigations of commemoration and the social heroic in which I pushed too hard. Fig. 58 shows an early version of *How do You Read Me?* As a triple triptych, it was ultimately too large for a group show. However, my decision to abandon it was also based on feedback regarding my wish to incorporate allusions to flags through the bright strips bordering the panels. I had initially blocked these in as red, white and blue, referencing both American and Australian flags, but wound this back to the colours of the ACT flag. Even so, feedback was not positive. It became clear that this attempt to raise ideas of polity would import a queasy nationalism and parochialism into the works, reflecting the appropriation of flags by right-wing political parties, and, in the case of the Australian flag, by commemorative events such as ANZAC Day which has developed a white, nativist subtext over recent decades. The public reception of the 2018 Neil Armstrong biopic, *First Man* illustrates the point. The film elected not to dwell on the planting of the American flag on the Moon. US President Donald Trump reportedly indicated he would not see the film for this reason, while right-wing media

accused liberal Hollywood of an unpatriotic re-writing of history.¹⁴⁸ While I begrudgingly accepted that flags had become the exclusive property of one side of politics, I secreted the colours of the ACT flag in my pennant flag and Honeysuckle Creek mission patch (fig. 56).

Another unsuccessful work, which I did not finalise, was *State Seals* at fig. 58 below. This work depicts the Apollo 11 crew members against landscapes and symbols of the sub-national states in which they were born. I sourced the images of landscapes and ‘official’ state birds and flowers from National Geographic publications. I had hoped to control the astronauts by earthing them in their own natal locals. However, these works have a sickly nostalgia to them given my use of the astronauts as central figures and the colonial histories they inevitably reference. While Michael Collins, born in Rome, Italy, was perhaps an exception, he could not save his crewmates here.

A third out-take was my attempt to turn the *Remember Kindly!* works into propaganda posters by adding text and incorporating contemporary Komsomol-like subjects (also at fig. 58). The works were informed by William Davies’ musings in *How Feeling Took Over the World* on the unwillingness of experts to make a more passionate case for objective discourse. Davies notes, for example, that some scientists opposed the ‘March for Science’ demonstrations (fig. 20 in Chapter 1) on the basis that embodied massing, marching and shouting was a self-contradictory way to advocate for their cause. In retrospect, I could have pushed these works further. With different, more fact-based text and closer attention to the contemporary subjects, they might have made their case more subtly. I abandoned them in alarm, however, as a kooky, insensitive toying with a medium linked to too much real-world suffering.

¹⁴⁸ E.g., Saagar Enjeti, “Exclusive: Trump Says He Won’t Be Watching Neil Armstrong Movie After American Flag Snub,” *Daily Caller*, September 4, 2018, accessed April 17, 2022, <https://dailycaller.com/2018/09/04/trump-neil-armstrong/>; Douglas MacKinnon, “Liberal Hollywood’s ‘First Man’ Gets it All Wrong – Neil Armstrong was a Proud American,” *Fox News*, September 1, 2018, accessed April 17, 2022, <https://www.foxnews.com/opinion/liberal-hollywoods-first-man-gets-it-all-wrong-neil-armstrong-was-a-proud-american>. While taking a different view, even *The Guardian* noted Hollywood has been “steadily de-Americanising space”: Steve Rose, “If anyone can MAGA, it is NASA: How First Man’s ‘Snub’ Made Space Political Again,” *The Guardian*, September 7, 2018, accessed April 17, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2018/sep/06/if-anyone-can-maga-it-is-nasa-how-first-man-put-a-rocket-up-the-politics-of-space>.



CITIZENS! REMEMBER KINDLY THE AGE OF FACTS!

Fig. 58. Out-takes from the social heroic. Top to bottom: early version of *How do You Read Me?*, *State Seals* (incomplete works); propaganda poster (2017–2020).

3.2 Solemn Ceremony

Context

Away from the spotlight of the anniversary, my remaining works can be considered in terms of the AWM's second category of commemoration: solemn ceremony. In contrast to works which explored the social heroic as a still-salvageable Apollonian good, these works accept that Apollonian hegemony is passing out. Against this realisation, they search for ways to present my subject as something that deserves to be sympathetically remembered, or at least decently seen off. My 2018 solo show, *Apollo 8*, at Sydney's Gaffa Gallery acknowledges Apollo's overreach and apocalyptic resonances, setting a high water mark of defiant triumphalism that I moved steadily back from. My 2019 solo show, *Air-to-Ground*, at Canberra's M16 Gallery, addressed Apollo's passing more quietly, highlighting ideas of shared mortality and seeking solace in the enduring beauty of the Honeysuckle Creek site. My final thesis works *LOS* centre on photomontage-objects that *presence* Apollo's photographs in order to point to their physical disintegration while also allowing for them to be more completely recalled through physically tending. The works thus demonstrate a range of responses to loss of hegemony from defiant flaming out, through calm acceptance, and a final acknowledgment that legacies endure only to the extent that they are permitted to do so in the present.

Roiling in the end-times: *Apollo 8*

In December 2018 I held a solo exhibition at Sydney's Gaffa Gallery to mark the fiftieth anniversary of Apollo 8. This show used sutured photomontage and a range of triptych formats to visualise both the end-times unleashed by Apollo and the end-times of Apollonian psyche. In doing so, it primarily traversed my expertise-intuition dichotomy to present the eschatological as an end-point of the metaphysical and technological sublime. It also experimented with depictions of the bodily heroic and bodily disintegration within this context. While not tasked to land on the Moon, Apollo 8's crew were the first humans to leave Earth's orbit and look down on its face and their leap into the void has been belatedly acknowledged as of equal or greater significant than Apollo 11's famous first landing that

followed several months later.¹⁴⁹ It was the most dangerous of the Apollo missions and was unusual in having been rushed into service ahead of schedule and out of sequence to beat out a rumoured Russian mission, bypassing Apollo’s typical cool-headed protocols. As I have noted, it brought back the famous *Earthrise* image which was used to propagate Apollo’s political universalism but which also invited nostalgia for a more immediate groundedness and pining for pre-Copernican ontologies. As I have also noted, it directly invoked the Christian metaphysical through its crew’s reading from the book of Genesis during a television broadcast from lunar orbit on Christmas Eve 1968 which intuitively presented ideas of the sacred as a counter to the astronaut’s God-like powers.¹⁵⁰

