Trace and the makers of meaning

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TRACE AND THE MAKERS OF MEANING

by

Lindon J. Thompson

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Award of Master of Arts (Creative Arts).

At the Faculty of the W.A. Academy of Performing Arts, Edith Cowan University, Mount Lawley.

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ABSTRACT

One of the greatest accessible records of trace and the past is the landscape, which over time acts as a repository of evidence from natural forces and things that humans have created or changed.

This thesis considers trace as material and nonmaterial evidence, remnants, marks, vestiges of events past and forgotten or remembered. How can a past that is evidenced only by its traces, be read within a landscape context by disciplines of knowledge production? The subsequent interpretation, generation of meaning and understanding of traces contributes to the knowledge, mythology and perceptions of reality for differing groups in different places.

At the same time this research considers my own arts practice, paintings which are derived from a unique process of casting various found surfaces (wood, metal, brick, etc) and extracting the 'traces' in acrylic paint, removing and transferring a thin layer of the original surface material which may or may not be reworked further.

The paintings, from the environment of a bygone time, remind us of what we see and yet often may not notice. They invite us to consider our relationship to a past from which we may have become alienated. ‘Trace’ connects ‘lived’ time, the past, with ‘physical’ time, the present.

Traces invite us to contemplate the ephemeral quality of time and consider the synergy of the time continuum - the connection of past and present - and in so doing compel us to consider the question of the future.
DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signature

Date 27-3-02
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

This research is derived from a survey of literature and from my practice as an artist working with 'trace', the material evidence accumulated over time as sourced from various landscapes, cultural or natural. The scope of this thesis is wider than that of my painting works, however issues that relate to both are discussed as they arise. Both inform each other, yet neither exemplifies the other. They do however form a relationship, which allows for a more comprehensive exploration of 'trace' and issues relating to my arts practice than might otherwise be possible, by capitalising on characteristics of both respective media.

The art works that I produce (see figures 1 to 17) are derived from various locations in both cultural and natural landscapes. Each painting surface bears traces of some past event and is derived from a process of casting various found surfaces such as wood, metal, brick, rock and so forth and extracting the 'traces' in acrylic paint. A thin layer of the original surface material such as dirt, old paint and organic material may also be removed and transferred onto the painting surface. The surfaces may be reworked further, paint added to emphasizing surface traces, or to add further layers of information. This intern may act as an additional referent, analogous say to temporary markings that appear and disappear over time for example, salt spray, water marks, corrosion or the leaching out of iron from rock, seagull droppings, decaying animal or organic matter and so forth.

On the one hand using paint immediately associates the works with the history and tradition of painting. On the other, paint is just a flexible material that is practical to cast and stretch on a frame as would be a more traditional canvas. Paint is no more than pigment of finely ground mineral or chemical substance, held together by a binding medium, in this case acrylic. They could as well be cast in cement, plaster, resin, wax, or other matter. The materials I use have certain practical advantages - flexibility, lightness of weight among others. On the other hand, using paint cast and presented in the form of a painting, means also that they are framed
and interpreted within the context of the medium itself and all its associated connotations.

Focusing on remnants from the environment of a bygone time, reminds us of what we may see, yet often not notice. These works invite us to consider our relationship to a past from which we may have become alienated. Trace connects ‘lived’ time, the past, with ‘physical’ time, the present.

I began my career as a photographer, probably developing an acuity to see often-overlooked details then. I later moved into video production and postproduction, spending many years editing for various broadcasters, which perhaps further developed a fascination for the manipulation of time. How is this relevant? This research, both thesis and paintings, are not just a result of a period of creative or ‘cultural’ production, but of a production that is influenced by previous learned experience. Everything seen and remembered is conditioned by what has been seen and remembered before. (Morris, 1986, p.5) New surroundings and situations are interpreted filtered or framed through that experience; this work is no exception.

These paintings are one of may ways to work, explore and deal with ‘trace’, to consider past events in the present, and are by no means conclusive. At the same time they also become cultural objects, artefacts which can be shared, traded or sold with others, the object of future historians perhaps. They may or may not communicate some of my perceptions and experiences of those particular places of their origin. Every work also generates a response different for each viewer; each of who brings their own views and past experiences to each painting.

Material traces are engaging because they are physical clues to the past, to events and/or cultures of another time. Yet trace is more complex also, it exists now in the present but is a connection to the past as a remnant, a vestige or artefact. Yet there may be no visible trace, an absence filled only by memory, something remembered, a personal or shared memory.
This enquiry into trace begins by considering ‘landscape’, the surface of the earth, as a repository of evidence from natural forces and things that humans have created or changed and which is probably the largest accessible record of trace and the past. Landscape traces the culture of its inhabitants; traces inscribed one upon the other, partially or completely erasing earlier traces. Such a process, the effect of accumulation, may also be understood through the idea of a palimpsest, a metaphor for the processes of landscape change, where current uses over-write but do not completely erase the marks of prior use. (Crang, 1998, p.198) Considering landscape over time also means considering it as “a legacy of the past.” (Smith, 1993, p.80)

This means looking beneath obvious surface appearances to the way in which landscape is gradually shaped over time by natural forces and by different groups of people in different places. This gradual shaping of the earth reflects the beliefs and practices of the inhabitants and the meanings invested in that landscape, each stratum of civilization growing on the next. From agricultural and economic uses to cultural and religious practices, the landscape records traces of those actions. (Crang, 1998, p.15)

The theatre, opera, art, literature and poetry are typically seen as symbolic products or expressions of a society’s culture, as are the institutions that keep them going, the galleries museums opera houses and various cultural organisations. But culture although difficult to define, includes perhaps all things produced by humanity ranging from high art and religious beliefs, to environmental pollutants and heavy industry. (Belton, Culture, 1996). Culture is also part of every day life and something that gives meaning to our everyday life through various sets values and beliefs, which ultimately are reproduced through material and symbolic forms.

There are a number of ways these process of change in the landscape can be understood, such as with the textual metaphor, viewing the landscape as a signifying system in a manner similar to a text in a book, as readable signs in a landscape. (Atkins, Simmons, & Roberts, 1998, p219) Every change we make to the landscape we live in, every trace, has the potential to be ‘read’ as a text depending on the
degree of erasure or partial erasure by other changes in the landscape. A text is “an assemblage of signs (such as words, images, sounds and/or gestures) constructed (and interpreted) with reference to the conventions associated with a genre and in a particular medium of communication.” (Chandler, Introduction, 1994)

However, as with any text, it’s reading is subject to rules, rules of grammar and use specific to the medium used. Reading the landscape and its traces, may effectively involve many differing mediums at any one given time, widening the range of possible interpretations. But attributing the traces to the past can be problematic, the identity of an artefact is not given, its identity depends on which connections are made and who is making them. (Shanks & Mackenzie, 1994, p.27) From an archaeological standpoint, rather than facts waiting to be uncovered in the ground to reveal the truth about how it was back then, traces and artefacts become a source of potential information, clues, and data for interpretation.

How trace is attributed and interpreted can be understood in terms of a contemporary social construction, which rests within the social, political, historical, intellectual and emotional relationships of groups attempting to interpret them. (Shanks & Mackenzie, 1994, p.32) Artefacts and traces in many layers of cultural and natural events are all of archaeological interest. The study of these areas may also be complicated by erosion and decay over a long period of time, requiring a diverse approach of study from the microscopic fragment to a topographical survey.

Archaeology, which Noble defines as “the study of past human existence by means of its material remains”, (Noble, 1991, p.40) involves an engagement with physical residues, traces whose identification is often difficult, let alone certain. There is no way of really knowing the exact circumstances of the past, and so material objects or artefacts may have many readings, their identity depends on which connections are made and who is making them, A trace thus can have many possible identities. (Shanks & Mackenzie, 1994, p.27) Interpretation or identification of trace becomes an issue of social, political, historical, intellectual and emotional relationships of groups attempting to interpret them.
Another way of visualising trace is as pieces in a giant jigsaw puzzle of the past, each piece separated by a void, which archaeologists attempt to fill - a gap between past and present, connected by narrative, theories. To complicate matters, there would not be just one jigsaw puzzle, but many mixed versions in many languages, made over differing periods and with different pictures on the pieces. Some of the pieces may even fit in the same places, whilst others which once fitted are now dog-eared and unidentifiable.

Our understanding of the world around us is built on images, language and other sensory information being absorbed, interpreted and stored in our brains throughout our lives. Our ability to hold and recall experiences, in our memory forms a crucial reference point from which we derive our view on the reality of the world in which we live. While each new experience changes the point of view of the viewer, each memory recalled is not the memory of the event alone but the memory of a memory. Rather than fixed, these memories evolve over time within the mind in relation to other memories. (Morris, 1986, p.5)

Although trace is more likely to be thought of as a sign of the material object, a mark or impression, a part of the visible world there may also be no visible trace, an absence filled only by memory. However there is no psychological or physiological evidence for the existence of memory trace, so how can it be accounted for? (Heil, 1978, p.62) Even though it may not physically exist in the brain, memory trace may be a result of a network of relationships and connections relating the way we perceive our experiences and knowledge learned though linguistic, images and other sensory information. Our perceptual mechanisms it might be argued, “impose a structure on our experience and that it is this (imposed) structure which maps onto traces.” (Heil, 1978, p.64) Traces are though to exist only because it would provide an explanation for the phenomenon of memory.

Time is a significant component of trace; it has the effect of decontextualising traces, separating them from the originator and original location. Their context
changes or ‘decomposes’ and if subject to the effects of nature for long enough, such as weather and erosion, they would gradually lose the trace of their origins. (Smith, 1993, p80)

Derrida’s term ‘différance’ is useful in describing the gap or difference between creative or originating agents and the lasting artefact or trace. Différance alludes to both difference; the gap between an origin and its trace, a signified and its sign; and deferral, the way in which the meaning of signs is endlessly deferred, a signified itself becoming a signifier. (Belton, Différance, 1996; Chandler, Modality and Representation, 1994)

Meaning is constituted by a “tissue of differences,” (Derrida, 1981, pp26-27) a network of traces, every sign marked by the trace of another sign. Hence, there is said to be no escape from the system of signifiers and traces. This is also an indication of the rhizomatic nature of trace, as a network or web of criss-crossing interconnecting lines of past and present time, physical and memory trace, events occurring in different times in the same or different places.

Différance highlights the difficulties there are with interpretation and derivation of meaning, and cast doubts on certainty in either. For there to be a difference there is always a gap, a space or interval between the signifier and signified. “An interval must separate the present from what it is not in order for the present to be itself,” (Derrida, 1982) without an interval between the present and an origin there could also be no trace.

“We know the way the world is because scientists tell us so.” (Johnson, 1999, p.34) The nature of this inquiry also addresses the process of constructing knowledge from traces and symbolism embedded in the landscape and its subsequent representation by ‘makers of meaning’.
Representing the world around us is part of a process of producing knowledge and of communicating and interpreting information. The creation of meaning is part of that process, a distinctly human activity that results in different cultures, responding in different ways with differing, codes and conventions, to create and communicate meaning of the world around us. (Cosgrove & Domosh, 1993, p.29)

Knowledge in Western society is to a large extent based on scientific endeavour and the way the world has tended to be represented stems from underlying issues of mimesis, and a “belief that we should strive to produce as accurate a reflection of the world as possible.” (Duncan & Ley, 1993, p.2) Enlightenment ideals of both science and nineteenth century ‘realist’ art and literature meant an overriding concern “with the ‘accurate’ observation and representation of the world.” (Chandler, Glossary, 1994) Postmodern scrutiny cast doubt on those metanarratives that legitimised both the rules of knowledge of the sciences and the foundations of modern institutions, “...on overarching explanations that claim to speak for all people; that claim to be universal and not ‘particular’”, (Crang, 1998, p.182) the result of which was a ‘crisis of representation’.

Representation becomes a means to the production and circulation of meaning, using such texts and their associated language systems. For representation and meaning to function, members of a culture must share similar sets of concepts, images and ideas about the world enabling them to think, feel and interpret the world through representations in a similar way. Thus communication of representation depends on our understandings of reality and its subsequent formal construction as knowledge. (Cosgrove & Domosh, 1993, p.25)

The advent of linear perspective was particularly convincing as a mimetic reproduction of the world, a ‘transparent window’, a ‘natural form of representation.’ (Duncan, 1993, p.41) A claim, which “spread from the world of art to other knowledge systems within Europe.” (Jay cited in Duncan, 1993, p.41) However this link between reality and ‘objective’ representation becomes all the more absurd, if
painting as a mode of ‘realistic’ representation, is considered over different historical periods and under differing social structures. All of which have produced differing representations of the ‘real’ world. (Duncan & Ley, 1993, P.4) There are numerous perceptions of realism depending on the period, the type of media used, stylistic movements and the individual concerned. Realist art typically seeks to ‘transparently’ and ‘naturally’ reflect a world, which exists independently of its representation, “as if they were slices of life ‘untouched by human hand.’” (Chandler, Glossary, 1994) Our own immersion in a culture can make it difficult to distinguish between the world and our representations of it, because of the familiarity and ‘naturalness’ of those representations. If we consider the multitude of forms of representations available to us today, it becomes apparent that what we may consider as a reflection of reality becomes somewhat slippery, is not fixed but constantly changing, and may be different for every individual. (Shanks & Mackenzie, 1994, p.40)

Knowledge is not limited to the scientific as Lyotard points out, it exists, competes, conflicts with narrative and myth as forms of knowledge. Narrative knowledge is determined by the society in which narrative exists and includes also notions of “know how,” “knowing how to live,” “how to listen.” (Lyotard, 1981, p.7, 20, 180) Making our experiences into narratives would seem to be a “fundamental feature of the human drive to make meaning.” (Chandler, Syntagmatic Analysis, 1994) Narrative knowledge is accumulated through past and shared experiences.

