Re-membering Publicness

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Abstract

In this short multimodal text I scratch at colonial processes of ownership that are etched over Southern landscapes and that shape the cultural commons and common worlds (Bowers, 2009; Hodgins, 2019). Colonial structures advance the enclosure and erasure of public spaces via a rhetoric of turning the earth to your advantage (Cooper, 2015). The tensions of colonial ownership become chiseled and notched into these southern Places, like a tabula rasa where the slate is wiped clean. The colonial project distorts natural systems and patterns, constituting a public pedagogy of forgetting, erasure, and displacement. Thinking with the ethical, political, and historical layers of Place makes coloniality visible and intensifies these relations to invigorate the refusal of these colonial narratives as the single truth. This text sticks with wounds caused by the ongoing advancement of colonisation in Australia and the world by multimodal storying. Storying Country (Phillips and Bunda, 2018) through multimodality re-members the complexities of Place in order to decolonise settler logics, constructs, and notions of Place (Hamm, 2017). Decolonising publics in this way is complex work as it is polyphonic and discordant, filled with fragments of ghosts, and hauntings that are often buried just under ground as though swept under the carpet. This multimodal work rejects the colonial processes of forgetting in order to come alongside (Martin, 2016) Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing (Martin, 2006) and re-membering Place. In this text I compose a multimodal text (Arnott and Yelland, 2020) that stories layered accounts of being in relation-with Place through a pedagogy of intra-action (Cooper and Sandlin, 2020). In this essay I practice staying with the constitutions of a small seasonal creek in western Wurundjeri Country, Narrm (St Albans, Melbourne), to provoke decolonising discourse in and of this public sphere.

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Acknowledgement

I acknowledge the Ancestors, Elders and families of the Wurundjeri peoples of the Kulin Nation who are the Traditional Owners of the land where I live, work, and teach. As I share knowledge in this text I pay respect to the deep knowledge embedded within the Wurundjeri and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities of Australia and their ownership of Country/ies. I refer to Indigenous Peoples by their identifying language group. Wurundjeri/ Woiwurrung are the Indigenous Peoples of Narrm (Melbourne), where I am located while writing this paper: Find out more about language groups here.

> '*Country is multidimensional: it consists of people, animals, plants, Dreamings, underground, earth, soils, minerals and waters ... it exists both in and through time ... living things of a country take care of their own ... those who destroy their country destroy themselves*' (Rose, 2004, pp. 153-154).

> '*Country is the space and place where Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people can learn with Country in relationship to everything that is of Country. If an individual has an open mind to see all the living unseen and seen teachers of Country—trees, mountains, water, animals, birds, people, rocks, humidity and all the entities that make up Country—Country provides the stories and the knowledge. Country also provides the space to learn, reflect, challenge, cry, laugh, oppose and agree, while experiencing an ancient story of connection'* (McKnight, 2016).

> *'Country is a place that gives and receives life. Not just imagined or represented, it is lived in and lived with. People often talk about Country in the same way they would talk about a person: they speak to country, sing to country, visit country, worry about country, feel for country, and long for country. . . Country is not a generalised or undifferentiated type of place, Country is a living entity with a yesterday, today and tomorrow with a consciousness, and a will toward life'* (Bird-Rose, 2007, in Hamm, 2017, p. 87).

The Country this paper is situated in is present day St Albans, an outer western suburb of Narrm (Melbourne). As a settler born artist, researcher and teacher the multimodal storying in this paper reflects part of my ongoing processes of decolonising, where my ancestral story in Australia's identity is founded on dispossession, displacement and colonial violence. My responsibility is to work through this as a settler, questioning colonial violence accepted as a singular truth, following the need for all educators to question the everchanging colonial project. I seek to decolonise 'the one-nation landscape' (Jakobi, 2021, p. ii) to address the political, social, environmental and pedagogical, directly committing to the ongoing sovereignty of Aboriginal societies.

Figure 1 Murnong sculpture in St Albans

Prelude

> *'This is an aching archive—the one that contains all of our growing grief, all of our dispossessed longing for the bodies that were once among us and have gone over to the side that we will go to too. When I told you that I will probably haunt you, you made it about you, but it is about me. The opposite of dispossession is not possession. It is not accumulation. It is unforgetting. It is mattering'* (Morrill and Tuck, 2016, p. 2).