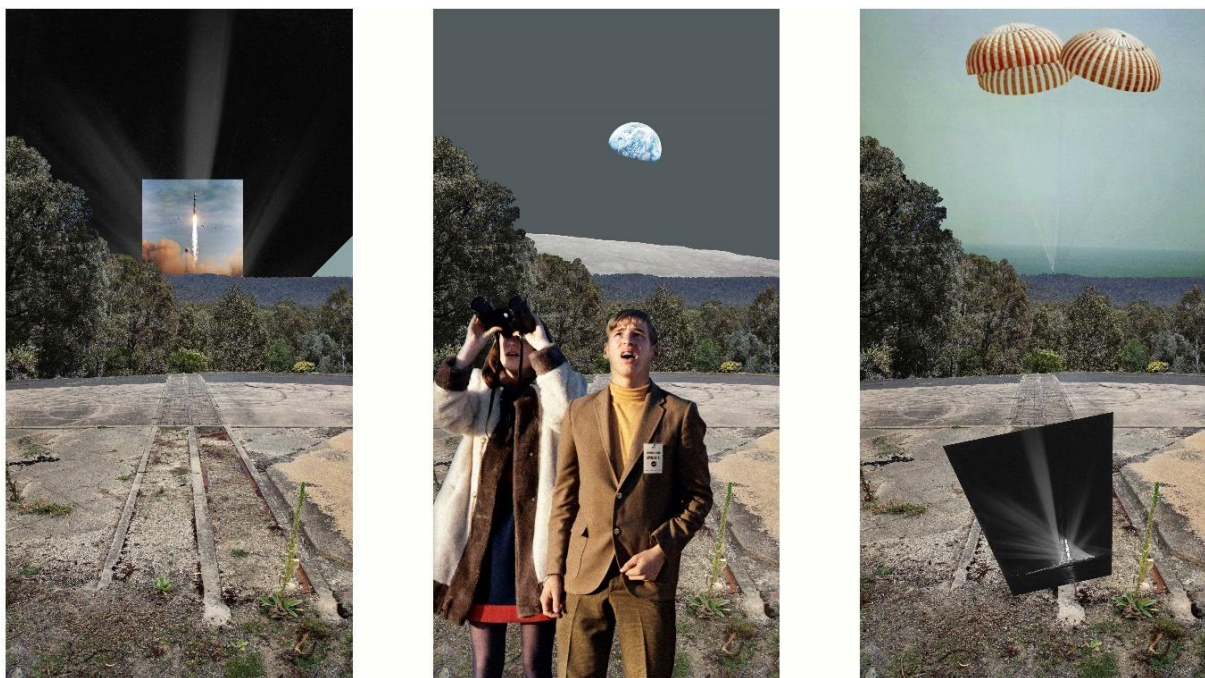


Fig. 59. *Earthrise*, 2018.

¹⁴⁹ See, e.g., Michael Collins, “NASA Johnson Space Center Oral History Project,” interview by Michelle Kelly, NASA (Johnson Space Center), 8 October 1997, edited transcript (unpaginated), accessed April 10, 2022, https://historycollection.jsc.nasa.gov/JSCHistoryPortal/history/oral_histories/CollinsM/CollinsM_10-8-97.htm. “I think Apollo 8 was about leaving and Apollo 11 was about arriving....As you look back 100 years from now, which is more important, the idea that people left their home planet or the idea that people arrived at a nearby satellite? I’m not sure, but I think you would probably say Apollo 8 was of more significance than Apollo 11.”

¹⁵⁰ Apparently the crew was instructed only to “say something appropriate” during the broadcast. For all NASA’s sensitivity to symbolism, it trusted its astronauts to get it right to an extent that seems remarkable today. Perhaps the most famous example is Neil Armstrong’s ‘one small step’ speech, which by all accounts was left entirely up to him and which, with the possible exception of a quick run-through with his brother, Armstrong kept to himself until he uttered it.

The show was moored by my own version of *Earthrise* (fig. 59) which was also chosen as a finalist for the Mandorla Art Award in 2018. I have noted that in seeking to spotlight Honeysuckle Creek's *forgotten* history, my socially heroic works discussed above had a degree of leeway in celebrating a hegemon that might not have otherwise been available. *Earthrise* uses a different technique to create space for commemoration of my subject by using a rare NASA image of the children of an Apollo astronaut watching their father's launch. Too young to be implicit in the hegemon's dreams, they are nonetheless drawn into them to arrive at a moment of intense vulnerability. This work follows a less traditional triptych form to evoke ideas of the sacred, using evenly sized panels with dimensions that approximate stained glass windows. The landscape, which repeats across the panels, shows wiring panels that led to the Honeysuckle Creek antenna. These resemble railroad tracks from a Kiefer painting, with their decline-of-the-West resonances. Their repetition alludes to documentary sameness of Apollo's photographs, but also makes the site a fixed point, grounding and outliving the missions it tracked and potentially the end-times as well. Unlike traditional triptychs, the panels have a temporal beginning, middle and end. The left-hand panel shows the Apollo 8 launch. The centre panel shows two children of crew member James Lovell observing the launch. His daughter watches through binoculars, face obscured, mouth open but controlled. His son, already tall but with teeth still in braces, gasps in a mixture of horror and awe, while his reflexive attempt to clench his left hand fails and his right arm hangs helplessly beside his body.¹⁵¹ Above them is *Earthrise*, with all its promise and threat for the world they will inherit. The right-hand panel shows Apollo 8 returning under parachutes, while a black square enclosing the rocket on the launchpad floats unmoored and unsutured in the foreground with mixed allusions to Malevich's black square, nothingness, death and the monolith from *2001: A Space Odyssey*.¹⁵²

The other works in this show begin to explore whether images of the astronauts themselves could serve my purposes or whether they were too freighted with their glories. While I took subsequent steps in *Promised the Moon* to keep them in check, here I allowed them to run riot through the Honeysuckle Creek site, creating a baseline to work back from. *Overmen* (fig. 60) takes its title from Nietzsche's Übermensch, a term appropriated by

¹⁵¹ His expression reminds me of the faces of the parents of teacher Christa McAuliffe who died when the Challenger Space Shuttle exploded shortly after launch in 1986.