Myth, on the other hand tends to be a meaning making system, which can also provide codes of behaviour, appropriate within a culture, but at the same time, they may also be inappropriate to members of another culture. (Tilley, 1991, p.139) What we take to be ‘natural’ may in fact be an illusory reality, comprising of myths that circulate everyday life constructing the world and our place in it. At the same time, they mask power structures in society. We inhabit a world of signs that “support existing power structures” and “purport to be natural.” (McNeill, Mass Culture, Myth and the Mythologist, 1996)
To contemplate the trace of an original past is to also negotiate its temporal relationship to place, past and present. Perhaps it is for this reason that Noble suggests “all artists are concerned with traces from the past.” (Noble, 1991, p.8) Even if archaeologists are the ‘past’ specialists, both art and archaeology have a binding commonality in creative and interpretive thought, craftsmanship, technique and communication. Archaeology is a human activity, and like art, exposed to personal bias and subjectivity. And both are perhaps well suited to dealing with traces of the past and constructing narratives to renegotiate and re-present the past in the present.

Both art and archaeology are concerned with ideas, meanings, symbols, narrative, speculation, interpretation, recognition, looking long and hard at things and both can cross disciplinary boundaries. Both offer meaning, insight, and understanding into the world around us. Yet, ironically, any artistic interpretation of the past is likely to end up a cultural artefact itself and become the subject of future archaeological study.

In practice, “Science, the arts, local belief systems all work to create different knowledge’s about the world.” (Crang, 1998, p.180) The makers of meaning write the history and construct knowledge and meaning from material evidence and from that knowledge. It comes back to which knowledge is prioritised over others, and who can participate in the languages of the dominant knowledge's and their institutions. (Crang, 1998, p.180)

My own painting works, apart from anything else, are also a record of interaction with the landscape, which become physical metaphors linking that experience of place and past. They are not about me but a result of my perceptions of those ‘traces’, how they related to my memories and experiences and how they relate to other places and times in landscape. They become an accumulative narrative of my experience and involvement in place and time. The lure of the real and mimesis is examined in relation to my own work and that of Boyle (see page 75) who also
works in a similar manner. Issues of simulation, representation and hyperreality are also addressed.

We all have stories, narratives and myths of our own which collectively contribute to an underlying knowledge base, part of the social fabric of any culture. Each one a version of a reality representing a particular view of the world, which helps us to make sense of ourselves and our relation to the landscapes and places we inhabit. My intervention in the history of a site or place becomes not only a trace of the original, but also a parallel existence. Each painting is a separate object, a new object, yet at the same time traces the original and my own processes, each recontextualising a less obvious aspect of the world.

The works are on the one hand mimetic representations, on the other hand they subvert mimesis in the sense that they hang on a wall, and are presented as a flat square/rectangular painting, which emphasises the fact that they are divorced, separated and isolated from the 'real' world. They are clearly objects, unframed and mounted on a wall, so they cannot be mistaken as a piece of the world or a view of it. All the above emphasise that although they may allude to their origins, they are also signs or texts that I have constructed to represent a part of my reality, the 'real' world as selected by me and represented in that particular medium.
CHAPTER ONE

LOCATING TRACE

Trace in Landscape

Over time, the landscape acts as a repository of evidence from natural forces and things that humans have created or changed and as such is arguably one the greatest accessible records of trace and the past.

The term landscape is somewhat ambiguous however, and has often had different meanings dependant on the period, culture or location. Landscape (or landschaft as it was once referred to) as a way of viewing the world had become popular in Europe by the late nineteenth century. (Atkins et al., 1998, p.274) Although the western attitude to nature and landscape stretches back to Roman times and “a desire to seek refreshment and fulfilment in the beauty of nature.” (Langdon, 2001)

From the seventeenth century the word landscape was employed by painters in England in order to distinguish between scenes of land, the sea and portraiture. By the middle of the seventeenth century, landscape also referred to what the eye could take in from a particular perspective and in the following century, meaning had shifted from painting to the natural scenery itself. (Stock, 1993, p.317)

Landscape as we know it today may refer to anything from a scenic view of ‘nature’, to the countryside, the bush or outback, to urban dwellings our habitat, the place we live and our surroundings. Landscape is also about the study of topography, or the lie of the land, landforms and geological structures. Landscapes may themselves be symbols, material artefacts and contribute to a community’s identity and sense of place, emphasizing the relationships between people and the physical landscape and the meanings derived from these settings. (Atkins et al., 1998, p.xvi)
Above all else, landscape might perhaps be better thought of as “the discursive terrain across which the struggle between the different, often hostile, codes of meaning construction has been engaged.” (Daniels & Cosgrove, 1993, p.59) The way the landscape is shaped can be seen as expressing social ideologies that are then perpetuated and supported through the landscape. (Crang, 1998, p.27) Cultures can be reflected in their surrounding landscape unintentionally, as a cumulative effect over time, or intentionally, by the shaping of the land according to the beliefs and customs of the inhabitants and the meanings invested in that landscape. Buildings, statues, parks, gardens or agriculture, for example are all typically symbolic as well as practical, yet intentional changes to the landscape. Landscapes thus store our attitudes to the environment.

Culture

“Landscapes are culture before they are nature; constructs of the imagination projected onto wood and water and rock.” (Schama, 1995, p.61)

Our continual ordering of the landscape makes it controllable, manageable and understandable. Culture is ordered, nature unordered to our eyes, although the nature world is actually quite ordered in that it functions on very complex sets of mutually dependent relationships between plants and animals and their environments.

Culture is itself complex and difficult to define, Williams suggests that it is constantly changing in definition and possibly one of the most complicated words in the English language. (Williams cited in Warren, 1993, p.175) A useful starting point however is that of all things produced by human agency ranging from high art and religious beliefs, to environmental pollutants and heavy industry. (Belton, Culture, 1996) Theatre, opera, visual art, literature and poetry are typically seen as products or expressions of ‘high art’ in a society's culture, as are the institutions that keep them going, the galleries, museums, opera houses and so forth. (Crang, 1998, p.3)

However culture can also be considered part of every day life and as something that gives meaning to everyday life, the sets of beliefs or values that give
meaning to groups of people, which intern are reproduced in the landscape through material and symbolic forms. It is necessary to acknowledge our own cultural viewpoint however; in considering other cultures, because we always see them from our own perspective, our own culture is not neutral. (Crang, 1998, p.2, 3, 7)

**Symbolic Landscapes**

The potency of symbolic landscapes created by man can be seen in the recent terrorists attacks on the World Trade Centre and Pentagon in the USA. As symbols of American culture they play a significant part in the cultural identity of a people and nation and thus also become targets from those who might be at odds with that culture. Forgey, of the Washington Post commented shortly after:

> The buildings signified America's economic might, just as the Pentagon -- equally big and prideful in its way -- connotes our military power. In the case of the New York towers, this symbolism was fully intentional. The objective was to be as soaringly visible as possible. (Forgey, 2001)

In Afghanistan earlier in the year, the ruling Taliban militia began destroying all “icons” including a 2000-year-old Buddhist statue, the world's tallest standing Buddha, because “...they were un-Islamic.” (Spillius, 2001) These icons of peace and tolerance imbedded in the landscape from another culture, evidently too stark a contrast for the totalitarian and intolerant rule of the Taliban.

Forgey also recalls earlier attacks on symbolism of countries such as Jewish synagogues by Nazis in Would War II, British troops in 1814 burning the White House and in the recent Balkan wars, where “more than 1,000 mosques and other Muslim buildings were demolished ...along with 309 Catholic churches and 36 Orthodox Christian churches and other buildings.” (Forgey, 2001)

> The Architecture is evidence... of the past. Buildings -- their shapes, materials, textures and spaces -- represent culture in its most persuasive physical form. Destroy the buildings, and you rob a culture of its memory, of its legitimacy, of its right to exist. (Forgey, 2001)

> These are prominent examples, but they demonstrate very clearly the way in which a landscape can function as a symbolic and signifying system, in which social ideologies are perpetuated and supported by the shaping of the landscape. These
values are readable as a signifying system, or a text. (Crang, 1998, p.27; Shanks & Mackenzie, 1994, p.22)

But before there were towering skyscrapers, there were towering stones, in centuries past such rocks might have held, an if not equivalent, certainly an equally important symbolic status.

**Rock Cultures**

Rock and stone raise questions about culture and the domination of nature, particularly if there is a big rock, we have to climb it, touch it, mark it, and possess it. Human beings have made use of earth and stone as basic building materials for much of our existence. Stone has become tool and weapon, such as axe and arrowheads, stone symbolises permanence and power. Permanence whether monument or building, is power that is reflected in the strength and effort required to move, carve or build from stone.

Rocks and stones touch a chord with human beings because of suggestions of immortality, rock survives as “a witness to the place in which it sits”. (Goldsworthy, 1996, p.6) The statue, figure or effigy carved in stone lives for thousands of years, into eternity. We mark our graves with carved stone, a final trace, stone endures, memory fades. Almost every culture known “has attributed to pebbles and stones, rocks and boulders, magical powers of intense energy, luck, fertility, and healing.” (Lippard, 1983, p.15)

In my painting works derived from rock surfaces (see figures 5, 12 - 17), the focus is on the traces of geological past and the subsequent effects of weathering. Yet, they remain symbolic of rock also. There are further traces which are lost if a surface is cast, the inherent colour of the material and temporary markings that appear and disappear over time such as salt spray, water marks, corrosion or leaching of minerals from the rock, white seagull droppings, decaying animal or organic matter and so forth. Some are inevitably lost in the process I use, although additional paint is added as a referent to them in many cases.
‘Waychinicup’, (see figure 5) is derived from a rock surface. Whilst it reflects its geological past it also traces the effects of water flowing across its surface for thousands, if not millions of years, pathways worn smooth across its surface.

Interestingly the paintings that are presented as pairs, with the same surface but split into two (see figure 10, 14, 15) seem to be more effective. Does this strike a chord with building structures (such as stone or brick), which consist of blocks or squares? Everything we build tends to end up gridded in some way, brick paving, brick/stone walls, and tiled roofs. On the other hand, are they a vague reference to dualities, underlying associations of binary opposites in our society, origin to trace, past to present?

River Cultures

An exhibition at The Museum of the River Thames, London, entitled “The Thames: What Would We Do Without It?” held in 2001, gives some insight into the often overlooked symbolic and defining nature of rivers to cities. This exhibition included a series of modified photographic images to suggest what it would be like if the Thames were not there.

In one, the river is a car park; in another, it appears as arid scrubland; in a third, it’s just paved over. The images are claustrophobic, the city reduced to a futile parade of buildings. (Martin, 2001)

When rivers are considered as the givers of life, a source of drinking and irrigation water, food source, transportation system, as well as a convenient waste disposal system, it is not difficult to see why such a multifunctional use has made them ideal places for human settlement. Although they can take life also particularly when subject to flooding, rivers remain a focal point of much activity and discussion.

Rivers since antiquity as Schama notes, have been analogous to blood circulating through the body, (Schama, 1995, p.247) they act as natural and social landscape divides, north vs. south, or east vs. west. Although the function of many city rivers has changed, transport now largely replaced by recreational use and the supply of drinking and irrigation water limited by pollution and salinity problems, the symbolism of a river as ‘the life blood of the city’ remains.
Tree cultures

The power of trees has had a particular hold over the human imagination, from the tree of life in Eden, and roots of German nationalism in the forests, to the aristocratic prestige and naval supremacy of the British oak; trees are intertwined with the cultural mythology of those regions. (Atkins et al., 1998, p.93) Depiction of wild landscapes was associated with the image of the wild man or herdsman who lived in the woods and of Roman preoccupation with the forest as a wild and primitive place that they failed to conquer. (Moser & Gamble, 1997, p.209) Traces of trees, forest which have long since been cleared can as Atkins Simmons et al, emphasize be found in place names such as “lundr (small wood), skogr (wood), thveit or thwaite (clearing),” or “lea, lee, leigh, ley, lye - forest, wood, glade, clearing.” (Atkins et al., 1998, p.94)

Reading the Landscape

Material culture and geographical features in the landscape do not communicate meaning in the same way as written or spoken language, rather they enable different types of meaning to be interpreted by different contextual relationships and analogy. (Tilley, 1991, p.16) Some of the ways in which landscape may be read and interpreted include; the textual metaphor, as a signifying system; the palimpsest, taking into consideration accumulated layers inscribed on the landscape; and oral text, the spoken word and narrative.