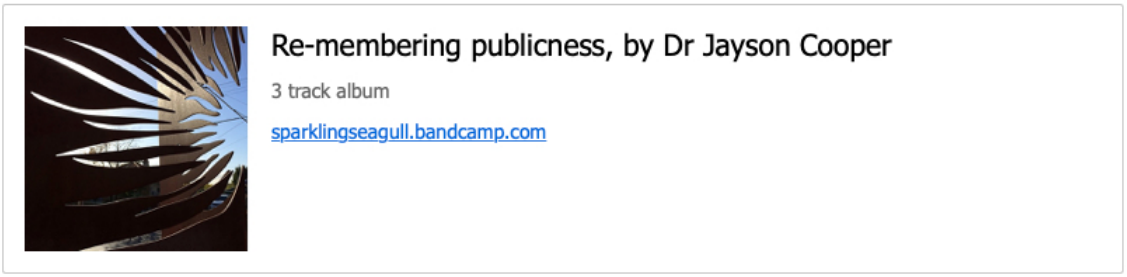


Figure 2 Joan prelude Audio piano Joan excerpt - https://sparklingseagull.bandcamp.com/album/re-membering-publicness

Engaging with this multimodal text

In this short multimodal text, I scratch away and articulate meaning by engaging with multimodality, moving beyond language alone as the vehicle for articulation (Kalantzis and Cope, 2021). Utilising literacies of the everyday, our modes of communication are bound with the materiality of media, where, 'digital texts, image, and sound are habitually overlaid in ways never before possible [generating] multimodal representations of speech, body, object, and space' (Kalantzis and Cope, 2021, p. 1). Kalantzis and Cope argue that 'to isolate language in a disciplinary and pedagogical ghetto is less conscionable than ever' (p. 1) and to avoid the trap of monomodal articulation, this article addresses their call for multimodal responses. This paper picks at these ideas, imagining alternative approaches to storying public pedagogy discourse.

The method employed in this paper aligns with William S. Burroughs' cut-ups and Gilles Deleuze's pick-ups. Creating a collage that folds in and through itself, I enact storying

as aesthetic resistance (Phillips and Bunda, 2018), cutting up politics and 'picking up snippets and flows of ideas and information from … here and there' (Gontarski, 2020, p. 569) cutting unities and making anew, and moving beyond language. A pick-up is where the 'a-parallel evolution, does not happen between persons [or texts, or not only between people or texts], but it happens between ideas as well, each one being deterritorialized in the other, following a line or lines which are neither in one nor the other' (Deleuze and Parnet 1987 cited in Gontarski, 2020, pp. 569 - 570). This multiplicity of dimensions is the epigenesis of a body without organs and becomes 'a magical intervention into reality' using 'weaponised aesthetics' (Gontarski, 2020). The intent of this paper is to scratch away at the colonial and consumerist ideals of ownership that are etched over Southern landscapes such as Australia (Connell, 2007) and explore how these ideals of ownership reinforce colonial narratives as public pedagogy, cutting through the politics of publicness. For Burroughs his cut-ups were initially situated in literature and later extended to all forms of media. His lifelong experimentations and work are augury to the ideas discussed by Kalantzis and Cope (2021) about moving beyond language. For Burroughs, language is a virus (Carmody, 2018). Deleuze's extension gestures towards ideas flowing in non-linear and rhizomatic ways. Both cut-ups and pick-ups work toward resisting a controlled society, subjugated by the written word and language. Like Deleuze and Burroughs I am interested in hijacking the dominance of speech and the written word to 'create vacuoles of non-communication, circuit breakers, [to] elude control' (Deleuze, 1990, para. 11).

I speak through many modalities (aural, oral, written, visual, and gestural) and I find the circuit breaking quality of multimodality allows an untangling of the tangled. Jumping and cutting through modalities intensifies the limen, the in-betweenness to think-with place-based public pedagogies. I examine what is publicness when colonial inscriptions have assimilated unceded territories and dominated the memories and pedagogies of places. The concrete materiality of public spaces express a particular narrative about these public spaces. In what follows I stay with the sticky, messy, and knotted his/her-stories of this 'concrete public' (Savage, 2014). Savage directs our thinking to question how teaching and learning exist in such public sites. Savage's idea of the concrete public views the public as a spatially bound site, 'such as urban streetscapes or housing estates' (p. 87). These spaces are political; unceded territory is always a political conversation.

Concrete publics are marked spatially; these forms of publics have borders. And not all are democratically accessible—they can be restrictive by class, race, gender and socio-economic strata and more. They can also be inaccessible by colonial erasure and through pedagogies of forgetting. Savage suggests when thinking about public pedagogy to pay attention to the ways publics, publicness, and pedagogies critically emerge.