¹⁵² Noting that conspiracy theories about the Moon landing frequently claim that they were filmed in an earthly studio by the director of *2001: A Space Odyssey*, Stanley Kubrick.

Nazism that invokes libertarian notions of personal ‘self-made’ strength and morality. Apollo, with its anti-heroic institutional collectivism, and Apollo 8 specifically, in its recourse to Christian mythology, were to me the *antithesis* of these ideas. However, as Apollo’s susceptibility to these readings is evidenced, for example, by Ayn Rand’s slaving over its rational mastery and the proclivities of contemporary space-billionaires, I felt they needed to be acknowledged.¹⁵³ This work therefore presses the Apollo 8 astronauts into revelling in their God-like achievements even as the skies, made from an interpretative sign-pole at the site, begin to roil around them. This work also investigates commemoration of bodily heroism ‘for a cause’ in incorporating images of the American flag. I was unable to control this imagery, which, when sutured together in high big-State style, suggested conquest, rule of the strong and starry-eyed imperialism.



Fig. 60. *Overmen*, 2018.



Fig. 61. *Annihilation*, 2018.

Annihilation (fig. 61) places photographs of the crew suiting up for their mission over photographs of footings and foundations at the Honeysuckle site. This work partially avoids the pitfalls of *Overmen* by drawing ideas of Thanatos, rather than heroism for a cause, into

¹⁵³ For Rand’s rhapsodising over Apollo 11 as a triumph of reason, her struggles with Apollo as an achievement of the collective, and her dismay at the Genesis reading see: Ayn Rand, “Apollo 11,” *The Voice of Reason - Essays in Objectivist Thought by Ayn Rand (Vol V)*, ed. Leonard Peikoff (New York: Meridian, 1990), 161–178.

the background apocalypse. The original photographs (fig. 22) have a wildness and an intimacy to them, like a moment of birth or death. Set against understandings of the heroic as culturally deviant, they seemed almost obscene. In the side panels, Borman and Lovell are depicted, Ozymandias-like, as monumental busts in traditional heroic form resting on cable footings near the site of the Honeysuckle antenna. In the centre panel, Anders, who took the *Earthrise* photograph, bends tensely towards the viewer near the place where the Honeysuckle operations building once stood while a kneeling technician fastens his suit ties like a slave. The unnatural, heightened colours of the bushes in the side panels and the churning swapped out sky in the centre panel reference shamanic visions of a living, writhing Earth; dissolution and an undifferentiated oneness of matter; and glitchy, heat-seeking machine-vision. The work is hot and super-heated at the centre, like something moments away from imploding. While this work is not as excessive as *Overmen*, it is still a *masculine* piece whose characters may still be too overbearing to invite empathy even as they are depicted blazing out or crumbling away.



Fig. 62. Left to right: *Transmission 1*; *Leaves*; *Transmission 2*, 2017–18.

This show also included some smaller analogue works that attempted to speak more quietly about the end-times while maintaining the tropes of the larger works (fig. 62). The reduction in scale suggests a shrinking down and letting go, while the analogue process give the works a patina of aimless, free-floating nostalgia. The tracks from my version of *Earthrise* appear again against re-purposed site features (the shiny interpretative sign pole that also features in *Overmen*, autumn leaves and a man-hole cover). The work at left uses a misprinted image with subjects that are streaky and dropping out. The work at right uses a

low-resolution print with blotchy artefacts. The inclusion of a Honeysuckle tracker at his instrument panel, meanwhile, moderates the astronauts' more mythic personas while also drawing more heavily on the commemorative latitude associated with Honeysuckle's forgotten history.

Elegy: *Air-to-Ground*



Fig. 63. *Air-to-Ground* install shot, 2019.

Shortly after the anniversary, I held a solo show, *Air-to-Ground* at M16 Gallery which combined sutured and unsutured photomontage along with a video work. These works resemble an elegy for Apollo, invoking ideas of shared mortality while searching for consolation in the natural beauty of the Honeysuckle Creek site. The works contrast mastery with mortality while viewing death and rot not with regret but as a re-earthing—the ultimate coming home that asserts the terrestrial over the celestial as the primary realm of human concern. The show's title reinforces the trajectory, referencing air-to-ground communications between Apollo spacecraft and mission control. The main photomontages produced for this show seek to deploy images of the astronauts, who had rampaged their way through *Apollo 8*, in less revanchist ways. I have noted that my main works for *Promised the Moon* took some initial steps in this direction by moving the astronauts to the edges of the works and balancing them with other subjects. While the astronauts return to centre-stage in *Air-to-Ground*, they are presented here not as ornaments of the social heroic or conquering heroes but as mortal

beings preparing to be recycled back into the Earth. Instead of seeking to salvage aspects of Apollo's inheritance, the works thus prepare to let go, suggesting a funeral speech for a parent for whom one holds deeply conflicted feelings.



Fig. 64. Top, *Apollo 10*, bottom, *Apollo 9*, 2019.