Textual metaphor

To consider evidence of geological occurrences and human material culture as a textual metaphor read in a way analogous to a text is not as strange as it might seem. The function of language necessitates the combination of individual letters or characters specific to that language, combined to make individual words, sentences and texts. Each letter is a symbol just as say Egyptian hieroglyphics or prehistoric rock carvings are symbols, which depending on the way they are ordered and combined with other letters or symbols, may convey a particular meaning. (Smith, 1993, p.89)
According to Chandler, a text usually refers to a message, which has been recorded in some way that it is physically independent of its sender or receiver. This may include both verbal or nonverbal and exist in any medium as,

an assemblage of signs (such as words, images, sounds and/or gestures) constructed (and interpreted) with reference to the conventions associated with a genre and in a particular medium of communication. (Chandler, Introduction, 1994)

The meaning and subsequent interpretation is particular to the cultural and geographical context in which they were made, in other words a text's meaning is, "culturally informed, and may indeed be shaped by explicit written conventions", (Duncan & Ley, 1993, p.17) that is, they are subject to certain rules. Consequently reading the landscape is not straightforward and complicating matters is the fact that we interpret landscapes which are already saturated in meanings through our own values, adding what Crang refers to as "double encoding". (Crang, 1998, p.40) The World Trade Centre for example, represented something vastly different to its destroyers than those who used and occupied it.

Landscape unlike a written text, is not read in a linear manner. It is not scanned once only, line-by-line as in reading the page of a book, but read in a concurrent manner, the eye darts and fixates on a variety of focal points within and including an overall view. (Stock, 1993, p.320) The spatial context may also change depending on an individual's movement within the landscape. So, under these circumstances, reading a landscape is conducted in a manner different from that of reading a book. In some ways it is more akin to 'reading' an exhibition of paintings, which can also be viewed in a non-linear manner.

Rules for reading

Language is subject to linguistic structure, which regulates the way in which meaning is conveyed. A significant difference between the use of language and that of other signs, objects, artefacts and including art works, is that not everyone knows the same 'linguistic' rules. Interpretation is subject to whichever variations of 'rules' are applied; therefore any reading of material objects in the landscape will involve a much lesser degree of precision.
The reader needs to know the same set of rules as the author to be enabled to decode, or 'read' what is written. As Saussure establishes, “language is composed of hidden rules that we use but don't articulate.” (Saussure cited in Johnson, 1999, p.91) Language works on the assumption that its rules are to some degree at least, understood by both author and reader.

Reading the landscape is less clear-cut; to do so requires a shared knowledge and memory of the symbolism and history inscribed in that landscape by a particular culture. But if we don’t have this knowledge, can we transfer the knowledge and memory we do have from one landscape to another, enabling the reading of other landscapes?

Stock suggests that, “all reading is remembering.” (Stock, 1993, p.316) We cannot read if we cannot remember the letters of the alphabet, combinations of words and sentences or what to do with them. Equally if we don’t have direct experience of a particular landscape then it would be necessary to evoke memories of similar landscapes as a basis for interpretation, with the inherent errors of interpretation that might bring. Stock also asserts that we are only partly reading what we see and that we view the landscape from a position that is “historically predisposed to read ...because our notion of landscape contains within it an already conceptualized notion of the reading process.” (Stock, 1993, p.317) To put it another way, the concept of reading is a social construction, a means of understanding texts, including landscape.

As a result meaning in landscape is inherently ‘unstable’, according to Duncan and Ley. Each author and reader brings their own history and present convictions to a landscape or text; hence there would be ‘multiple’ realities in its interpretation. (Duncan & Ley, 1993, p.329) This can be understood in terms of reception theory, where the importance of the reader and their individual prejudices are emphasised as well, or more so than the intentions of the author. Meaning is merged along a ‘horizon of expectation’ of the author and each reader. (Kaufmann, 2001) No landscape can ever thus be considered in purely objective terms.
Yet conversely, meaning can be stabilised or held in place Smith reasons, by convention and power, to "penalize misreading". (Smith, 1993, p.89) An obvious example can be seen with road traffic signs and rules, held in place by rules and conventions with penalties enforced by the authority of police. Misread them and you pay with a fine, or worse still, with an accident or someone’s life, a considerable ‘stabilising’ force. The way to determine where that power lays smith maintains is by challenging those symbolic meanings. Exceed the speed limit on a regular basis and the power structure soon becomes apparent.

Another instance of the struggle between differently organized power groups over the meanings invested in landscape is in the South West of Australia in its few remaining old growth forests. To generations of woodcutters and millers, they represent a resource for their use, a source of timber and income, their livelihood. To other groups the forest represents a source of natural beauty and wonder untainted by man. A pristine environment that is a refuge of biological diversity, the lungs of the earth and so on. Try and stop a tree from being cut down and the power structure again becomes apparent. This struggle between differing groups to signify the forest environment in a particular way also becomes a struggle to authorise or discredit action through that signification.

**Landscape as a palimpsest**

The evolution of cultures and their surrounding geographical topography is recorded and rerecorded in the landscape over time. Landscape traces the culture of its inhabitants; traces inscribed one upon the other, partially or completely erasing earlier traces. Smith rather aptly describing landscape as, “above all else, a legacy of the past.” (Smith, 1993, p.80) The effect of accumulation, the legacy, is what is sometimes described as being analogous to a palimpsest, a term derived from medieval writing material, typically vellum – a fine parchment prepared from the skin of a young animal such as a calf or lamb. (Atkins et al., 1998, p.xvii)

Because of the expense involved in producing vellum, it was frequently reused, the original inscription erased and another written over it, time and again. The previous writings could never be totally erased from animal skin however so
after a period of use each new layer of writing thus showed relatively faint traces of previous uses. (Atkins et al., 1998, p.xvii; Crang, 1998, p.192)

A palimpsest represents the sum of all the erasures and over-writings hence it is a useful metaphor for the processes of landscape change, where current uses over-write but do not completely erase the marks of prior use. The landscape becomes “the sum of erasures, accretions, anomalies and redundancies over time.” (Crang, 1998, p.22) The accumulated layers and patterns reflecting the geographical and cultural evolution of the landscape. Palimpsest is a useful metaphor for landscape change and evolution, and is useful in ‘conceiving’ of landscape. The notion of palimpsest emphasises patterns of geological change and cultural diffusion - the mixing and changing of cultures, in relation to space and time.

A palimpsest metaphor although not the definitive answer to landscape study, is a method of considering the landscape as a non-static continually evolving entity. Significantly however, remnant ‘traces’, are a widespread component and their interpretation becomes critical in the representation of landscape and the construction of meaning.

**Spoken Word and Narrative**

What of communities or cultures that do not communicate with written texts, how can a reading of landscape be applied in this situation? As discussed previously, a text can be both verbal and nonverbal, in any medium including oral communication. Spoken language is a code that works in a similar way to written text, instead of graphically represented elements such as letters and words; spoken language is constituted by sound elements that convey messages. (Tilley, 1991, p.22)

It is also useful to remember that the Western concept of ‘landscape’ is itself a construction. The notion of landscape can also be understood in ways that do not prioritise text. Knowledge may be contained in oral memory, and in relationships between space, geographical features, artefacts created and a history of those and previous events. (Stock, 1993, p.323)
Within a community, meaning may be derived from the physical and symbolic significance of objects and their locations, the way they are selected, organized and categorized. These in turn become reinforced in mythology constructed of real and symbolic events passed on by word of mouth from generation to generation. (Stock, 1993, p.323,324) This relationship between an oral communication, place, memory and its history, is apparent in aboriginal cultures and ‘dreaming’ in Australia. (Stock, 1993, p.324) Physical aspects of the landscape may be intertwined with mythology, ceremony and oral narratives which in turn may be represented symbolically with body decoration, sand drawings, on bark or rock and since the 1970s, in acrylic paintings. These collectively work to provide an understanding of landscape for its inhabitants.

This relationship between Aboriginal social structures, ritual practices and artistic production can be seen in the paintings of Judy Watson, a direct descendant of the Waanyi clan of north-western Queensland. Watson often works outside placing canvas on the ground and applying washes or rubbing ochre’s and oxides into them, “allowing the contours of the underlying surface to influence the background of the painting as the pigments are applied.” (Fink, Lynn, & Perkins, 1996, p.19,30) Impressions of the ground beneath are embodied with Watson’s personal experience and memory, “marking the surface with almost imperceptible silhouettes and delicate traces… articulat[ing] the order of her response to country.” (Fink et al., 1996, p.19)

Fink describes Aboriginality as being “intrinsically about country” and country to Perkins and Lynn is “simultaneously concept and place…‘I’ denoting at once the place where one lives, or the land of one’s ancestors, and a cosmology, a world view. In some Aboriginal languages, country is synonymous with painting itself.” (Fink et al., 1996, p.26)

When we paint whether it is on our bodies for ceremony or on bark or canvas for the market- we are not just painting for fun or profit. We are painting as we have always done to demonstrate our continuing link with our country and the rights and responsibilities we have to it. Furthermore, we paint to show the rest of the world that we own this country, and that the land owns us. (Galarrwuy Yunupingu cited in Fink et al., 1996, p.26)
Watson’s paintings literally trace the impression of the lands surface on which they are made, at the same time they are infused with her own emotional responses to place, history and memory.

Art mediates between the ancestral past, or Dreaming, when the form of the land was created by the actions of mythical Ancestral Beings, and the present. Art is an extension of the Ancestral Past into the present and is one of the main ways in which ideas or information about the Ancestral Past is transmitted from one human generation to the next. (Murphy cited in Tilley, 1991, p.165)

From Watson’s works, we might gage some sense of the emotional relationship to landscape and place, stories and history of the land through the sensations that Watson achieves with paint. And of the significance of the imagery intertwined with culturally specific mythology and narrative.
CHAPTER TWO

THE TRACE

What is trace? Is it something, which can be isolated? An entity, a phenomenon, a separate thing in itself. Or is it always a result of something else, a remnant, a pattern, or imprint of a mark, evidence of an action or some past thing? Trace is probably most often encountered as a residual remainder, a physical reminder of an event past. A sign of something no longer present, a mark of its absence that has survived. Yet there may be no visible trace, an absence filled only by memory, something remembered, a personal or shared memory. The nature of trace then appears mixed; it connects ‘lived time’, the past, with ‘physical time’, the present. Trace existing now in the present, but also as a remnant, a vestige of something from the past, such as an artefact, document or monument. Moreover, it refers to, or signifies something, that was once in a past world. This chapter considers the nature of trace, both in its material form as a physical presence, the material object or artefact, and the non-material. Nonmaterial trace takes into consideration memory trace; virtual trace, which may take the form of narrative, conceptual or imaginary trace; and interpretive trace as in tracing or drawing a perceived experience.

Material Trace

Material trace, trace as a physical presence, objects and artefacts, are all part of the present, the here and now. Their existence may have come into being decades, hundreds, thousands or millions of years ago, but any assessment of their evolution, function, manufacture or period, is something that can only be made in the present. The past is gone and intangible, it can only exist again in our imaginations in the form of stories or theories or images that we create to represent it.
Trace and Archaeology

Who makes use of trace and how? Perhaps the most obvious proponents are the science disciplines of archaeology, anthropology, geography and palaeontology. Beyond the earth’s surface, astronomers also base much of their knowledge on ‘trace’ – traces of light from stars that may no longer exist, meteorite impact, weather systems, geological formations on other planets or space matter. The scope of this discussion is limited to the earth’s surface however, and to one of the groups most concerned with traces, namely archaeology.

Noble, defines archaeology as “…the study of past human existence by means of its material remains”. (Noble, 1991, p.40) Artefacts and traces in the many remnant layers of cultural and natural events are all of archaeological interest. Although the study of these areas can and often is complicated by erosion and decay over a long period of time which requires a more diverse approach of study, from the microscopic fragment to the topographical survey. It also makes any reading of the landscape difficult and imprecise.

Another approach is to focus on patterns of use in landscape over a period of time, where by traces of the day to day human activities in, domestic, agricultural or industrial environments may begin to emerge revealing changes and differences over the longer term from what may just appear to be a day to day cycle. (Shanks & Mackenzie, 1994, p.36) Shanks emphasises interpretation in archaeology’s engagement with physical residues, “clarifying or explaining the meaning and significance of something, deciphering and translating the past in the present.” (Shanks & Mackenzie, 1994, p.20) It follows then that a further role for the archaeologist is to represent their findings, to write about and publish their interpretation and translation of the past into some form of media usable in the present, typically a text, that conveys that meaning and understanding of their findings.

Barrett also stresses the need for archaeologists to study agency rather than just material residues and the archaeological record of those remains. Agency refers to both the individual such as an archaeologist interpreting the material in the present and the inhabitants of the past, who created the material objects leaving them
scattered about in the first place. Therefore, emphasis is moved to some extent from the artefacts, to considering the social context, the surrounding practices and conditions of the original inhabitants or creators and that of the people doing the interpreting now in the present, this emphasises ‘traces’ of past environments more so than the artefacts themselves. (Barrett & Bartley, 1994, p.154) It also means taking into consideration the motivations and prerogatives of each party concerned.