Publics and all their multiple forms, as outlined by Sandlin et al. (2017), act as 'potential pedagogues' (p. 4) by making incisions and openings to contest the conventions of the academy. They attempt to decenter the assumed power learning institutions hold over knowledge and address how citizens can engage as critical thinkers beyond this stronghold. Humans are only part of a public's fabric, and publicness is always situated within places; publicness is a confluence of the human and the more-than-human in mutual constitution (Cooper and Sandlin, 2020). The public in this paper is a train station, it is grasslands, it is creek, it is suburbia, it is home, it has changed. This public is comprised of human and more-than-human and is a messy entanglement between the two; it is all these things and more. Its publicness has wounds and scars from botched attempts at metaphoric correction surgery, liposuction, blepharoplasty, and multiple face/off attempts. The pedagogy that is articulated emerges from 'public provocations that attempt to draw out political and cultural questions from an intellectualism produced in the moment of interaction with the public' (Sandlin,

Burdick, and Rich, 2017, p. 4). I offer counter-narratives to the history of this specific place in the western suburbs of Narrm (Melbourne), Australia that are multilayered and artful. These arts-based approaches articulate my engagement and relationships with this Place. As an artist, educator and researcher living and working on stolen land I utilise my aesthetics and creativity to interrogate and challenge historical, cultural, biographical, environmental and social contexts.

Suitable for farming and grazing: a journey of 'discovery'

Hume and Hovell were the first two European men to travel inland over the Great Dividing Range, surveying the land between Sydney and Port Phillip Bay (Melbourne). In their journal they praised the topography of present-day Keilor Plains/St Albans/Sydenham, for its agreeance to farming pastures and European notions of land management (deforestation, quarries and development). They camped overnight before heading further south to an area near Geelong, Wathaurong Country. To mark the hundred year anniversary, in 1924, memorial cairns were erected at their camp sites along their 'journey of discovery' (Hovell and Hume, 2004).

The memorials were built as part of the colony's desire for national identity in the early twentieth century, a time where a generation of settlers yearned for a nationhood that was their own as opposed to an extension of the colony. These settlers attempted to take Aboriginal languages to use in the fashioning of their nationalist and identity purposes. Today this tension is not lost for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people where the colony has built a particular kind of cultural capital that cashes in on Aboriginal cultures, knowledges and worldviews, naming and claiming Country in the process.

The St Albans memorial is made from local volcanic stones and is awkwardly consumed by Keilor Plains train station. Once a vast grassland this area is now outer metro suburbia, with only patches of remnant grasslands remaining. This area lacks the biodiversity it once had, as many birds and mammals have been pushed to extinction and endangered. People bustle past the memorial without giving it much attention; it becomes part of the "furniture". It has been nearly two hundred years since Hume and Hovell's 'discovery' of these golden plains and their declaration of its promise for grazing livestock, an action that would push murnong (the yam daisy, a staple food for the Wurundjeri/Woiwurrung of the Kulin Nation) to the brink of extinction by hooved animals. This extinction heralded the beginning of consistent terraforming practices that continue to penetrate this landscape, this non-human public.

Figure 3 Hume & Hovell memorial plaque

Figure 4 Hume & Hovell memorial cairn and train station

Figure 5 treacherous pastpresent dispossessions, Jayson Cooper, text cut/picked-up from Hume and Hovell's journal, 'Journey of discovery' (Hovell & Hume, 2004). Video link - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OltCsUA9uZQ. A short audio/visual video that plays with the idea of being displaced and dispossessed by urban development. A creative entanglement co-created with the site Keilor Plains train station and is indicated in Figure 6.

Script: '*These natives, who were soon joined by a third, it was discovered were inquisitive, troublesome, and great thieves, cunning and treacherous. They made a laugh of the circumstance of one of the people having been pursued, though there could be no doubt as to the hostility of their intentions on that occasion. Messrs. Hovell and Hume, had been desirous of taking their horses in the direction of what they supposed to be Port Phillip, but the conduct of these people, and the numerous fires which were being made around them, apparently as signals among the natives, made them conclude, that it would be unsafe for the party to separate*'