For this show, I first created three large multi-panel pieces that mix sutured photomontages with documentary images of the Honeysuckle site and NASA mission photographs.¹⁵⁴ While the proportions of *How Do You Read Me?* suggested a mural, these works are a cross between a mural and a film-strip. The combination of images, with their different times, technologies and motivations suggests both an impossible documentary sequence and a controlled jumbling of generational memories. The two works at fig. 64 follow an identical layout. The astronauts are at centre in sutured style, but the eye moves quickly outward to the unmolested mission photographs, with their invocations of the technological sublime, and the site photographs, which linger on the loveliness of the ground. The astronauts are pictured on return from their missions and they are loose, smiling and spent. At the same time, their gestures, performed against the background ruins with its sinking light and tinted skies, suggest a leave-taking through final salutes or waving goodbye. The mission photographs include images of Apollo's hardware which I had previously assumed would be too clinical for my purposes. I used these images here, however, both to invoke the sublime with its intimations of mortality and as factual ballast to steady the nostalgia of the centre panels. In *Apollo 9*, the mission photographs depict a stretch of pristine earthly ocean both as background to the hardware and in its own right as the

¹⁵⁴ While an additional piece created as part of this set was not shown I will include discussion of it here.

astronauts' technological gaze appears to jostle briefly with human pleasure in the view. The works are flanked by my close-up, ground-focussed photographs of the Honeysuckle site showing moss growing between cracks of a rock and autumn leaves resembling their own galaxy.



Fig. 65. *Apollo 8*, 2019.

The work at fig. 65 is structured differently and shows the astronauts sinking into the Honeysuckle site or floating above it before moving outwards to my site photographs. In earlier experiments with floating astronauts over and around the site, I had struggled to avoid depicting them as overbearingly God-like (fig. 70). To make them more manageable, I experimented here with lower-quality images and less orderly positioning. The astronaut images are taken from stills of a television broadcast from space which I enhanced to *emphasise* the grain while also making them more readable. This graininess and their tumbling, cropped placement seemed more suggestive of souls expanding outward as they dissipate into the atmosphere. While the foreground in the three middle panels tilts upwards to witness this process, the strong perspectival lines of the antenna tracks pull the work back to the ground as a vanishing point. This downward movement is confirmed by the end panels which tether the work to the site, while also addressing the related panels in the other works.



Fig. 66. *Rock*, 2019.

A final large work for this show reverts to the panoramic stage-set of my triptych for *Promised the Moon* while raising ideas of violent demise through a flying rock aimed both at the head of a toppled Buzz Aldrin at left and Neil Armstrong's glass helmet at right (fig. 66). The comic-book feel of this work detracts, in hindsight, from other works in the show. However, it was a useful experiment that added to other attempts to explore violent disintegration and vandalism in the context of my project. A willingness to face violent death is of course a traditional element of bodily heroism. More broadly, however, it seemed appropriate to address the potential for violent disintegration of histories, monuments and hegemonies and the desire to make them suffer for their sins. The works at fig. 69 for example, which I initially considered for inclusion in this show, present the astronauts part as crash-landed bodies and part as toppled statues. Some of my earlier works (e.g., fig. 46 and fig. 51) also experimented with vandalised astronaut forms. The rock in fig. 66 meanwhile is perhaps less an errant meteorite than a deliberately aimed projectile.

This exhibition also included some smaller dye-sublimation prints on metal, titled *Ground-to-Air* (numbered 1-8) (fig. 67), which are semi-sutured but more abstract than the other works. I had experimented with dye-sublimation early in my thesis with mixed results. It accentuated the deficiencies in low quality images, rendered human skin with an unpleasant tacky dazzle, and seemed showy at larger scale. But with high-quality images, more abstract subjects and at smaller scale it spoke softly but effectively to the materials of the space age. Some of these works feature close-up panoramas of the Honeysuckle site placed over Apollo mission photographs. Others contrast the lunar surface and Apollo's probing of it with the Honeysuckle site's natural features. The meteorite that menaces the astronauts in *Rock* re-appears in less threatening guise in one piece. While the airborne astronauts return to the clay in the larger works, a reciprocal process is taking place here, as segments of earth fly meteor-like into space and pink gum leaves float behind the Moon. These works also point to a widened galactic deep time into which all human concerns are eventually absorbed.