Science is based on formulation and testing of an idea or hypothesis, and the subsequent observation and interpretation of results. (Johnson, 1999, p.42) This is rather difficult for the past, in that you cannot directly observe and test something that has been and gone. This leaves archaeology in a rather difficult position when placed alongside geology and astronomy in complying with scientific procedures and practices. In fact Harry states there is no such thing as ‘objectivity’ in archaeology. Archaeologists instead, tending to find what they look for and that which is likely to turn up as a result of chance. (Harry, 1994, p.133)

Archaeology can use ‘scientific’ methods to examine certain aspects of traces from the past however such as the chemical analysis of materials, but in particular the period a material trace may be from, by using dating techniques including carbon-14, although its accuracy cannot be conclusive verified. Much depends also on the relationship to other artefacts, their location and context.

**Temporality**

With the advent and application of scientific dating techniques in archaeology, it has become apparent that not only can individual items be positioned in relation to others on a time scale, but also that there is an existence of a vast temporal span at all, which is a relatively recent phenomenon. (Clarke and Bailey cited in Squair, 1994, p.95) Time or Chronology is a way of ordering and making sense of masses of accumulated layers of material trace in the landscape. However, as we have already seen with landscape and texts, which are considered social constructions, “all temporalities are in fact social constructions fabricated in discourse.” (Fabian, Shanks, Tilley and Adam cited in Squair, 1994, p.97) Hence, our understanding of the past is also a contemporary social construction. The past did exist, but does not exist now and we can only consider it in the present through
whatever discursive processes we constitute in different social contexts. (Squair, 1994, p.110) Determining the actual temporal sequence of past events, its chronology in the form of material trace becomes evidence that is able to, “reassure the present that the past has an existence as arche.”(Squair, 1994, p.11) Moreover, as Baudrillard suggests, “Our entire linear and accumulative culture collapses if we cannot stockpile the past in plain view.” (Baudrillard, 1994, p.10) Who or what would we be (in the west), without our museums stuffed full of artefacts from our own and other cultures past and present?

Trace as data

Trace then, can be a physical presence in the now of a past that is gone and absent. From an archaeological standpoint, rather than facts waiting to be uncovered in the ground to reveal the truth about how it was back then, traces and artefacts become a source of potential information, clues, and data to be interpreted.

Traces may be fragmented and incomplete, with less surviving as time progresses, the materiality of an object also has a history of its own, which changes over time particularly if subjected to ongoing natural forces of weathering and erosion. An objects appearance may thus belie its origins; its potential interpretation may change over time because of these factors and the effect they may have on the surface traces. Thus, an object’s past is no less certain than the circumstances that surround it. (Shanks & Mackenzie, 1994, p.28)

It is difficult therefore to identify and attribute trace, many readings may be possible depending on what connections are made and who makes them; a trace as a result can effectively have a multitude of identities. (Shanks & Mackenzie, 1994, p.27) The way in which trace is attributed and interpreted can be understood in terms of a contemporary social construction, which rests within the social, political, historical, intellectual and emotional relationships of groups attempting to interpret them. (Shanks & Mackenzie, 1994, p.32) The past then, is a “contemporary construction perpetrated by historical discourse, where the subject matter is allegedly located in the past and cannot be retrieved.” (Barthes cited in Squair, 1994, p.104)
An Original Past

Although archaeologists are the professional re-creators of the past, it is something that we all do from time to time, past events remembered, memories shared, mementos and old photographs enabling experiences to be relived, and recreated. There is nothing wrong with translating creating or fabricating a past, providing it is acknowledged as such, and as a consequence it is also un-provable. A ramification of this is that any view of the past would have an equal validity and that there can never be one original past. (Squair, 1994, p.94)

This premise too is a construction, that of post-structuralism, that the past is but a contemporary archaeological construction within an inescapable present. (Squair, 1994, p.93) Archaeologists have not always taken this position however, the archaeological record often considered “unequivocal vindication of conventional historicism.” (Squair, 1994, p.94) In this view, the archaeological record was thought to have one unique and complete history that is gone and unchangeable, with no other possible interpretations. (Squair, 1994, p.103)

An archaeological record therefore is better seen as a focus of archaeological activity derived from the past, not a record of past material culture. Nor does it prove that the past can be reproduced as past. (Squair, 1994, p.94) Yates and Maley suggest instead that, “the purpose of archaeology is not to reconstruct the past but rather to deconstruct the present through a critical consideration of the fabric that is the archaeological record.” (Yates and Maley cited in Squair, 1994, p.94)

Yet, it can and does become an historical archive, an artefact in its own right, as does any cultural object. Nevertheless the compiling of an archaeological record does not reconstruct the past nor is it proof of the past, (Squair, 1994, p.94) only the activities of those who engage in its production.

Gaps

What then are archaeologists constructing from material trace and artefact? Is it more to do with filling in spaces, what is not there, the gap between the past and the present? To fill that void, trace effectively becomes stepping-stones, pieces in a
giant jigsaw puzzle of the past, a basis for narrative theory and archaeologist’s stories. Yet, there is not just one jigsaw puzzle but many, in differing versions, languages and designs. Sometimes the shapes may even fit in the same places.

A disconcerting analogy can be made also with forensic science and the judiciary; who are similarly motivated as archaeologists in filling gaps. Gaps between evidence, traces from a crime scene and a reconstruction of a past in the present. Both prosecution and defence construct versions of the past from available traces. Each witness constructs their own version of the past from their memory trace. Who then can reconstruct an original past, if all relevant claims would have an equal validity?

Différence, Gaps and Derrida.

A further aspect in understanding landscape as an inscription of the past is that which Smith describes as the “critical difference between the evanescent and the enduring”. (Smith, 1993, p80) By ‘evanescent’ Smith means the original creative agents; ‘enduring’ refers to their material remnants or traces. Smith continues, “over time the enduring element is alienated from both the agency and the scene of its creation, and with this displacement it loses the taint of intention and assumes the purity of nature.” (Smith, 1993, p80)

Material trace may be separated over a period of time from its original creative agents, humans that made the artefacts. The objects themselves may move from their original location and the ‘creators’ intentions may also be lost, any signifying traces becoming less apparent over time and thus difficult or impossible to ‘read’. Campbell also raises similar concerns over the number and difficulty archaeology has with gaps. Gaps not only between the past and the present, but what is seen and written up, between sites, landscapes and between the archaeologists and the public. (Campbell, 1994, p.140)

The ‘act of will’ or creation by human agency or for that matter a geological event, is as Smith describes it ‘concretised’, that is a concept is objectified or give physical form which remains in the landscape whilst its makers or ‘creative agents’ move on. (Smith, 1993, p80) Time has the effect of decontextualising an artefact or
trace, separating them from the originator and original location. Their context changes or 'decomposes' and if subject to the effects of nature for long enough, such as weather and erosion, they would gradually lose the trace of their origins. Thus becoming what Barthes originally refers to as 'empty' or 'floating signifier's', (Barthes cited in Chandler, Modality and Representation, 1994) Chandler defines this as “...a signifier with a vague, highly variable, unspecifiable or non-existent signified.” (Chandler, Modality and Representation, 1994) Their signifying traces are open to interpretation. The connection between signifier and signified may be lost, symbols can be dislocated from the original event and meaning. Or they may no longer signify anything, and effectively 'assume the purity of nature'.

The effect of decontextualisation may take a considerable period of time, however if the event is subsequently recorded or represented in some form such as language, painting, photography or even music, its meaning may be insulated to some degree from that decontextualisation process. But this depends on the ability of an individual to read that representation, it may even become more real than the event itself in that it is given an existence beyond the time and place of the original, a form of hyper-reality.

Floating Signifier / Floating Trace

The manner, in which Rosalie Gascoigne worked, assembling discarded objects from the roadside and landscape, can also be understood in terms of signifiers, which either remain attached to their referents, or as floating signifiers, which have become dislocated from their referents. Every item that Gascoigne included in her work contained some traces of past usage, “but in these new configurations, the old codes and signals are confused.” (Kirker, Wedde, & McDonald, 1990, p.19)

The objects she collected are for the most part insignificant in themselves, each a trace of a complex set of events leading from their manufacture and use, through to their discarded location. In assembling and ordering countless individual objects, their average properties tend to emerge through new juxtapositions in each work. Some pieces as signs refer to their original use, others have become to abstract, the connection to their referents lost. This severing of ties between signifier and
signified, does enable a re-reading and flexibility in interpretation of the collected materials, hence Gascoigne creates not just new configurations of objects but also new meanings.

MacDonald has described her work as “a painterly attempt to capture the real world of landscape and memory.” (MacDonald, 1998, p.32) In this sense, Gascoigne selects and places pieces or fragments of the world, as she found them, in new configurations. Recontextualising everyday found objects in a way that, although we might often recognize them, makes us read them in a different way.

Does the empty or floating signifier present a more effective way to explore trace in my own works? Would severing signifier from signified emphasise trace? In some works (See figure 6 and 7) it is difficult to read the surfaces original location and context. Signification has become abstracted past a stage of recognition. To complicate matters, the colours employed these two works are derived from a completely different location. Whilst it does not aid in a reading that corresponds to the makers reading of the works, it nevertheless adds another layer of signification, aside from any aesthetic issues raised.

Whilst trace may be emphasised in these two works, the surfaces of the painting itself is also emphasised with a correspondingly reduced ‘readability’ of those markings, communication of meaning becomes more open to interpretation. However, if the ‘traces’ are the focus, then does it matter what they represent, or are they interdependent? A trace with severed signification is still a trace. That we may not be able to read and interpret its origins does not make it any less a trace. On the other hand, a work with severed or unrecognisable trace is more likely to be considered or read on aesthetic grounds than that of trace or evidence. How ‘effective’ or ‘successful’ then a work is, may be more of a question of balance. Balance between intention, readability or not of included trace and aesthetic and formal elements as applies in traditional abstract painting.

Derrida’s term ‘différance’ is useful in comprehending the gap or difference between creative or originating agents and the lasting artefact or trace. Différance alludes to both difference; as in the gap between an origin and its trace, a signified
and its sign; and deferral, the way in which the meaning of signs is endlessly deferred, each signified itself also becoming a signifier. (Belton, Différance, 1996; Chandler, Modality and Representation, 1994) Meaning is constituted by a “tissue of differences,” (Derrida, 1981, p.26, 27) or a network of traces, every sign marked by the trace of another sign. Hence, there is said to be no escape from the system of signifiers and traces.

Différance highlights the difficulties there are with interpretation and derivation of meaning, and cast doubts on certainty in either. For there to be a difference there is always a gap, a space or interval between the signifier and signified. “An interval must separate the present from what it is not in order for the present to be itself,” (Derrida, 1982) without an interval between the present and an origin there can be no trace.

Trace according to Derrida, is an element or sign in the present, of something absent. An absent past or future, which causes us to doubt the relation between that element or sign, and its meaning, “each element that is said to be ‘present,’ appearing on the stage of presence, is related to something other than itself but retains the mark of a past element” (Derrida, 1973, p.142)

Trace is a structure of difference that determines the relationship of the sign to the other, which is forever absent. “A trace, then, is a present thing which stands for (vaut) an absent past.” And it is also both “a remains and a sign of what was but no longer is.” (Ricoeur cited in Bourgeois, 1993, p.53) Because trace is the mark of a past that exists in the present, it becomes necessary to conceive of a past that was never present, and never will appear.

The Loss of Origin

A trace may be a past that was never present by virtue of the fact that trace exists through the displacement or loss of its origin, its originating referent. An original referent once was present, but became the past, effectively replaced or erased by its trace.
Take for example, a material object or artefact that was made say 1000 years ago by a human being. Is this still the object itself, or is it a trace of itself? Has the original in effect been erased by its trace of itself. Trace is thus paradoxical in that it appears to be its origin yet at the same time a trace of itself. “The trace becomes a past that has never been present, that is always under the sign - if it can be called a sign - of erasure.” (Merewether, 1999, p.165) Trace would seem to exist in the absence of its originating referent, only to be seen and understood after the fact. Nevertheless, trace would also always be in the future in relation to its origin, always coming after. Derrida explains it thus,

The trace is not only the disappearance of origin — within the discourse that we sustain and according to the path that we follow it means that the origin did not even disappear, that it was never constituted except reciprocally by a non-origin, the trace, which thus becomes the origin of the origin. (Derrida, 1976, p.61)

Yet Derrida admits that to speak of an originary trace or arche-trace, “that concept destroys its name and that, if all begins with the trace, there is above all no originary trace.” (Derrida, 1976, p.61) So trace could not exist at the same time as its origin; the phonic element, or sign and thus meaning, “would not appear as such without the difference or opposition which gives them form...Différance is therefore the formation of form. But it is on the other hand the being-imprinted of the imprint.” (Derrida, 1976, p.62,63) For there to be a trace according to Derrida, there must be an element of time, a temporal space, a difference.

Without a retention in the minimal unit of temporal experience, without a trace retaining the other as other in the same, no difference would do its work and no meaning would appear. It is not the question of a constituted difference here, but rather, before all determination of the content, of the pure movement which produces difference. The (pure) trace is difference. (Derrida, 1976, p.62)

Derrida gets around the dichotomy of trace apparently existing in the present and being its origin at the same time thus:

...from the moment that the trace affects the totality of the sign in both its faces. That the signified is originarily and essentially (and not only for a finite and created spirit) trace, that it is always already in the position of the signifier... (Derrida, 1976, p.73)
The critical aspect being time. For trace to exist there must be a difference, a temporal spacing from its origin, “the difference which opens appearance [l'apparaître] and signification.” (Derrida, 1976, p.65)

**Trace of a trace**

An effect of temporal spacing, a gap between past and present is that trace itself becomes a trace. “The tracing of traces is accompanied by its simultaneous effacing - its own retreat…” (Levinas cited in Merewether, 1999, p.171) Trace is replaced by a trace of itself. Trace is a sign of its own erasure.