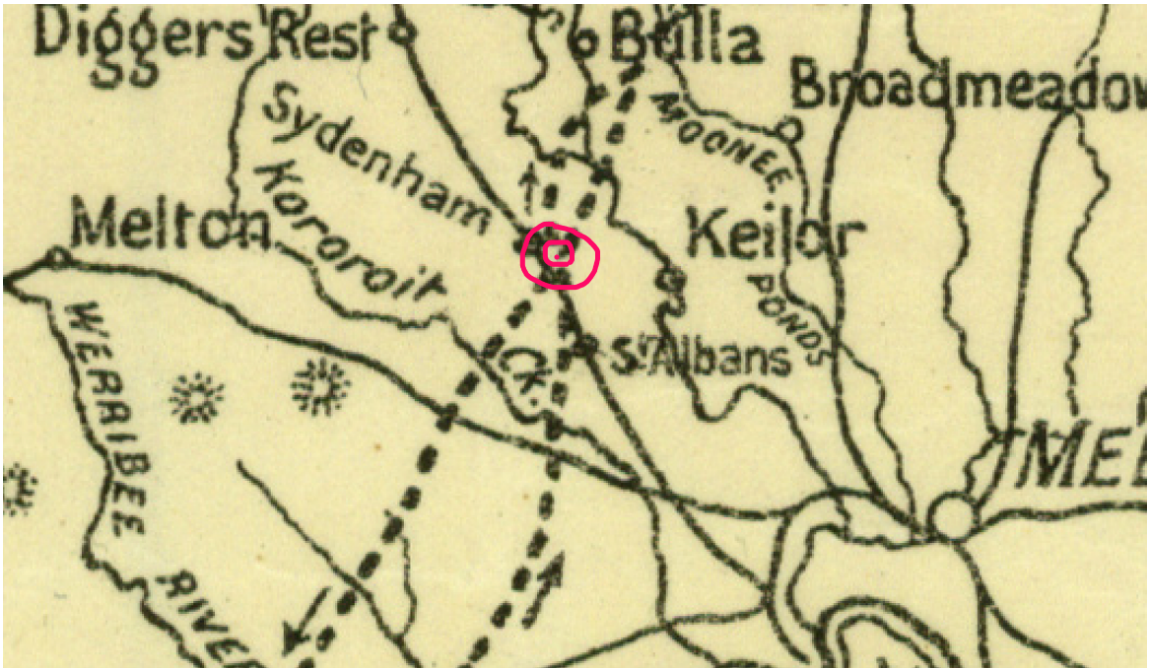


Figure 6 the dotted lines and arrows mark the journey as documented by Hume & Hovell, the location where the two tracks meet and is circled is the St Albans memorial and the location this paper is situated

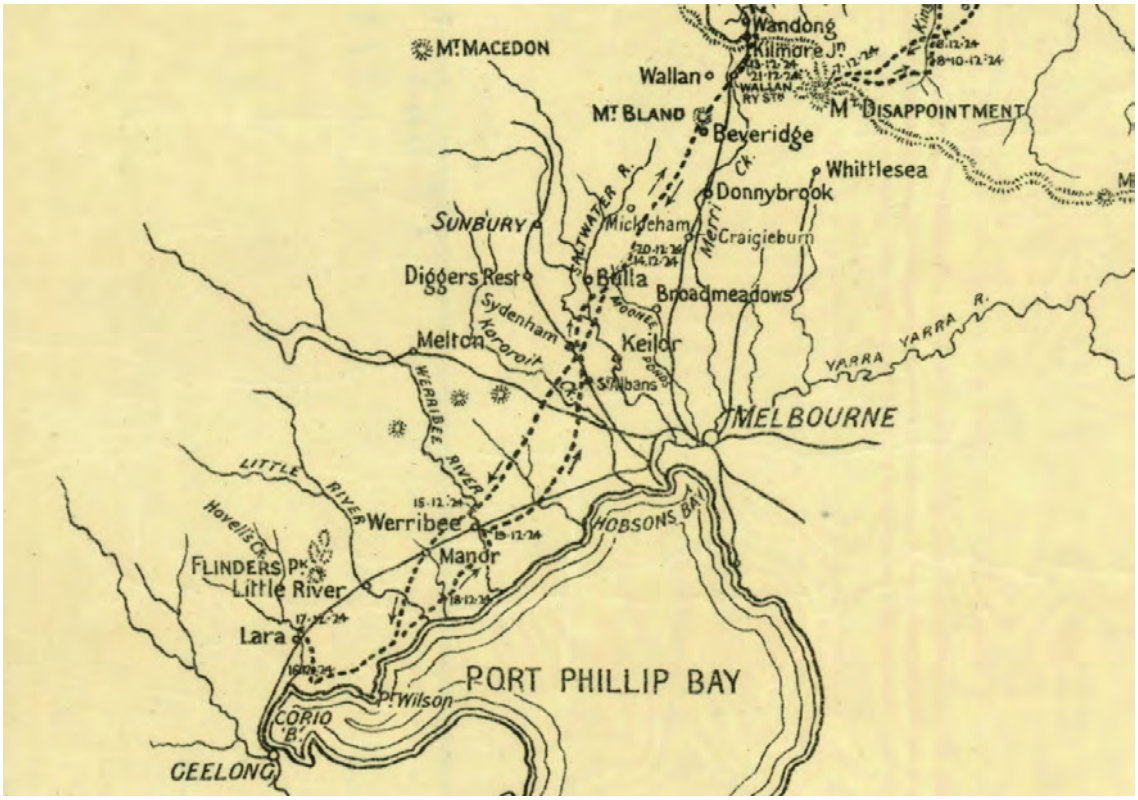


Figure 7 Map of Hume & Hovell's expedition (Department of Lands and Survey, 1924): the dotted lines and arrows mark the journey as documented by Hume & Hovell.