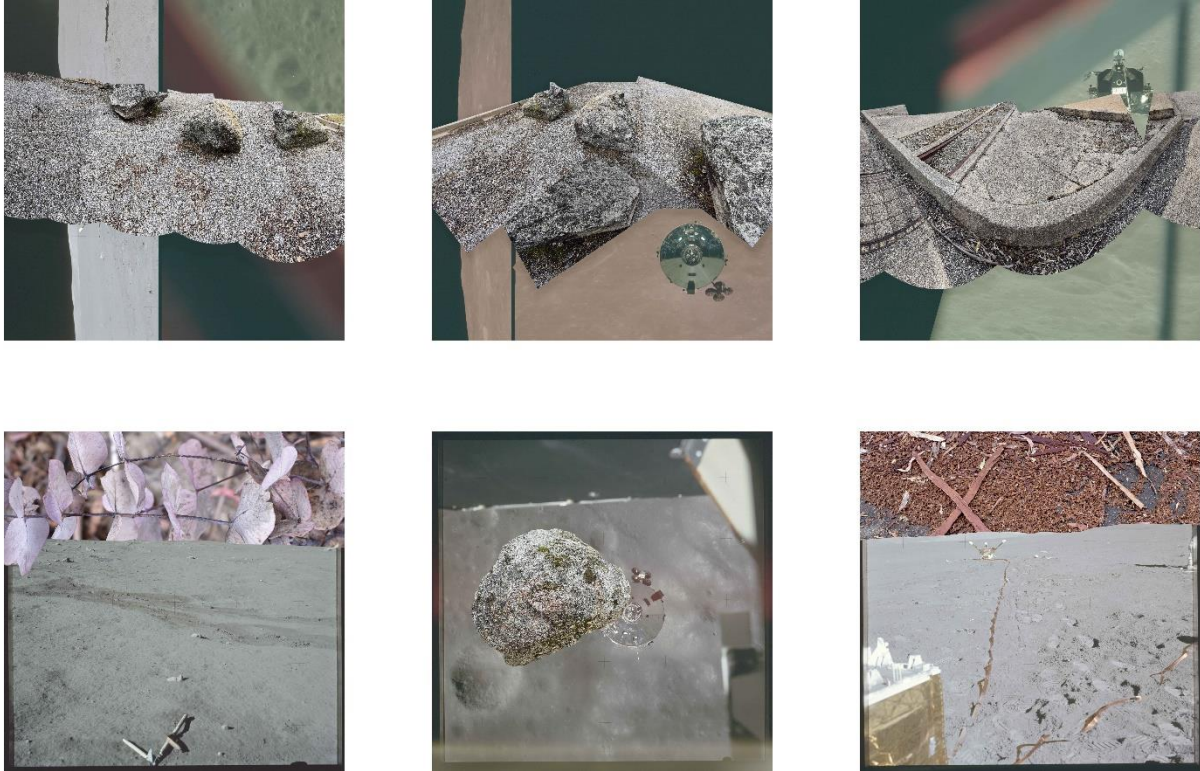


Fig. 67. *Ground-to-Air* works, 2019.



Fig. 68. *Honeysuckle Traverse*, 2019.

The final work for the show was a video, *Honeysuckle Traverse* (fig. 68), displayed in a small digital picture frame which also develops ideas of violent demise and return to the soil. The video was made by attaching a cheap action camera to the top of a Tonka truck, pointing the lens to the ground, and nudging the truck slowly around the Honeysuckle site with an axe handle. There is a date stamp of 21 July 2019 at bottom left and minutes and seconds are recorded. This is my version of the Apollo 11 television broadcast fifty years later. As with the panoramas and the photographs of the Honeysuckle site in the larger works, it records the details of the site as something novel and worthy of intense regard. The details are varied and lovely despite their graininess: moss, rocks, crumbling concrete, flecks of paint, brickwork, twigs, ants going about their business. At times the perspective appears to flick out, becoming that of an aircraft searching for a place to land: cracks in concrete resemble rivers, patches of moss appear as forests and scuffed white paintwork transforms into snowdrifts. Even so, the whole is claustrophobic. At times the camera lurches up as it mounts a rock, offering a flash of a longer vista, but the sky stays beyond reach. The main suggestion is of an injured astronaut dragging themselves across the site, repeatedly attempting and failing to raise their eyes heavenward.



Fig. 69. Works considered for inclusion in *Air-to-Ground*, 2019.



Fig. 70. Experiments in floating astronauts, 2017–19.

Tending to things: *LOS*

My final thesis project *LOS* (NASA-speak for loss of signal) takes Robert Rauschenberg's *Stoned Moon* series, which I have discussed in detail in Chapter 2, as its departure point. The works are a combination of technical experiment and further attempts to lower my commemorative tone by manifesting Apollo's images as decaying ritual objects. The project consists of three elements: a set of flat but irregularly shaped three-dimensional photomontages; exploded views purporting to explain their making; and a performance in which the works are treated as quasi-sacred relics. There are fifteen photomontages, representing roughly half the number of works Rauschenberg produced for *Stoned Moon*. The photomontages are various sizes which loosely echo the dimensions of the *Stoned Moon* works but at around half of their scale. The half numbers and half dimensions suggest an atomic half-life, or a tipping point of the psyche that Rauschenberg captured.

I have mentioned that using hard substrates was one of several techniques that I identified as allowing for enlargement of my works and I used *LOS* to explore some possibilities. The substrates for the photomontages are mostly laser-cut ply which references the use of plywood in early aircraft manufacture and model planes to point to a reverse evolution from Apollo's space-age materials and perfected Moon-ships. I also experimented with di-bond, aluminium, and card substrate. While I re-made the smaller test components in ply, I retained some larger di-bond pieces in the final works to avoid wastage, concluding that what might otherwise have been an aesthetic compromise constituted its own comment on the needs of the present. The overlain images are mostly image transfers using a variety of gel mediums. There are also some acid transfers, which Rauschenberg also experimented with in the drawings for his *Stoned Moon* book. I had intended to confine myself to image transfers because of their uncontrollability which I discuss further below. However, as with my early experiments with low-resolution photographs, my early transfers at times looked poorly-executed and sloppy. I therefore faced some of the component substrates with Ilfotex prints which held the set together and made them more readable. Even so, some of the pieces are rough and difficult to read, which was again consistent with the *Stoned Moon* works.

The photomontages involved a mix of controlled and uncontrolled making, echoing Rauschenberg's processes, while baulking at the idea of actual handmade interventions which seemed somehow gratuitous in the present. I mocked them up in Photoshop, made files for laser cutting, and printed my images for transfer. Mimicking the process I had used in my digital works, I initially cut my components to carefully trace the outlines of people and objects. However, given my three-dimensional substrates, the resulting components looked like a children's jigsaw puzzle. I therefore settled on rougher cuts around subjects which made them look like they had been scissored from magazines, noting that this referenced a form of Dionysian vandalism. I found it difficult to align the printed images precisely with the laser cut component pieces, even when the programs I was using repeatedly verified that everything was precisely as it should be. Where visually necessary, I persisted until things came 'right' by trial and error or dumb luck, but I also over- or under-printed some components, letting things fall where they would. The transfers themselves, which used inkjet prints and rotated through a range of gel mediums and office papers, were impossible to control. The first of them were rough and papery, with an ugly mould-like sheen covering darker areas. For reasons that remain elusive, the later transfers were more pleasing, resembling faint but detailed prints embedded in the ply. While this may have been the result

of different drying times as winter gave way to summer, I was unable to verify this. Following Rauschenberg's lead in including diverse works within his *Stoned Moon* series, I did not attempt to remake the earlier works but included them as part of a single endeavour.