…the present becomes the sign of signs, the trace of traces. It is no longer what every reference refers to in the last instance; it becomes a function in a generalized referential structure. It is a trace, and a trace of the effacement of a trace. (Derrida, 1973, p.156)

There is no return to past, it is irreversible; the trace, traces itself into the future, out of the past and into the present.

Anthony Bond has referred to trace as the “material evidence that allows us to recall an object or an event, but it can also be a journey of discovery. In either case, trace connects us to the world through recognition and memory.” (Bond cited in Merewether, 1999, p164) A journey, an effectual way to approach a unexpectedly complex concept that is the trace, a journey that moves somehow back and forth between a future that has past and the present, to traverse a network of traces, both visible and remembered.

What journey do my paintings entail? What is it that is recognised or remembered and what appears present or absent? The origin of many of my works appears present in paintings, that is, the surface they were made from is often self-evident.

The collection and isolation of surface information from an environment in this manner, means not only that the resultant works are removed from their original location and placed in a new context, but that they are also subjected to varying degrees of abstraction as discussed earlier, visual resemblance to the original site may be lost, the chain of signification severed.
What do my paintings connect through recognition and memory, what event do they recall? Recognition and memory associated with the works I make will always be different for myself and for a viewer in that I associate the memories and experiences in their making with locations they originated from, whilst each viewer brings their own association and memories to the works.

But at the same time an artist can put himself in the place of the viewer, in order to see what kind experience the work might invoke. "An artist must look at his canvas in order to see whether it is producing the sort of experience he wants it to" (Schier, 1991, p.151) Its very making depends on such a process of movement, back and forth between changes made to a work and judging the effect that they have, to achieve the required experience. In the same vein the viewer, is obliged to envisage the point of view of the artist to comprehend what the work may mean from his or her perspective. However, as both the artist and the viewer of a work are "bound by their different social, cultural and intellectual horizons", (Gadamer cited in Nehamas, 2001) it is never possible to understand exactly the original intentions of the artist.

Incorporating traces of natural forces or man made objects into my work is a way of constructing or re-presenting the past in the present. My paintings become another set of related artefacts which instead of presenting closure, invite a continued dialectical response from the viewer, the reading of the works remain open to interpretation. Although I have selected and framed the traces, each viewer also brings their own responses, to add to my contextualisation of those traces. The physical presence of the works confronts the viewer in the now, the present; at the same time, the inclusion of trace enables them to operate in the past, as signs of the past.

Photography as trace

The photographic process is yet another dimension of trace, whether silver halide or digitally originated, in still or moving form. Each is a trace of reflected light and a particular process - optical, mechanical, chemical, and/or electronic. The photographic image traces a moment in time, a fragment of history represented. Although perceived as resembling that which it depicts, as a material object the
photographic image becomes more than a representation of the 'real', it becomes a physical trace of the past, a record of the effect of light on an object. (Bond, 1999, p.20)

It is also “an index of the effect of light on photographic emulsion”, (Chandler, Signs, 1994) (although increasingly so, light sensitive ‘chips’), because the images produced were “physically forced to correspond point by point to nature.” (Peirce cited in Chandler, Signs, 1994) As such, a photograph is considered to be an indexical signifier. An index is a mode in which the signifier is seen to have some direct relation or connection to the signified. An indexical sign is like “a fragment torn away from the object”. (Peirce cited in Chandler, Signs, 1994) But because of its mechanical nature, the photographic image also “reinforces the myth of its ‘objectivity’”, (Chandler, Codes, 1994) and is thus more likely to be read as ‘natural’ or ‘realistic’.

Each of my paintings also, by incorporating cast surfaces have a direct relationship to the originating surface, thus effectively functioning as indexical signifiers, corresponding point to point to the referent. A further distinction arises between these paintings and those made with a brush or similar implement in a freehand manner, and that is the detail. Again in this regard they are more like photographic images capturing detail rather than filtering it out as might typically occur with representational painting.

**Photography and Memory**

A photographic image preserves experience, albeit from a particular perspective, in this respect it is similar to memory, in that it allows us to retain events that otherwise might be lost, covered by those that follow. However, it is also an aid to reviving memory, a memory trigger, the photograph makes it unnecessary to “rely on one's memory for a clue to the reality of appearances.” Or to “rely on linguistic description to know how people or places appeared in the past.” (Beilin, 1991, p.50)

The effect of trace becomes particularly evident with the photograph not only of places visited, but also people known to you, friends or family, particularly if they
are no longer alive. A photograph is a particularly evocative trace of that person. Photographs taken by the individual, which Berger terms ‘private’, are like an aid to memory, “in private use a photograph is read in a context which is still continuous with that from which it was taken,” (Berger, 1997, p.44) because you were there and can relate the image to the circumstances of its origination. A photo taken by someone else or a ‘public photo’ is like a false memory, someone else's memory, because you were not there and cannot necessarily relate to the contextual circumstances that surround it. “The public photograph has been severed from life when it was taken, and it remains, as an isolated image, separate from your experience. The public photograph is like the memory of a total stranger,” (Berger, 1997, p.44) This would account for why our own holiday snaps seem particularly engrossing, whilst another’s may seem rather uninteresting, even when of similar quality and content. By being removed from their context “they are prised away from their meaning.” (Berger, 1997, p.44)

However there is a distinct difference between a memory and a photographic image of the same event. The memory is subject to ongoing review reassessment in relation to events that follow; the photograph does not evolve or change in relation to time. (Morris, 1986, p.19)

**Non material trace**

Our understanding of the world around us in built on images, language and other sensory information being absorbed, interpreted and stored in our minds throughout our lives. Everything we see, hear and experience influences our perception and the decisions we take and as we have seen, our understanding is framed through our own particular cultural perspective.

What we see and remember is also influenced by events that we have seen and remembered previously. Each time we recall a memory it is not only the memory of that event but also, “the memory of a memory. These memories are not fixed but evolve over time.” (Morris, 1986, p.5) Our memory becomes a source of our identity and a continually updated reference point from which we construct our own realities in the world in which we live.
Memory

The phenomenon of memory may be a result of the way in which the brain connects and re reconnects our experiences and perceptions. A network of connections that are continually changing or being rewired so to speak, foregrounded or backgrounded according to the way the conscious or unconscious mind prioritises thoughts. A network that is continually updated linked and positioned relative to temporal spacing.

An experience that is particularly memorable, typically those with a high associated emotional content, may be quite vivid, just like ‘yesterday’, even though the event may have occurred many years ago. Memories in effect live on with us, we reinterpret memories and incorporate them into new experiences, they sometimes appear to escape time in the way they remain with us.

The timeless here is not an unbounded infinity, but is convoluted or folded time, a folding or recycling of past moments. As conjuncture between the -temporality of person remembering and past event, memory crosses time. (Shanks, 1997, p.88)

Memory does not conform to a linear conception of time and is also subject to distortion, how often have we found that on revisiting an object or place it is not quite how we ‘remembered’ it to be. Shanks suggests that,

Memory is in fact the act of memorizing. The past as memory does not just exist as it was. The past has to be recalled: memory is the act of recalling -from the viewpoint of a subsequent time. (Shanks, 1997, p.88)

Trace in Memory

Trace is more likely to be thought of as a sign of a material object, part of the visible world, the result of an event leaving an impression or legible mark on a surface. How then do we account for the perception of trace in memory? There is no psychological or physiological evidence for the existence of trace in memory. (Heil, 1978, p.62) Exactly how the memory stores and processes information is as yet unknown, although it is thought that the brain develops circuits of neurones, which are made stronger with repeated use. (A Dictionary of Biology, 2000) Traces are though to exist because it would provide an explanation for the phenomenon of
memory. (Heil, 1978, p.62) Contemporary schema theory suggests, “perception, comprehension, interpretation and memory are mediated by mental schemata – hierarchical structures (or ‘frames’) for organizing knowledge.” (Chandler, 1995, p.5) For Bartlett, from whom the notion ‘schema’ is derived, said that memory is “a creative process of reconstruction making use of such schemas.” (Chandler, 1995, p.5)

Heil suggests that such a structure is imposed by perceptual mechanisms onto our experience and, “that it is this (imposed) structure, which maps onto traces so memory trace may be part of our perceptual mechanism.” (Heil, 1978, p.64) The imposed structure corresponds with traces, memory trace in this sense, “need not represent the world, but only our experiences of the world.” (Heil, 1978, p.64)

Trace may not physically exist in the brain but be a result of a network of relationships and connections related to the way we perceive experiences and knowledge learned, though linguistics, images and other sensory information. Numerous paths and stimuli leading to memory, rather than a single route to something remembered.

If memory is not fixed but evolves over time, and if each time we recall a memory it is not only the memory of that event but also a ‘memory of a memory’, is there a difference that produces a trace? Memory needs a past and a present to make sense, so the passing of time, a temporal spacing would be the differentiating factor.

The origin of memory and of the psyche as a memory in general (conscious or unconscious) can only be described by taking into account the difference between the facilitation thresholds, as Freud says explicitly.- There is no facilitation [Bahnung] without difference and no difference without a trace. (Derrida, 1973, p.149)

Each time we recall a memory, it is re-contextualised within a new temporal spacing. Similarly, to make sense of new experiences, we rely on our memory to anticipate and frame those experiences. (Chandler, 1995, p.5)
Virtual Trace

Trace, which exists in the space between sign and signifier, between the deferred meanings that Derrida refers to in discussions of différence, is in effect a ‘virtual trace’. Neither ‘virtual trace’ or memory trace, can be seen or touched, they exist as a concept of trace. A trace that exists between related meanings generated by language and communication.

The concept of a ‘virtual trace’ can be taken further, as a trace that exists as a part of a network of traces, which are interconnected and interrelated to other traces, nonmaterial and material. Traces that may not exist physically such as memory, or trace that was not a memory but was of an event or events that have left no long-term traces, or ‘inert’ historical facts. Events that happened but for which there are no discernable lasting differences. (Westbury & Dennett, 2001) Virtual trace might for example also trace events that have happened in different times in the same or different places. Considered cumulatively over a temporal continuum they would in effect be a network or web of criss-crossing interconnecting lines, lines that are not visible but which are representative of a concept that connects or relates all trace - physical, non-physical, memory and ‘virtual trace’.

An example might be, a number of people walking down the same cement path at differing times. There is no physical trace, each walking event happened and each person has a recollection or memory trace. However if you were not present, it is still possible to conceive of the event and the trace of the event. It would not be a memory trace in the first instance (except for those present), but a conceptual trace or virtual trace. Even after it is memorised it also remain a virtual trace. If this analogy were applied to different places each would have a network of trace; a combination of virtual, visible, non-visible and memory trace; from human, animal or other naturally occurring sources. Each an intersection of trace, real or virtual - a trace node.

The idea of a trace node might be applied also to works of art. Again considering a Rosalie Gascoigne work of assembled found objects, each object is related in some way, all have a history, each fragment a palimpsest. Such a work brings together virtual and real traces of the individual histories of the objects, all
related traces intersect in the work and diverge again as each viewer brings and
intersects their own memory traces.

Virtual trace as a hypothetical trace is similar to but should not to be confused
with confabulation or false memory, as Belton intimates in relation to Derrida’s
stance on différance and differed meaning, “While Derrida holds his interpretive
ingenuity in relative check, some of his followers leap quickly from deferral to
confabulation.” (Belton, Différance, 1996) Confabulation refers to compensation for
memory loss by a plausible but imagined memory, which fills in the gaps in what is
remembered. (Belton, Confabulation, 1996) Rather the notion of virtual trace I have
described would be more of a speculative trace, one which relates also to a
rhizomatic paradigm.

Trace Network, The Rhizome

A rhizome is a horizontal plant stem or rootstock with shoots above and roots
below, which serves as a reproductive structure. The term has been coined by
Deleuze and Guattari to describe a structure which is for example, similar to the
growth of a vine in sending out shoots that produces a tangle of plants, stems and
roots each criss-crossing the other. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988, p.6)

This is in contrast to an ‘arborescent’ metaphor, like the branching of a tree,
which is a hierarchical system of mutually distinct categories, characteristic of most
modern Western thought. (Campbell, 1994, p.146) This tree thinking imposes limits
on the way connections can be made because of its hierarchical form and successive
stratified levels, with limited and regulated connections. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988,
p.16)

The nature of the rhizome is that it spreads non-hierarchically and
horizontally, forming random networks which constantly change mix and bring
together, rather than being static, dividing and splitting categories apart. Each
component can freely connect with any other component in the system. “A rhizome
ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organisations of power
and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences and social struggles.” (Deleuze &
Guattari, 1988, p.7)
The Internet demonstrates a rhizomatic structure in practice; by the way it is possible to endlessly hyperlink to information across various levels and strata's. The Internet exemplifies the rhizomatic nature of knowledge; in that there is no single linear unity to knowledge or meaning.