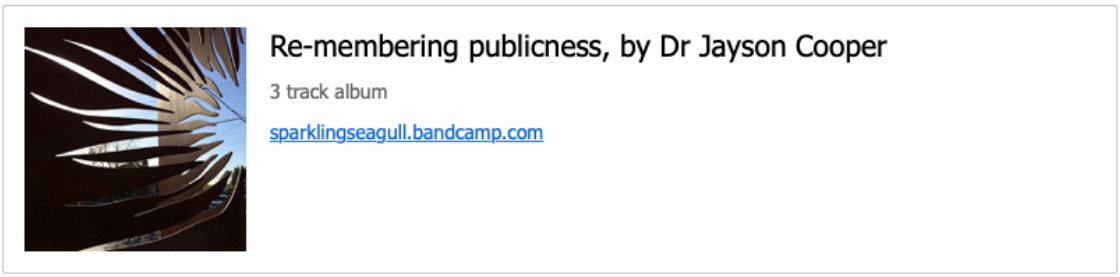


Figure 8 Joan reprise Jayson Cooper - [https://sparklingseagull.bandcamp.com/track/joans-reprise]

Turning the earth to your advantage

Figure 9 Turning the earth to your advantage, photo from a rural farming town where the main industry is sheep and wheat farming, photo Jayson Cooper

Colonial structures advance the enclosure and erasure of public spaces via a rhetoric of "turning the earth to your advantage", that is, to the advantage of those invading already sovereign places. This views the South—including Indigenous minds, bodies, and territories (Tuck and Yang, 2014)—as an empty land waiting to be "developed" and "put to good use". The colonial project's terraforming practices of places have distorted natural systems and patterns, manifesting a public pedagogy of forgetting. This is a forgetting that seeps across the political, social, environmental, and ethical fabrics of nationhood and tampers with identities of contemporary Australian publicness. Refuting the colonial narrative, I listen to the wounds inflicted by the ongoing advancement of colonisation. Decolonising publics is complex work. A starting point for this work is through refusal, resistance, and the rejection of forgetting.

Connell (2007) explores the division between knowledge grounded in the Northern Hemisphere and that found in the Southern Hemisphere, with the north having academic capital over the south. Places like Brazil, Africa, New Zealand and Australia have knowledge systems that stand beyond the Northern metropoles' empirical hold. The north would have the importing theories, methods, terminology, curriculum to make 'us retailers of ideas, rather than manufacturers' (p. 208). Southern theory untangles this. This is important to consider when situating ourselves collectively where we are, on this southern land. Further, how we collectively perform public pedagogy and trouble the colonial etchings laid over places can be a starting point for ongoing decolonisation within public pedagogy, specifically in this geo-spatially located site.

Settler colonialism has at its heart the intention to settle, to stay and not return. Australia is a settler colonial nation and benefits from the ghosts of genocide. It is an 'ongoing horror made invisible by its persistence' and through colonial innovations these manipulate memory to 'become history, and whose ideology becomes reason' (Tuck and Ree, 2013, p. 642). What remains is a haunting. Tuck and Ree outline hauntings, below:

> The relentless remembering and reminding that will not be appeased by settler society's assurances of innocence and reconciliation.
>
> Haunting is both acute and general; individuals are haunted, but so are societies. Haunting lies precisely in its refusal to stop.
>
> Haunting aims to wrong the wrongs, a confrontation that settler horror hopes to evade. Haunting is a constituent element of modern social life. (p. 642)

To be present and to think about pedagogies of remembering hauntings created by settler colonialism insists we confront the ghostly. Tuck and Ree encourage 'alternatives in how we know and make knowledge' (p. 642), alternatives such as rhizomatic storying.