Fig. 71. Sample of digital mock-ups for photomontages for *LOS*, 2021.

Consistent with my ‘scissoring’ of images, the photomontages use a relatively unsutured style. The components will be glued together, with larger pieces and fixings also secured by rivets (which are commonly used in aircraft manufacture). Honeysuckle Creek images are the most prominent. They include my own photographs of burned trees at the station site taken after the site re-opened following the 2019–20 bushfires and of some of the trackers who I had met during my research. One piece uses an image of tracker Gillian Schoenborn on a trip to Europe after Apollo 11, pointing to life beyond the Moon landing. There are also NASA images, including of astronauts’ wives tensely watching their husband’s departure or waiting for them to return. The image of Marilyn Lovell at fig. 10 features in a large work, as does an image showing Mary Haise, wife of Apollo 13 astronaut Fred Haise following the crippling of that mission on its way to the Moon. The astronauts do not generally feature prominently or heroically. The main exception is Apollo 11 lunar module pilot Michael Collins, who circled the Moon alone while Armstrong and Aldrin landed, and who appears atop a pile of images resembling a rocket stack in one of the large pieces. Collins died while I was working on this project and his inclusion is a mark of personal respect to a favourite astronaut. Gene Cernan, commander of the final Apollo mission, also emerges from his capsule to gasp the sweet air of home in the final work. Apart from Apollo and Honeysuckle photographs, the works used scans of Rauschenberg’s *Stone Moon* works.

Each photomontage is accompanied by an exploded view (fig. 74) which will be printed at small-scale to cardstock and which I plan to attach to the gallery walls with map pins. I have noted in Chapter 2 that Rauschenberg analogised his art-making with Apollo as an epic technical and collaborative achievement, while inviting the reverse comparison of Apollo as an epic work of art. The exploded views analogise my processes with Apollo’s in that both are deliberative, structured, and expert but also at some level entirely beyond objective explication. These pieces build on my retrofitting of my works for *Promised the Moon* in exploring instructional keys as a counterpoint to affective works such as the photomontages. Keys are designed to *explain* things in an objective manner that anyone can readily grasp. The exploded views ruminate on aspects of the creative process that can and cannot be explained in this way, while also inquiring into the types of information that convention otherwise requires to be displayed. They describe the images that make up my photomontages as factually as possible, informed by my reading of NASA image captions. They include the date of the image, which seemed essential to contextualising it, along with

the author, as a legal requirement. They also note where I have manipulated images in Photoshop using descriptors that mimic Apollo's endless data-points. While the keys show what happened, and provide a template for re-making the photomontages, they cannot, of course, convey the intuitive process by which I selected and combined my images, or the material lottery of the image transfer process. In like fashion, Apollo's reams of acronyms and time stamps can never adequately explain why, or even how, Apollo landed twelve men on the Moon and returned them safely to earth.

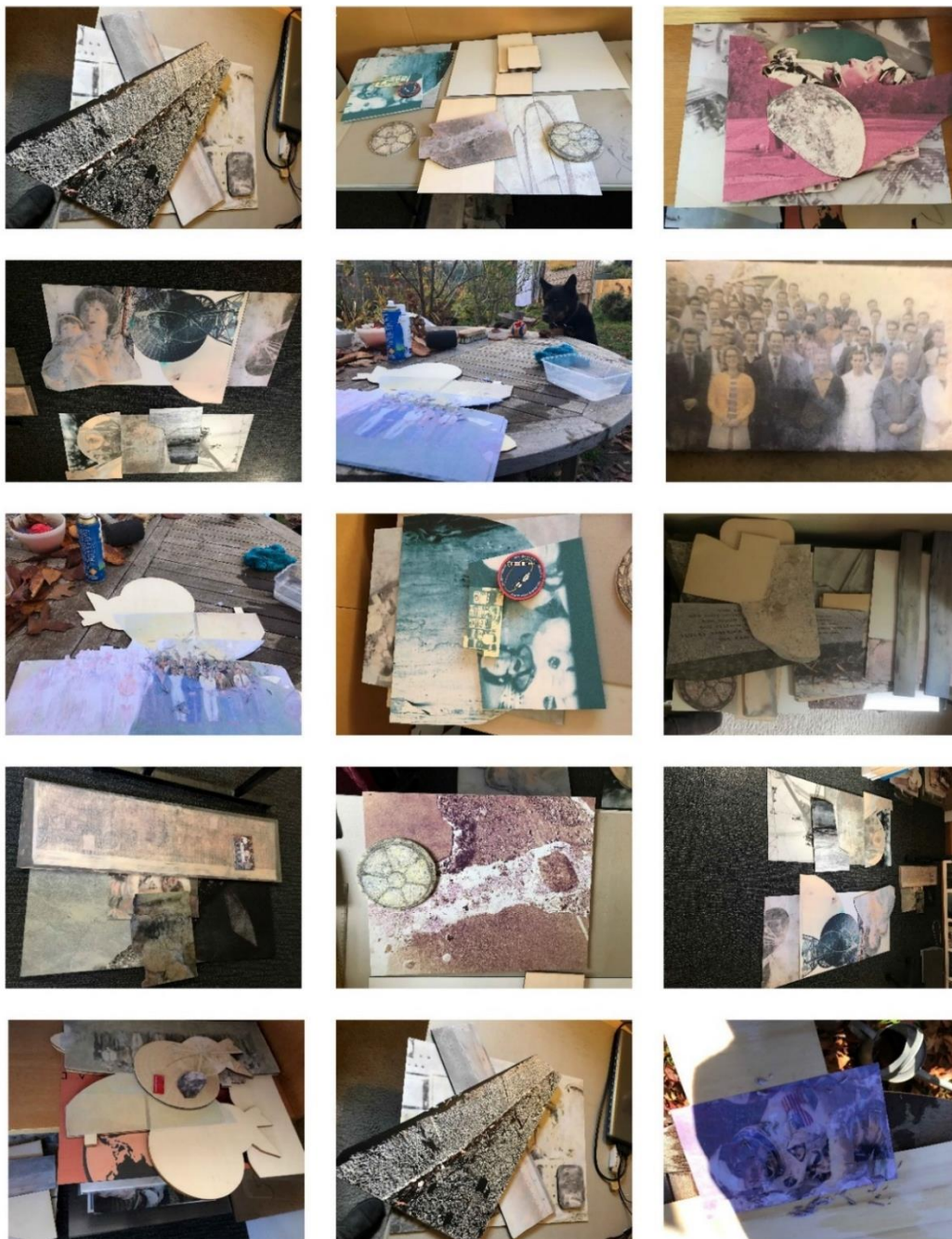


Fig. 72. Process shots for *LOS* photomontages, 2021–22.