By applying a rhizomatic analogy to my works, they may also be thought of as trace nodes, an intersection of traces, past time – present time, memory. Then there is also my own intervention in the history of that particular place, at that trace node.

The rhizomatic analogy is also apparent in language use, which in Derridian terms is a ‘trace’ or network of traces recorded in the act of writing. “Meaning transpires in the ‘play that is the web of language,’ ...a play that weaves a network of traces.” (Lawson cited in Bourgeois, 1993, p.45)

Which return us to the system of signifiers and traces, every sign marked by the trace of another sign from which there is no escape. Yet, in practice different signs are prioritised over others, some foregrounded while others backgrounded allowing meaning to function.

**Escaping the signifiers**

Ricoeur offers a way out of this seemingly continual deferral, an endlessly signifying circle, proposing the sentence as a basic unit of meaning, a new entity, “not a larger or more complex word... A sentence is made up of signs, but is not itself a sign.” (Ricoeur cited in Bourgeois, 1993, p.49)

This suggests moving the emphasis from the word as sign, towards semantics, emphasising the meaning in language rather than its components. Bourgeois maintains that language is hierarchical and with the sentence, the articulation of those levels is seen to make sense. (Bourgeois, 1993, p.50)

Under semiotic theory, signs or words derive meaning according to their relationship or difference with other signs or words in that system. The meaning of
words is also dependent on their context; a closed system of signs becomes an inadequate determinant of meaning because of its abstract nature, focusing on the parts rather than the whole. (Bourgeois, 1993, p.51)

The sentence is not a larger or more complex word, it is a new entity. It may be decomposed into words, but the words are something other than short sentences. A sentence is a whole irreducible to the sum of its parts. It is made up of words, but it is not a derivative function of words. A sentence is made up of signs, but it is not itself a sign. (Bourgeois, 1993, p.52)

Instead of focusing on the relation of the sign to the system of signs, focus is shifted to the function of a sign in a sentence.

Words and the sentences that contain them can mean different things depending on the social conditions in which they are used. Individual words and sentences may be polysemantic, that is, under different contexts the ambiguity of an individual word or phrase may express more than one meaning. Yet as Tilley points out, each word and sentence refers to other words, sentences and phrases, which “helps to create the overall ‘meaning effect’ of the text.” (Tilley, 1991, p.118) The combination of sentences into a text creates meaning, but at the same time negotiates polysemy.

Language, as Bourgeois suggests, can be considered hierarchical in that at the first level there is the individual character, the grapheme or phoneme, which are combined together to form individual words, these in turn constitute sentences, and finally, sequences of those sentences comprise a text.

Consequently, moving from word to sentence emphasises semantics, whilst moving from the sentence to text emphasises hermeneutics. (Tilley, 1991, p.119) Tilley maintains that a text loses its meaning if it is broken down into its constitutive parts; it is “a structured totality which is irreducible to the sentences of which it is made up... it is something much more than its component parts.” (Tilley, 1991, p.118)
**Interpretive trace**

Interpretive trace is not so often referred to nowadays, relating as it does to a traditional form of representation in which the word ‘trace’ refers to sensations or experiences and the conveying of them by drawing or painting onto a surface such as paper or canvas. The artist ‘traces’ an impression of that which they see before them, an interpretation which makes visible that which they perceive, the artist’s sensations ‘traced’ onto a surface.

The artwork becomes also a trace of the artist’s actions, regardless of how what they perceive and trace onto their surface relates to that which they are observing. The same could be said of any artwork, all of which trace the artists and their actions, at the same time incorporating traces of the social context within which they were made.

The artist’s interpretation is what Merleau-Ponty refers to as the ‘secret visibility’. (Merleau-Ponty cited in Silverman, 1994, p.166) More specifically it relates to painting, whereby the painter translates his own visibility into a new visibility of the painting.

The secret visibility involves a tracing (un trace)...The tracing is a marking out of the secret visibility which is neither outside nor inside, neither thing nor body, neither visible nor invisible. This tracing is what makes painting possible. The tracing of the secret visibility is rendered in a particular way on a particular canvas. (Silverman, 1994, p.166)

For the artist to communicate their interpretation laid down on ‘canvas’, it is necessary for the viewing audience to share the same perceptual capacity, one “for ‘seeing-in,’ that is, for seeing the marks on the surface and at the same time seeing those marks as representing something.” (Bryson, Holly, & Moxey, 1991, p.6) This in other words relates back to ‘rules for reading’ as described in chapter one, in which a reader of a text needs to know the same set of rules as the author of that text to be enabled to decode, or ‘read’ the particular form of media presented before them.
CHAPTER THREE

THE MAKERS OF MEANING

The previous chapters have looked at ‘trace’ and the way in which landscape over time becomes a vast accessible repository of evidence from natural forces and human activities, and how those traces may be read and interpreted in different ways. ‘Traces’ are clues to the past, to events and cultures of another time. This chapter considers the way we represent the world around us, the way we constructed knowledge and for what purpose.

The production of knowledge

Knowledge in Western society is to a large extent based on scientific endeavour. The term ‘scientific’ infers rationality, logic and commonsense, whilst ‘unscientific’ connotes irrationality, foolishness and a lack of objectivity.

We know the way the world is because scientists tell us so. Scientists are so powerful, hold such a grip over our beliefs and sentiments, that we believe them even when our strongest intuitions tell us otherwise, when boarding an aeroplane for example. (Johnson, 1999, p.34)

The ‘scientific’ versus ‘unscientific’, is symptomatic also of binary oppositional differences, a key relationship in structuralist analysis. Consequently, in scientific discourse the objective tends to be privileged over subjective, rational over emotional, reason over intuition. Thus, objectivity, rationality and reason tend to be valued in knowledge. (Crang, 1998, p.178)

Science’s ‘objective’ stance often presents an outsideness that purports to view the world as an impartial observer. Crang suggests that “being outside of culture is impossible and what is usually meant is being inside ‘scientific culture’.” (Crang, 1998, p.178) However objective it might claim to be science is not impartial, it maintains a certain standpoint, a particular point of view that works to exclude or marginalize other accounts and increase its own validity.
Representing Knowledge

Instead of direct interaction with an object, often we function on information about things, rather than on the things themselves. A representation is typically something that represents, or stands in for something else. The communicative process entails the substitution of the actual thing or object with a representation; that is a sign or signifier, which refers to it.

A representation, which may consist of various signifiers, can be considered to form part of a text, which may also be constructed in any medium. A text then broadly refers to, “anything which can be ‘read’ for meaning”. (Chandler, Glossary, 1994) A ‘text’ is made and read according to the rules that frame that particular genre and its medium. For example, language ‘texts’ conform to specific rules and grammar; painting ‘texts’ conform to certain conventions, systems or styles, as does for that matter a cinema ‘text’. They each use a system of signs, which may take the form of words, images, objects, sounds or gestures. (Chandler, Glossary, 1994) Each is also correspondingly subject to the constraints of that medium and may be particularly suited to representing certain aspects or experience. The media I use for example seems particularly suited to representing surface traces in a three dimensional form. (See fig. 5-8) Although they are not exact replicas, they begin as a cast of a surface; they resemble very closely the markings on that original surface. They are abstracted from a landscape but are not a view of a landscape in the traditional sense even though they may resemble the original surface or object very closely or ‘realistically. Instead, they become objects in their own right.

Representation becomes a means to the production and circulation of meaning, using such texts and their associated language systems. For representation and meaning to function, members of a culture/s must share similar sets of concepts, images and ideas about the world to enable them to think, feel and interpret the world through those representations in a similar way. Communication of representation also depends on our understandings of reality and its subsequent formal construction as knowledge. (Cosgrove & Domosh, 1993, p.25) Representation thus necessarily involves a process of intention or motivation, and an interpretive selection. For an intention to be communicated there are obvious practical limitations in selecting
things directly from an environment, so selected signifiers typically act as
substitutive referents for that intention.

As our knowledge of the world runs exclusively through representation, we
can never, independently "assess the accuracy of the representation against its
original, or the description against the perception." (Hagberg, 1991, p.223)

Why Do We Represent?

Meaning

Representing the world around us is part of a process of producing
knowledge and of communicating and interpreting information. The creation of
meaning is part of that process, a distinctly human activity that results in different
cultures, responding in different ways with differing, codes and conventions, to
create and communicate meaning of the world around us. (Cosgrove & Domosh,
1993, p.29)

There is no way the world is, no facts, only interpretations conventions and
codes in terms of which we perceive different objects and different worlds. (Danto,
1991, p.207) Interpreting means to "use one's own preconceptions so that the
meaning of the text can really be made to speak for us" (Gadamer cited in Tilley,
1991, p.116) Understanding involves a process of questions and answers, of making
choices and trying out alternative readings of a text and being open to possibilities.
Understand means translating, foregrounding some aspects and backgrounding
others. Meaning only becomes apparent through an ongoing process of
understanding. (Tilley, 1991, p.116) We engage in meaning-making behaviours,
produce and read texts, according to conventions associated with their use. That is,
the hidden rules common to a culture that are understood by an author and reader
alike which are used but not directly referred to; for example different grammar in
languages. (Chandler, Glossary, 1994)

Understandings of meaning parallel those which relate to the nature of reality,
so that for an objectivist, meaning is embedded in a text, and to be understood it must
be ‘extracted’ by the reader. Meaning is considered to be “transmitted” from a ‘sender’ to a passive ‘receiver’.\(^\text{1}\) (Chandler, 1995, p.4)

To the constructivist, meaning involves the interplay between a text and its reader, thus is more of a process of ‘negotiation’. The meanings of texts in this view would neither be completely predetermined nor completely open, instead working within certain constraints. (Chandler, 1995, p.4) To the subjectivist, the reader alone brings meaning to a text. (Chandler, 1995, p.5)

Understanding, and thus the creation of meaning is not fixed but a result of making connections and exploring contexts in an ongoing basis, a continuing historical process, (Kaufmann, 2001) which in turn we relate to our own experience and memory. Meaning becomes “a property of the mutually relevant people, things, events in the situation.” (Palmer cited in Seaman, 1999, p.55) Ownership of meaning is a part of belonging to a culture, ‘these are our stories.’

This also begs the question, why do I represent in the way that I do? Are these works my stories? My narratives? Is it a form of communication, an interpretation of what I see and think is significant? Is it a form of possession, a mapping of the environment? Does it provide a sense of belonging or ownership of space, of consuming the landscape, taking a piece of it away with me?

The early stages of these works require a direct engagement with the landscape, in common with land art perhaps initially. Cultural or natural, traces have to be physically searched for sourced out, cast over a period of days, before transporting back to the studio to be further worked and completed. In the end they become part of a process of reinterpreting the surroundings and elements of their location.

“A map, a picture, a word, a text - all of them are forms of creation, all are in large measure personal expressions.” (Cosgrove & Domosh, 1993, p.37) They are ways of creating sense from the world; my painting works then are one way for me to reflect on and make sense of the world, of time and of place, to engage in meaning
making. They involve a physical and conceptual experience of place and a transformation or translation of those experiences into a physical materialisation.

**Time and Place**

Time as well as place becomes embodied within the paintings and in their production. This happens in the act of travelling to the site, the duration of the visit, the hour of the day, the season of the year, making the cast and so on. Experiencing the completed painting thus involves a synthesis of anticipation, perception and memory. Yet, it can never be the same for another viewer as it is for the originator of the work because of their involvement and associations with the piece. It acts as an effective memory trigger for all the activities that surrounded its production. Much of that can seldom be communicated, unless there were other people there at the time, or if the work were accompanied by anecdote or narrative, stories that may recount some of those experiences. An artwork, any artwork, is first and foremost personal - for the individual or individuals who make it, before it is public.

My own paintings apart from anything else are also a record of that interaction with a landscape; they become physical metaphors linking that experience of place and past. A result of perceptions of those ‘traces’ how they related to my memories and experiences, how they relate to other places and times in landscape. They become an accumulative narrative of my experience and involvement in place and time.