Resisting the colony's lithography through storying

Refusing the narrative of the colony etched in maps I follow Phillips and Bunda's (2018) approach to storying Country. In this I embody ancestral stories of settler hauntings, troubling and staying with uncertainty as a settler on stolen land. Similarly to Phillips, I thread and compose artfully the past, present and future into one another where a sense of self and Place is performed. Performing *storying* as action allows new openings into thinking how places are pedagogical. These new ways are encouraged by Tuck and Ree. Through stories and the processes of sharing stories 'we understand self, Country/Place and others' (Phillips and Bunda, 2018, p. 43). To support how I work with stories and storying as a methodology, I turn to Phillips and Bunda (2018), who offer insights into the principles of storying. They state that:

> storying nourishes thought, body and soul;
>
> storying claims voice in the silenced margins;
>
> storying is embodied relational meaning making;
>
> storying intersects the past and present as living oral archives; and
>
> storying enacts collective ownership and authorship. (Phillips & Bunda, 2018)

Country/Place is central to storying.

Joan

Figure 11 row of sugar gums along Jones Creek: Sugar gums being a plant imported from South Australia and used to make fences, border and boundaries in the farming of these grasslands. Iramoo (Kulin word for grasslands), St Albans

A row of Sugar Gums. The silence of these trees echoes and haunts this landscape, colonial tracings of pastpresent where 'the past and the present continually converge, collapse and co-invent each other' (King, 2010, p. 1) through the 'fleshly realities of companion species' (Haraway, 2010, p. 53). Staying, sticking, and deeply listening to these echoes and hauntings is a pedagogical process, an embodiment of land-based pedagogies. I adopt processes of 'becoming-with'. Becoming-with is woven through time, space and in 'materialsemiotic places (here, not there; there, not here; this, not everything; attachment sites, not case studies for the general)' (Haraway, 2010, p. 53). Attachment sites here are populated by sugar gums not endemic to this Wurundjeri/Woiwurrung Country—they are a noxious weed. The sugar gums are a metaphor for colonialism; they are toxic, causing blurred vision, memory loss, and an unpleasant intoxication. Staying and sticking with these encounters resists the storying of colonialism and departs from taken for granted truths that falsely pass on a legacy. Telling alternative narratives counters the singular tomes venerated as the *harbinger* of *colonial* dominion. Being called into connection (Rose, 2017; Rose and van Dooren, 2017) is a call for the ethics of connection to be lived through an openness with the more-than-human, an openness to the sites of attachment that generate processes of becoming-with. This is pedagogical. Openness 'produces reflexivity, so that one's own ground becomes destabilized. In open dialogue one holds one's self available to be surprised, to be challenged, and to be changed' (Rose, 2002) whilst documenting and thinking-with these 'lines of flight' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987).

Sugar gums are common in the western district of Narrm (Melbourne) and they maintain a colonial haunting and presence in this landscape. They mark farmhouses, allotments, borders and boundaries—settler notions of ownership. Sugar gums are the physical traces of colonial inscriptions cast over and upon Country/Place. Here these sugar gums stand along the edge of the remnant grasslands called Iramoo, on a small seasonal waterway called Jones/Joan's Creek. This waterway 'shimmers' (Rose, 2017), it sparks questions in me as I stick with the liveliness of materiality and I move across 'discourses, disciplines, politics and knowledges' (King, 2010, p. 5). I want to know more about this waterway. I constantly re-turn and follow the calls of connection, the shimmering of this little creek that seems to start in the middle of nowhere, surrounded by houses and suburbia.

I found Jones Creek to have a vague history. Sourcing information about the creek's *pastpresent* came from historical documents through the Victorian State library, local libraries and historical societies, and conversations with people who grew up in the area. Today the creek begins approximately three kilometres from where it once started. It consists of a series

of large ponds that filter stormwater before reaching the bay; these artificial bodies of water are not the true beginnings of this waterway. People walk in-between the edge of the creek and the remnant grasslands daily, underneath large pylons of electricity and the flight paths of hawks and planes. My focus shifted to the northern section of the creek, a section that has been erased from the landscape. St Albans has increasingly been sub-divided, from once volcanic basalt plains to squatter allotments sold out to small farming plots, to the gentrification of property developers. This small seasonal creek is more of a hindrance. In the 1950s, the suburb grew as post war migration re-newed the area. The local council shifted soil from a nearby bluestone quarry to fill in the northern section of this waterway. All that remains are traces and hauntings disguised under and behind houses and streetscapes, trainlines and factories.