Look at the Earth

1. Extract from Apollo 10 onboard transcript (Lunar Module), commencing mission elapsed time 04 04 25 30, page 145.
2. Tidbinbilla Deep Space Communication Complex personnel Ron Hargreaves, John Heath, Peter Gracie, Mal Lee and Peter Topley performing calculations during uncrewed pre-Apollo deep space mission. John Heath photograph, circa 1966.
3. Slow scan TV monitor at Honeysuckle Creek showing Apollo 10 astronaut John Young during TV broadcast from space. Tom Reid photograph, May 1969. Colin Mackellar scan.
4. Honeysuckle Creek site, lower level, concrete paving, 7 April 2018.
5. Close-up of aircraft at Pima Air and Space Museum, Tucson Arizona, 12 October 2018.
6. Australian Capital Territory Parks and Conservation Service logo.

Burnout

1. Honeysuckle Creek site, lower level, moss growing on concrete slabs, 18 March 2018. Invert. Channels:(C): C -50; B +200; constant -115; (M): C -10; M +40; Y +100; constant -97; (Y): Y 0; (B): M -30; Y +130; B +40; constant -15. Brightness +44. Stamp/duplicate/high-pass filter @ 5 px/overlay mode.
2. Honeysuckle Creek site, parking area near lower level, leaves, 13 April 2018. Duplicate/high-pass filter @ 5 px/overlay mode.
3. Honeysuckle Creek site, upper level, tyre marks on antenna pad, 5 March 2018. Channels: (C): C +30; M +7; constant +5; (Y): M -20; Y +200; B -180. Brightness +38.
4. Honeysuckle Creek site, lower level, manhole, 4 March 2017.

Fig.73. Samples of text from exploded views (works in progress), 2022.

The third component of this work is a performance in which I wash the photomontage works with water. The performance will take place daily at 12.56 p.m., marking the timing of Armstrong's first steps on the Moon. I will dress as an Apollo technician in white coat, hard-hat and spectacles. This element was initially devised to address my indecision about whether or not to varnish the photomontages. The transfers faded as they dried and varnishing them would have reverted them to a more readable state, doing justice to images while also making the works durable. However, I was reluctant to undermine the honesty of the originals, while making them durable also ran counter to my wish to speak of the Apollonian as fading away. Apollo's images thus re-appear only when are washed by hand in a respectful act of tending.

The performance is an example of solemn *ceremony* in the truest sense and commemorative *practice* that Jay Winter identifies as fundamental to collective remembrance. It draws on Geoffrey Batchen's identification of hybrid photo-objects as *things* which, in requiring mediation through touch, offer a "compelling memorial experience" in ways that photographs alone, with their tendency to substitute for and thus erase felt memory, cannot.¹⁵⁵ While my subject is not nearly so solemn, my decision to dress as an Apollo technician is informed by Jeremy Deller's *We're Here Because We're Here* (2016) which

¹⁵⁵ Geoffrey Batchen, *Forget Me Not – Photography & Remembrance* (New York: Princetown Architectural Press, 2004), 48. Batchen is talking specifically here about interventions made in photographic albums. He makes similar points in relation to photo-lockets in "Ere the Substance Fade – Photography and Hair Jewellery" 32= 47 in *Photographs Objects Histories – On the Materiality of Images*, ed. Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart (London & New York: Routledge, 2005).

used actors to re-materialise the 1,400 soldiers killed on the first day of the Battle of the Somme on the centenary of that occasion. Deller's soldiers were silent and ghostly, appearing lost or trapped between worlds. My technician will maintain their industrious Apollonian routines, even as these are dissolved by the technician's own hand into Dionysian ritual.



Fig. 74. Exploded views (works in progress), 2021–22.

Closing observations

The commemorative works produced for this thesis follow a broad trajectory from air to ground as Apollonian abstractions are balanced by felt Dionysian immediacies. The Honeysuckle Creek site earths the works from the outset and the site becomes more prominent as the works develop. The socially heroic works begin with the light optimism and traditional horizon lines of *Remember Kindly* before progressing to a more anxious clinging to ideas of polity in my works for *Promised the Moon* in which the ground begins to *express itself* and move upward into more prominent view. The commemorative works also turn from *Apollo 8's* tableaux of astronauts bestriding the site-as-stage-set to regard the site in *Air-to-Ground* as an enduring and exquisite earthly place to which the astronauts-as-mortals return. My final works, *LOS*, consider earthliness differently by materialising Apollo's photographs as rot-prone objects. While my focus on the site provided commemorative latitude by foregrounding the forgotten history of Honeysuckle Creek, it also made Apollo more suitable for commemoration by affectively binding it to local Dionysian earth.

Conclusion

This thesis used photomontage to propose a new framework for commemorating the Apollo Moon landing program during its fiftieth anniversary. In presenting Apollo as a subject for commemoration, my creative works risked revanchism, insensitivity, or a begrudging of current commemorative concerns. The works step cautiously through these dangers to celebrate what was good about Apollo and to adequately mark its passing. A departing hegemon cannot trumpet its victories or seek to have its glories restored. It can, however, speak quietly of its dreams while ruminating on their excesses and limitations, and while accepting that its time is past. In doing so, it may presume to offer a distillation of its skills and energies to the present, or at least convince the present to lay it properly to rest and think of it from time to time.