A sense of belonging and place are particularly important to humans, we define our selves by a sense of place, as Australian, as Greek or more specifically, as being from a particular region or city, Sydney, London, Madrid or where ever. (Crang, 1998, p.102) The way we speak, the dialect and language, cultural practices in which we engage, are all specific to places with which we identify. They are intertwined with our own self-identity and cultural mythology. As we also tend to think and act through material objects, a place becomes a product of our interactions with it. Places mean different things to individual’s dependant on whether we live, work or holiday there, moreover our travels to other places or countries quickly remind us of the specific character of place. (Crang, 1998, p.103,109)
If experiencing something beyond visible, physical and sensory properties of place takes us into the realms of emotion and feeling, then the representational modes sought to express meanings associated with a unique ‘spirit’ of place or genius loci, are typically the arts; literature, music, performance and visual art. (Crang, 1998, p.108) Aside from representing an observation of a ‘genius locus’, place also epitomizes that which happens there, its history of events that physically occur there. (Agnew, 1993, p.263)

**Mimesis and Objective Truth**

The way the world has tended to be represented stems from underlying issues of mimesis, and a “belief that we should strive to produce as accurate a reflection of the world as possible.” (Duncan & Ley, 1993, p.2) The underlying assumption of this position, is that objective truth and meaning is something that is separate from the observer themselves, and that “trained observation transcribed into clear prose and unencumbered by abstract theorizing produces an accurate understanding of the world.” (Duncan & Ley, 1993, p.2) Or so it was thought. Mimetic representation persuasively claims to imitate closely, “observable features of an external reality as if this is being experienced directly and without mediation.” (Chandler, Glossary, 1994) This became a primary goal of not only scientific ideals of enlightenment, but of nineteenth century ‘realist’ art and literature. Each concerned, “with the ‘accurate’ observation and representation of the world.” (Chandler, Glossary, 1994)

Artists for a time worked in conjunction with scientists, employed to record accurate observations, adopting perspectival techniques in drawing and painting to document scientific endeavours, prior the photographic image. These new imaging techniques, together with the collection of flora and fauna “were made co-partners with language in knowledge.” (Duncan, 1993, p.41)

But this ‘improvement’ in representation began in the early 15th century according to Hockney. Artists made use of optical instruments such as the camera lucida and camera obscura well before photography. (Hockney cited in Gussow, 2001) This enabled a marked improvement in the accuracy of their drawings and paintings, thus achieving a corresponding perceived increase in ‘objective representation’.
Rather than a gradual shift during the 15th to the 19th century's by artists to naturalism, Hockney believes, "the optical look arrived suddenly and was immediately coherent and complete." (Hockney cited in Gussow, 2001) Prior to such a relationship with science, artists also undertook a similar role in representation for the church, court, or wealthy patrons, illustrating myths and narrative in accordance with the demands of the commissioning party.

Art and painting in particular, is no longer a part of religious or scientific life however, (Podro, 1991, p.180) artists have long since been relegated to a relatively minor social role. The camera 'machine' was much more effective than optical painting devices, its mechanical/chemical/optical nature capturing intended and unintended detail alike, depicting what was 'seen' at the time a photo was taken and as such the camera was/is considered a substitute for the eye, all of which adds to its perceived objectivity. (Beilin, 1991, p.51)

Hockney suggests that by 1839 with developments in photography the use of optical aids by artists declined, as they "realized they could not compete with photography in reproducing reality", which he believes was a factor in the "awkwardness" returning to art, signalling "the beginning of Impressionism, Cubism and abstraction." (Hockney cited in Gussow, 2001)

And particularly after the advent of photography, artists have had to face up to their own crises in representation. This is a recurring theme in twentieth-century art Bond suggests. As the gap between "our perceptions of reality and the illusion of its appearance" continues to widen, many artists seek to explore and redefine the relationship between life, art and the real. (Bond, 1999, p.12) In this respect, with my own work, I am defining and redefining my relationship to the real, by engaging with traces of the 'real'.

With any significant 'realistic' representational requirement removed, perhaps the role of the artist becomes one of interpreting experience and transformation of that experience. Where does my work stand in relation to these enlightenment ideals of 'accurate' objective observation and representation? In
presenting slices or fragments of an apparent 'real' world, they are probably more likely to draw attention to themselves as being something other than the 'real' world. They are obviously not the real world, but effective illusions, or fabrications. The real world is not resoundingly flat, rectangular, and able to be stretched on a frame, as my paintings conveniently do. These works, rather than emphasise the form of an object or surface, are more concerned with emphasising its traces, which presenting them in this manner tends to do.

They are made in the form that they are in, that is as a painting, to some extent because as Podro suggests, "it is a matter of convention that we look at the surface of a painting to see what is represented on it. It is a matter of convention that we use flat surfaces to represent things by showing the look of those things." (Podro, 1991, p.165) The disadvantage that comes with such a convention is that of conforming to the associated rules and norms of that convention. So why stick with a particular convention? It has the benefit of providing a framework that assists in directing a painting's interpretation and understanding.

Guiraud has noted that "the frame of a painting or the cover of a book highlights the nature of the code; the title of a work of art refers to the code adopted much more often than to the content of the message." (Chandler, Codes, 1994) If a viewer knows that they are looking at something that is purported to be a painting, they know then to approach it in a certain way. It provides a framework to decode, that which is presented before them. "What a man sees depends both upon what he looks at and also upon what his previous visual conceptual experience has taught him to see." (Kuhn cited in Danto, 1991, p.205)

The medium of painting is a particular representative form, a text that can be read according to certain rules, 'grammar', codes and conventions. We approach a book expecting to read text comprised of language and/or images, because that is what we have learned to do. We approach a painting, sculpture or other art work based on our previous knowledge and learned experience of that media, we watch and comprehend the edited sequence of moving images in cinema and television, because we have learned through past experience how to read them.
That is not to say that convention cannot be broken or experimented with combining differing modes of media text, it can and it is. None more effectively perhaps than with performance and installation art. At the same time, the corresponding framework for these media is wide and encompassing, which may also affect what is communicated and the ability of an audience to read and interpret meaning.

If one were to play the cynic, it could be supposed that I also conform to the particular mode of representation I use, in part because I have been channelled for the last 5 years through a university art school specialising in painting. A system which requires the individual to focus on a particular method of approaching his/her conceptual concern as time progresses, honing and refining their techniques and chosen media to the closest correlation of that concept as the end of the course nears.

**Intervention**

My works are on the one hand mimetic representations, on the other hand they subvert mimesis in the sense that they hang on a wall, and are presented as a flat square / rectangular painting, which emphasises the fact that they are divorced, separated and isolated from the ‘real’ world. They are clearly objects, unframed and mounted on a wall, so they cannot be mistaken as a piece of the world or a view of it. All the above emphasise that although they may allude to their origins, they are also signs or texts that I have constructed to represent a part of my reality, the ‘real’ world as selected by me and represented in that particular medium.

The more I intervene, by manipulating the surface or adding paint, the more removed from a seemingly objective, accurate or transparent representation, the paintings become. The selection of subject, framing, composition and casting, is from my point-of-view and they end up mostly flat (albeit in low relief). Photography similarly involves a reduction and flattening (mechanical and optical) of form and image, selection, framing and composition.

Were I to make claims to truth and authenticity regarding the trace I have represented, they would be thwarted even before I had begun. The authenticity of the trace in my works is, even though often closely mimetic, unavoidably changed and
distorted at every stage of my intervention. This presents an interesting dilemma, on the one hand there is a compelling resistance to interfere with the surface trace I have cast and begun to work with, a pressure no doubt due in part from my immersion in western culture, and its enduring emphasis toward objective representation, added to by my own background in photography and television. Even after a century of varying forms of abstraction in art, we remain surrounded by projections of realism and of ‘apparent’ objectivity. A fallacy reflected in the convincingly ‘realistic’ photographic and digital realism or ‘hyperrealism’ that surrounds us in mass media.

Yet, there is also a desire to intervene in my surfaces, to ‘muck them up’ – so to speak, to counter any notions of a truth to authenticity, truth in representation. Any intervention, modification, is a mark of my presence and physical or emotional involvement. This quandary is faced with each work; to cover the traces and loose information, editing out and ‘spoiling’ the textural information on the surface, or adding my own marks, my own trace. For as a trace is erased it is replaced by a new trace, a trace of my own actions, actions that trace the various cultural histories inscribed within my own body.

The point, at which an image borders on abstraction, where it moves from recognisable depiction into abstraction, is at the same time particularly appealing. This point of abstraction, where the signifier/s are loosened or severed from their signification and begin to float, the ‘floating’ or ‘empty’ signifier resulting in a work whose meaning is more open to interpretation, yet less easy to define.

This dilemma is not unlike one that has faced the photographer throughout the history of photography, who attempts to “break the causal chain by which the photographer is imprisoned, to impose a human intention between subject and appearance...to turn a mere simulacrum into the expression of a representational thought...” (Scruton cited in Beilin, 1991, p.52)

The Crisis of Representation

The enlightenment ideals of a belief in science and progress are no longer regarded as a privileged discourse linking us to truth since the scrutiny of

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This ‘crisis of representation’ concerned enlightenment metanarratives of truth and emancipation. (Peters, 1999) Doubt was cast “on overarching explanations that claim to speak for all people; that claim to be universal and not ‘particular’”. (Crang, 1998, p.182) Metanarratives had been used to legitimate both the rules of knowledge of the sciences and the foundations of modern institutions.

Neutral and Transparent Media

The language and imagery of the enlightenment was considered neutral, a perfect and transparent media through which essential properties of a ‘real world’ could be represented and their ‘fixed’ meanings revealed. (Duncan & Ley, 1993, p.4) (Johnson, 1999, p.163) Familiar representational modes that are in constant everyday use, such as television, have a tendency to seem ‘natural’ and transparent, the reader focusing on what is represented rather than the process itself. (Chandler, Glossary, 1994)

This transparency is often exploited to maximise the effectiveness of a particular medium. In watching video or cinema, although we know the images are cut together in a sequential form like nothing that occurs in the natural world, we quickly become absorbed with the message or narrative that is being conveyed and no longer aware of the cuts and jumps between the images. The same applies in reading a novel where we lose awareness of the words themselves, becoming engrossed in the story itself. Similarly in reading or viewing paintings, the mode of representation itself tends to be taken for granted, which has the advantage of focusing attention on content.

So convincing, was linear perspective, as a mimetic reproduction of the experience of the world in fifteenth century Italy, that it was claimed to be, “a ‘natural’ form of representation, a ‘transparent window’” (Duncan, 1993, p.41) A claim, which “spread from the world of art to other knowledge systems within Europe.” (Jay cited in Duncan, 1993, p.41)
This convincing link between reality and representation, an essential part of "the 'natural attitude' of objectivism", appears all the more absurd, if painting as a mode of 'realistic' representation, is considered over different historical periods and under differing social structures. All have produced differing representations of the 'real' world. (Duncan & Ley, 1993, P.4)

If we consider the multitude of forms of representations available to us today, it becomes apparent that what we may consider as a reflection of reality becomes somewhat slippery, is not fixed but constantly changing, and may be different for every individual. (Shanks & Mackenzie, 1994, p.40)

**Reality Represented**

For Bryson, realism is the process by which a representation coincides with "that which a society assumes as its reality". (Bryson cited in Duncan & Ley, 1993, p.4) To be characterized as realistic, art needs to be able to produce what Barthes terms 'the effect of reality', or to create “the sense of conforming to what we believe to be real.” (Barthes cited in Stoczkowski, 1997, p.261) However the differing versions of reality painting has proffered over the centuries suggests just how historically specific realistic representation can be.

In fact, there are numerous perceptions of realism depending on the period, the type of media used, stylistic movements and the individual concerned. Realist art typically seeks to 'transparently' and 'naturally' reflect a world, which exists independently of its representation, “as if they were slices of life ‘untouched by human hand.’” (Chandler, Glossary, 1994) Our own immersion in a culture can make it difficult to distinguish between the world and our representations of it, because of the familiarity and 'naturalness' of those representations.

**The construction of reality**

The constructivist view of reality is of a reality that is constructed; rather than an objective and independent observed reality that exists outside of and separate from us. In this view, all representations result in a constructed 'reality', however
‘realistic’ or ‘how it is’ that they may appear to be; they are nevertheless constructed instead of transparently reflecting a pre-existing reality. (Chandler, Glossary, 1994)

To the objective realist on the other hand, the world is understood to exist independently of its observer and conform to an inherent order or logic. The focus of the realist is on how representations correspond to an objective reality, by applying hypotheses and methodologies in an analysis of reality that will “reveal its inner order and logic.” (Cosgrove & Domosh, 1993, p.26)

Realists argue that truth can be found by the testing of those theories against an external reality. The emphasis of the constructivist is that ‘reality has authors’ whose realities are being represented and prioritised over others. (Chandler, Glossary, 1994) To accept that all knowledge is culturally constructed means accepting also that it can be as easily deconstructed. (Cosgrove & Domosh, 1993, p.31)

Morris suggests that a representational image such as a photograph, drawing or painting has no meaning in itself. An image prompting an emotion response, from which the brain infers a reality corresponding to that which is represented, dependant also on our memory of previous experiences. Without previous experiences that can be related to this new image information, meaning would be unrecognisable or ambiguous. (Morris, 1986, p.14)

Our perception of reality is derived from the comparison of new information to that held in our memory, and by the way in which it is framed when presented to us. The type of media used and accompanying instructions, such as a title to the work facilitates this process. (Morris, 1986, p.15)

With the departure from the belief in an objective world, of ‘universal knowledge’ and ‘grand narratives’, postmodernism has called into question the different traditional claims to truth as an objective representation of reality. Eid describes this critique as a counter emergence of intertextuality, “that ‘life itself is a text’, a text that is interpreted in relation to other texts.” (Eid, 1999)
Whether through ‘direct’ perception or mediated texts, what we experience as realities always involve sets of codes or texts, that provide a context within which other texts may be created and interpreted. (Chandler, Intertextuality, 1994)

Derrida has demonstrated through ‘deconstruction’, a process of critical analysis, that any word or signifier, instead of referring to a real world can have many meanings, which may in turn refer to a multiplicity of other meanings. (Johnson, 1999, p.164) The result of this is a view of the world that includes, text and landscapes, in which meanings are unstable and fluid. “Instead of looking for deep, underlying, ‘core’ or ‘essential’ features of a phenomenon, there is simply endless fluidity and play across surface meanings.” (Johnson, 1999, p.164)

Deconstruction is useful in emphasising the differing interpretations that arise from reading texts, either language or landscape. Although emphasis has moved from representation of truth, to the construction of meaning and by whom, it remains a “social and political struggle for the production of meaning.” (Somekawa and Smith cited in Cosgrove & Domosh, 1993, p.36)

With postmodern thinking then has come “the loss of confidence in science, an attack on essentialism, the stressing of a diversity of readings together with a lack of fixity of meaning.” (Johnson, 1999, p.166) But has this really happened? Johnson suggests postmodernism is in some ways a ‘red herring’. It is not hard to see why. Any loss of confidence in science in the early days of postmodernism seem to have long since dissipated, the increasingly rapid advances in technology, genetics and medicine for example are an indication that it is business as usual, or better that usual.