I began mapping the land through my artistic processes to create a cut-up *pastpresent* map. I collected and 'playbacked' these gatherings to further drive my inquiry into this little waterway. There was a lack of Aboriginal voice and presence in these documents, as the memories and histories of this waterway were told as part of the colony's canon. This was also true of the herstories. The book *Pubs, punts, and pastures: the story of Irish pioneer women on the Salt Water River* (Carstairs and Lane, 1988) provided further insights as it told a female perspective within the white male dominated narrative of colonisation. Within this book I came upon a map marking Jones creek as, Joan's creek. The creek in this map also started further north than where it starts today. Its original starting point is from a soak 200 metres from where the Hume and Hovell memorial stands.

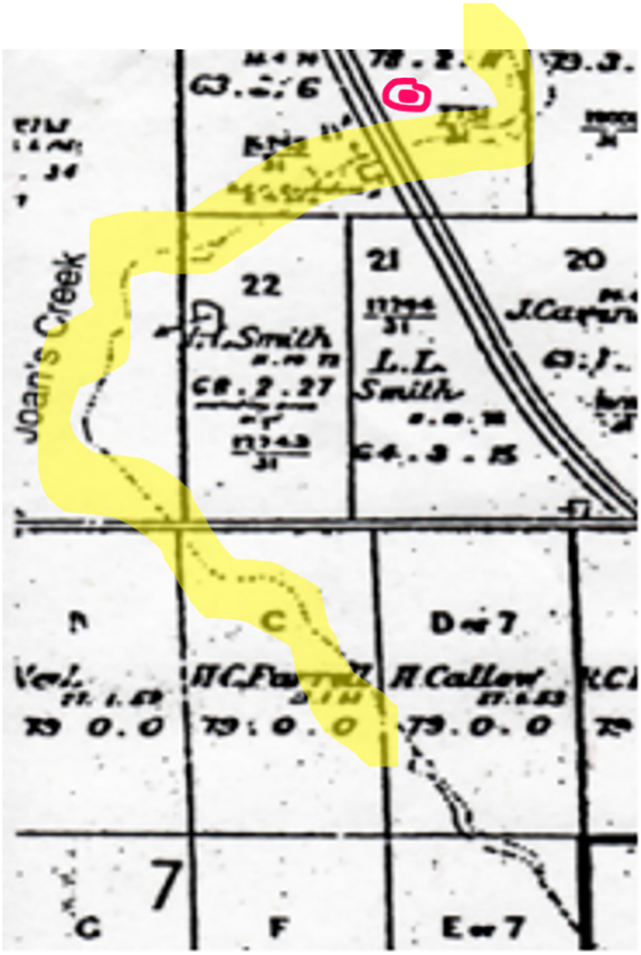


Figure 12 Joan's creek before erasure, red circle indicates Hume & Hovell memorial, the yellow highlight indicates the erased section of waterway

I spoke to a local person at the post office and he told me about when he was a child in the 1940s remembering walking along the train tracks to get to school, near a large dam a few hundred metres from the Hume and Hovell memorial. This dam was big enough to swim in during the hot months and was a source of water in the early days of St Albans. Today there is no dam or creek; a muddy drain way underneath the train line is all that remains.

Figure 13 All that remains

Joan's/Jones creek came to symbolise many things for me as a local artist and teacher. I was unable to find any documentation about who Joan may have been; scouring local history catalogues with no success. Who is Joan and why is a creek named after her, why is it now spelled Jones? The only Joan that I could find was the author of the book containing the map marking the waterway as Joan's creek. Was it a spelling error? The idea of a forgotten person living on as a creek was interesting. Joan is a ghost-like character, both fact and fiction. Likewise, the male counterpart Jones was equally evasive in historical records. Many creeks go nameless in this suburban environment but their hidden paths linger; this little creek has a name, it had been claimed.

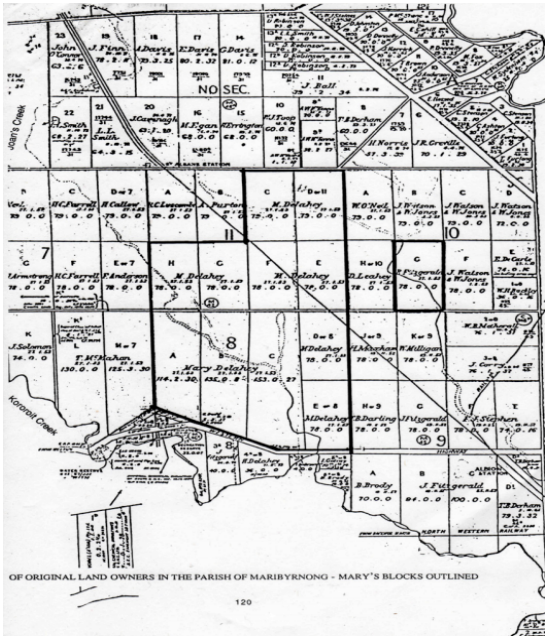
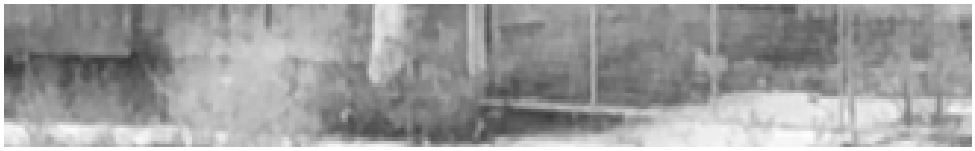