It is easy enough to impugn Apollo's rationalist, internationalist and objective overreach. I have argued, however, that these qualities may appear in a new and potentially more flattering light when viewed against the rise of recent countercultures. Within this context, my creative works re-interpret the Apollo program's monumentally Apollonian photographs to present them in a more Dionysian guise. The photographs are made to speak affectively and supra-rationally about their meanings from the site of the former Honeysuckle Creek Tracking Station. The works thereby mitigate the excesses of the Apollo program and the psyche of its makers to allow for commemoration of what remains. In doing so, they invite reflection on how Apollonian and Dionysian modes might best be mixed in the present. For me at least, the answer was nuanced and shifting. It arose acutely, for example, during the apocalyptic bushfires of 2019–20 whose smoke I breathed along with millions of others for an interminable two months and which burned to within metres of the Honeysuckle site. Beyond horror, my initial response was to lament the possibility of rational discourse and global action as ways to *solve* things. But I increasingly pondered how Apollonian visions of universal technological mastery had contributed to this tragedy by disconnecting us from the imperative to *care* for our earthly and immediate homes.

At a more specific level, the works tentatively rehabilitate the language of big-State photomontage to celebrate Apollo in terms of a local social heroic. Apollo was an idealistic public project that linked the labour of its contributors to ideas of political community, however selective, and whether real or imagined. My works for *Promised the Moon* draw on these notions to celebrate Honeysuckle Creek Tracking Station's role in Apollo as a source of local civic pride. These works rely in part on the commemorative latitude that is available for the telling of forgotten histories. The main works also control their subject by casting the Apollo astronauts in supporting roles, while winding back nostalgia and affective excess with documentary materials. Within the context of the anniversary, these works contribute to wider efforts to enhance collective memory of Apollo's local resonances while accepting that their relation of a fundamentally Anglo history limits their ability to speak fully of polity in the present.

The works also commemorate Apollo more solemnly to offer their last respects to Apollo and its participants. While these works maintain a focus on Honeysuckle Creek, they address it as an earthly place rather than a forgotten history. In *Apollo 8*, the astronauts came on too strong and I was unable to muffle their defiant assertions of control. *Air-to-Ground* was more successful in presenting the astronauts as mortal beings preparing to be recycled back into the earth while remaining cognisant of their mixed legacy. While these works are a seeing off, they are also an atonement. Norman Mailer described the Earth staring back at Armstrong on the Moon like "the eye of a victim just murdered," but here the Earth is the main character and it is very much *alive* as it waits to receive its progeny. My works for *LOS* also balanced respect for my subject with an awareness of its failings. These works manifest Apollo's photographs as entropic reliquial objects that may exert their pull not through appeals to universal reason but through ritual, personal tending.

Idealistic public projects appear increasingly to have run their course, at least at larger scale or as enacted by the West. In the West, space exploration is now fronted by private billionaires like Elon Musk and Geoff Bezos whose extraordinary personal wealth flows from and further hastens an undoing of polities. While NASA has always relied on contractors and major space exploration projects continue to be funded by NASA, the

difference lies in who appears to be leading the charge.¹⁵⁶ And while men like Musk and Bezos may be driven by their own versions of the common good, the common good should not be in their gift, or theirs to determine. It is also unlikely to be common. When Elon Musk launched a red Tesla sports car with an astronaut mannequin into orbit around Apollo's Sun in 2018 social media lit up with techno-futurist adulation: the strong *could* escape a used-up Earth to revel in their trans-human futures! NASA, meanwhile, as an organ of unloved, under-funded government, was eviscerated as old, bureaucratic, *lame*. In presenting Apollo in terms of its social heroic my creative works push back against these developments to offer a reminder that there *are* alternatives.

Apollo's mortality was painfully displayed against a backdrop of countercultural efflorescence during a press conference hosted by former President Donald Trump to mark the fiftieth anniversary of Apollo 11. The President used the occasion to pit the views of NASA's administrator against those of the remaining Apollo 11 astronauts, Buzz Aldrin and Michael Collins, while commending Neil Armstrong's children on having "great genes" and extolling the virtues of space exploration by "rich guys".¹⁵⁷ The conference lapsed rapidly into unrelated matters with the media more eager to butt heads with Trump about the scandal of the hour than to revisit ancient history. The astronauts, now in their late eighties, were expected to stand throughout, with Michael Collins eventually resorting to resting his fingertips on the edge of the presidential desk behind which Trump remained seated. It reminded me of the *Tears in Rain* speech from *Bladerunner*.¹⁵⁸ The astronauts had "seen things you people wouldn't believe." More fundamentally, however, they deserved better as beings whose moments would shortly be lost in time. This thesis seeks to offer a more decent sending off.

¹⁵⁶ Senator Bernie Sanders, for example, recently described NASA as an ATM machine fuelling a race between Musk and Bezos: Bernie Sanders, "Jeff Bezos is worth \$160 bn – yet Congress might bail out his space company," April 22, 2022, *The Guardian*, accessed April 24, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/apr/22/jeff-bezos-space-elon-musk-billionaires-bernie-sanders>.

¹⁵⁷ Viewable on YouTube (Encyclopedia Britannica/Apollo Space Program) accessed April 21, 2022: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WNmWL1sng-g>. For transcript see, "Remarks by President Trump Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Apollo 11 Moon Landing" on *Trump Whitehouse Archives* website, accessed April 21, 2022: <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-commemorating-50th-anniversary-apollo-11-moon-landing/>.

¹⁵⁸ The speech is delivered by replicant Roy Batty (Rutger Hauer) near the end of the film: "I've seen things you people wouldn't believe. Attack ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion. I watched C-beams glitter in the dark near the Tannhauser Gate. All those moments will be lost in time, like tears in rain. Time to die."

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