Figure 14 'original land owners' map – language that erasures Aboriginal identities and connections to Country; this map illustrates the full waterway prior to local council erasing the northern section

Walking-with Joan's Creek: A Photo Essay

To generate a counter narrative promoted by colonial accounts such as maps and historical documents I pick-up and cut-into this paper by creating-engaging in counter-mapping processes of walking. This photo story makes visible the invisible, it remembers a waterway through the embodied encounters of walking with this Wurundjeri Country. This essay acts as a counter story to the erasure of Joan's/Jones creek, bringing the creek back as a member of this Place's publicness. Refuting the colonial musings and use of the natural world, including how it is named and owned, ghosts become friends through a decolonising act of public pedagogy.



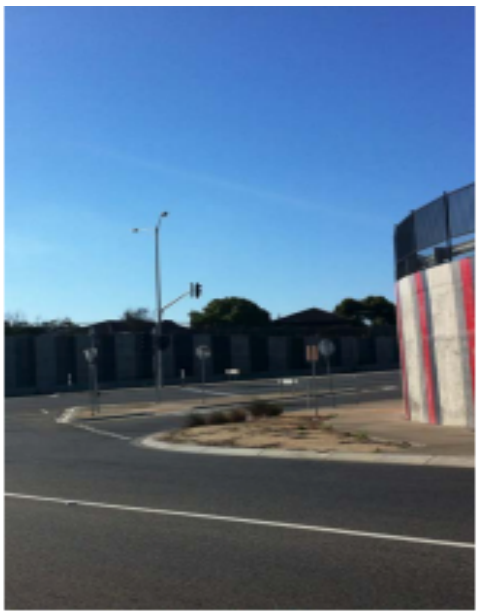


Figure 15 unnamed creek

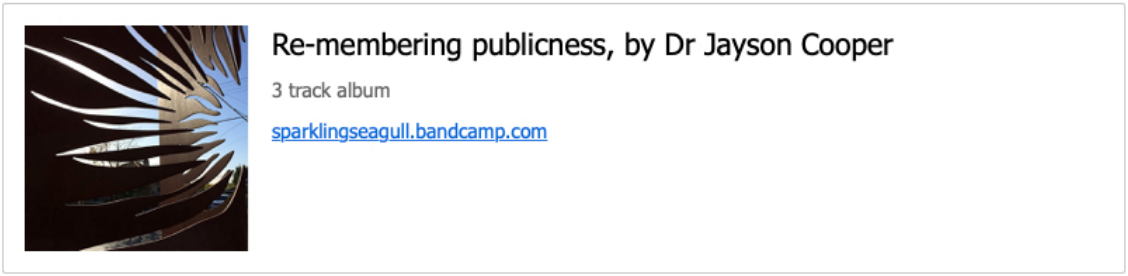


Figure 16 Joan - [https://sparklingseagull.bandcamp.com/track/joan]

Lyrics

Verse One
She ripped her floral red dress,
And her memory's tired and makes no sense,
She lingers in the flat lie of the land,
Chorus One
For Joan's a ghost, with the most beautiful hair,
(Oh no, oh no, oh no: there's two)

Verse Two
Looking out over the grass plains,
She sees her house shimmer in a haze,
Nothings permanent but I think she's OK,
Chorus Two
For Joan's a ghost, with the most beautiful hair,
(Oh no, oh no, oh no: there's two)
Called to the spirits to make them leave,
The concrete walls slip and skid,
I thought you might just, like to know,
Your house is built on bones, belonging to, Joan

Verse Three
Her floral dressed wedged between thistle stalks,
Taken away with not a thought,
The people ask, but your name is gone,
Replaced by a man, a man called Mr Jones
Chorus Three
For Joan's a ghost, with the most beautiful hair
(Oh no, oh no, oh no: there's two)
Stepped in the water, I needed to see
How really deep is she?
Standing in the floating debris
You know you're standing on bones, belonging to Joan
Belonging to Joan
Where is Joan? She's not alone

Figure 17 Enclosure

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