Moreover, scientific achievements are eagerly supported by a news media happy to use pre-prepared and supplied media kits, an economical and convenient filler for a news bulletin, thinly veiled as news of a ‘breakthrough’. In some cases this can be a free advertisement for drug companies launching a new product or surgeons who have bought a new hi-tech machine. Media endorsement reinforces the authoritative position of science, as the primary producers of knowledge.
Public funding through governments of scientific institutions also supports that position, not that they do not provide useful services to society, but it is also a function of maintaining institutional knowledge and power. Governments may also seek to influence the direction of research, as Lyotard states, “knowledge is now more than ever a question of government.” (Lyotard, 1981, p.9)

This is evident in the arts also with ministries and departments developing policy and administering funding for supporting particular collections and projects providing they meet certain requirements and guidelines.

But knowledge production is not only influenced by government, it is subject to market forces. This becomes particularly noticeable in medical research, a drug or vaccine that is expected to produce a reasonable return, most likely to have significant research funding.

In the eighteenth century, the study of the 'real world' was divided into different disciplines dealing with different kinds of phenomena. Under postmodern questioning, according to Johnson, there has been a breaking down of these disciplinary boundaries. (Johnson, 1999, p166) If this were the case, it should give credence to other means of constructing knowledge and to a cross-disciplinary approach. A paradigm shift it may not have been, but in principal at least, other groups may be allowed to participate in contributing to knowledge.

In this regard, a work of art has a potentially useful role, acting as signposts that suggest different ways of interpreting the world, in a way that is less precise than written language. Art is not bound so tightly by linguistic and grammatical rules, which allows greater freedom in its construction and interpretation, limited perhaps only by imagination and the constraints of the particular medium used. This greater flexibility may not always be considered desirable (they may be harder to interpret), but it is something that artists can use quite effectively. Works of art can re-present ideas in differing ways and draw attention to that which might otherwise go unnoticed.
I emphasise that whilst art ‘can’, it does not necessarily mean that it does. I would argue that an artist often produces work to please him or herself primarily, so it depends on their intentions, the degree of codification incorporated into the work and the desire to communicate (if at all). Further, a willingness to allow others to participate in its interpretation by incorporating codes and signifiers in the work that may be read by others.

Cosgrove and Domosh reveal a concern at the possible de-emphasising of the scientific way of knowing, “We are obliged to accept the magical/mystical interpretation of the world as equally valid or invalid as the scientific, for each is a construction of meaning.” (Cosgrove & Domosh, 1993, p.29) Those fears would seem to be largely unrealised, despite the embracing of postmodernist rhetoric, for as indicated previously science continues to enjoy a predominantly dominant position in Western Societies with regard to knowledge and continues to provide the answers that were once the domain of religion. Science “…is an institution of authority for us in the same way that the Catholic Church was for the people of medieval Europe.” (Comte cited in Johnson, 1999, p.34)

After all science does a pretty good job of explaining the world and the universe for that matter, compared to religion and mysticism. Its success and authority as an institution reinforce such an argument. Scientists are generally well funded, although they may like to suggest otherwise. Which knowledge prevails seems to become an issue of politics, about empowering the group who sees the world in a particular way, validating their arguments and disabling other groups. (Crang, 1998, p.180) Whoever wins the struggle for meaning “reconstitutes the world, our knowledge of it and thus the modes of its representation.” (Cosgrove & Domosh, 1993, p.29) Dominant classes of any society write the history leaving their traces for posterity in documents, on monuments and by naming places, streets and buildings; their traces live on in the present.

Within an institution such as science, the language used, as with other modes of discourse, does not ‘mirror reality’, it constructs it. “‘Reality’ always has authors, and all written texts offer only their particular authors’ constructions of realities.” (Chandler, 1995, p.115) Just as this text is constructed from my point of view, to
support my other constructed (painting) representations, scientists see reality through
their theories and their representations. (Crang, 1998, p.190)

**Narrative**

Scientific knowledge however, is not the ‘totality of knowledge’; it exists
with, competes and conflicts with, a form of knowledge Lyotard refers to as
sciences ‘grand’ or ‘meta’ narratives is determined by the society in which the
narratives are told. Its users are able to define the criteria of competence and
evaluation that are used. The narrative form, unlike the developed forms of the
discourse of knowledge, lends itself to a great variety of ‘language games’. Allowing
denotation, interrogation, evaluation and points of view, but it also includes notions
of “know how,” “knowing how to live,” “how to listen.” (Lyotard, 1981, p.20, 180)

Narrative is knowledge accumulated through past experience and shared
experience. Making our experiences into narratives also “seems to be a fundamental
feature of the human drive to make meaning.” (Chandler, Syntagmatic Analysis,
1994) Burr suggesting that as story teller’s human beings “experience themselves
and their lives in narrative terms” (Burr cited in Chandler, Syntagmatic Analysis,
1994)

Narrative changes the way we relate to things and places. Visiting a pristine
beach on a hot summer’s day, and hearing that a ship was wrecked there in the last
century with many people losing their lives, suddenly changes our perception of that
place. It is no longer just a beautiful long white beach with brilliant aqua blue water
and white surf, but also a place of treacherous seas, drowning and disaster, of
isolation and desperation.

Like all good Australian boys making the pilgrimage to Gallipoli in search of
and reinforcing the myths of our own culture, I too wandered along the beach at
Anzac Cove. On a beach so much like one in Australia, it seemed unfathomable that
it could have been covered in so much blood 75 odd years ago. Even after all those
years of sightseers and metal detectors, there are still traces that turn up on the shore
and in the dunes. An old bullet and rusty piece of tin were my prized souvenirs as I
returned home, myths firmly cemented. And every year the cinematic reality of Gallipoli is rebroadcast on TV, so we don’t forget the myth that we never remembered.

Myth

Eagleton suggests that notions of realism are culturally based and hence ideological. Transparency in language has a tendency to seem natural and ordinary, giving us reality ‘as it is’. (Eagleton cited in Duncan & Ley, 1993, p.4) Beliefs may seem “self-evident and apparently inevitable; denigrating ideas which might challenge it; excluding rival forms of thought, perhaps by some unspoken but systematic logic.” (McNeill, Myth and Ideology, 1996)

A socially constructed reality, which seems normal and natural, tends also to be historically specific, this is in Barthe’s view myth. Myths “naturalize; they turn history into nature.” (Barthes cited in Duncan & Ley, 1993, p.4) “The opinions and values of a historically and socially specific class are held up as ‘universal truths’.” (McNeill, Myth and Ideology, 1996)

What we take to be ‘natural’ may in fact be an illusory reality, comprising of myths that circulate everyday life constructing the world and our place in it. At the same time, they mask power structures in society. We inhabit a world of signs that “support existing power structures” and “purport to be natural.” (McNeill, Mass Culture, Myth and the Mythologist, 1996)

Myth then is a ‘form of signification’, a ‘system of communication’ within historical limits, that is conveyed by a discourse (Barthes, 1983, p.93) which means it is also a way of making sense of and ordering social reality, providing cultural solutions to the world as experienced. Myth is a meaning making system, which can also provide codes of behaviour, appropriate within a culture, but at the same time, they may also be inappropriate to members of another culture. (Tilley, 1991, p.139)
Narrative, Art and Archaeology

Archaeology might also be better understood as a narrative (Johnson, 1999, p.168) Archaeologists weave material evidence and supposition together, creating a narrative to give an account, a story, of what might have happened in the past.

Constructing narratives to explain human’s actions are perhaps best explained, “by reference to the ideas and intentions that humans have.” (Johnson, 1999, p.43) These do not have a physical existence; they cannot be measured or observed, so their interpretation becomes an issue of Hermeneutics, the practice and theory of interpretation. In other words to try and grasp what a people might have thought and done in the past, it is necessary to consider what those ideas and intentions might have been, that resulted in what ever actions they took.

“Interpretation in archaeology is therefore, in this view, always hermeneutic (about ideas, meanings and symbols) in nature rather than scientific.” (Johnson, 1999, p.43)

Archaeology shares some similarities also with art, although intentions, technology and process may differ and each function through a different disciplinary framework. However, they both are concerned with symbols, ideas, speculation, interpretation and meanings and each can traverse the boundaries of other disciplines. Both offer meaning, insight, and understanding into the world around us.

Ironically, any artistic interpretation of the past is likely to end up a cultural artefact itself and could become the subject of future archaeological study. In this sense, art represents a fragment of the past, a trace of its maker and originating culture. (Merewether, 1999, p.167) Any art “as a material form, no matter how recently made, appears before us in the present as the presence of the past and asks us, among many other things, to engage with history in particular ways.” (Cummins, 1995)

Archaeology has of course utilised artistic representation in trying to reconstruct reality with various visual representations and the ‘artist impression’, more recently and more ‘realistically’ with 3D video graphics.
Both art and archaeology have a similar concern with creative and interpretive thought, craftsmanship, technique and communication. Archaeology is a human activity, and like art, exposed to personal bias and subjectivity. Like archaeologists, "Artists are by nature visual magpies collecting bits of information from diverse sources." (Noble, 1991, p.4)

Tilley, Hamilton, et al argue,

...the production of art works in the present can be a powerful means of interpreting the past in the present. Both the practices of interpreting the past and producing art result in the production of something new that transforms our understanding of place and space resulting in the creation of new meaning. Art and archaeology can act together dialectically to produce a novel conceptualization of the past and produce a means of relating to the past that is considerably more than the sum of its parts. (Tilley, Hamilton, & Bender, 2000)

So what is my particular interested in the past? Is my own work any more than antiquarianism, of simply assembling and collating and representing old objects for their own sake? There is no doubt some appeal to the mystery or romance, of a past that beckons through its remains. A past that is visible in its remnant traces, yet only accessible in our imaginations.

Noble suggests "all artists are concerned with traces from the past." (Noble, 1991, p.8) This is more where my interests lie, in the trace itself, not necessarily with an artefact or the particular surface itself. The trace and what it alludes to, as evidence of some past event. By focusing attention on a surface's traces, these works may also present an opportunity for each viewer to negotiate a relationship to a past which is gone, yet, lives on in the present as a trace of that origin.

"The strata of the Earth is a jumbled Museum. Embedded in the sediment is a text that contains limits and boundaries which evade the rational order and social structures which confine art. In order to read the rocks we must become conscious of geologic time, and of the layers of prehistoric material that is entombed in the Earth's crust. When one scans the ruined sites of prehistory one sees a heap of wrecked maps that upsets our present art historical limits..." (Smithson cited in Noble, 1991, p.8)

To contemplate the trace of an original past is to also negotiate its temporal relationship to place, past and present. Narrative thus contributes to making one painting of greater value over and above another, the imagery is part of the artwork,
the social construction and contextualisation that surrounds it another. The associated
signification and social context contributes to make a painting more than that which
is visible on the surface.

Nevertheless, imagination and creativity are accorded a less important place
than hypothesis, observation and measurement of formal science. Are the arts that
different from the sciences? In scale certainly, however, individual artists collect data
and information in differing forms, produce conceptual or material artefacts
following analysis, and submit their work for peer approval by gallery exhibition or
performance. As with science, public approval may be sought, or at least an
awareness made of their activities in an attempt to canvas private or public funding
to enable continuation of their activities.

The suggestion by Lyotard is that knowledge is far more widely reaching
than can be determined by the application of hypotheses, methodologies and criteria
required of institutions of knowledge. (Lyotard, 1981, p.180) Lyotard highlights two
significant differences in scientific knowledge, which are that the conditions imposed
on statements must be available for repeated access under certain conditions of
observation and that those given statements be appropriate to the language judged
relevant by the experts. (Lyotard, 1981, p.180) A critical difference between
narrative and conversational knowledge and institutional knowledge being, that an
institution defines the criteria of competence and evaluation, “an institution always
requires supplementary constraints for statements to be declared admissible within its
bounds.” (Lyotard, 1981, p.17)

The conversations we have, narratives, stories or anecdotes are not subject to
those institutional rules, which set parameters on discussion. They are determined by
the participants. A counter aspect to narrative knowledge however is, when
knowledge that has not been measured and categorised by a specific discourse has to
overcome the problem of credibility and acceptance; narrative often cast aside as
‘hearsay’.

In practice, “Science, the arts, local belief systems all work to create different
knowledge’s about the world.” (Crang, 1998, p.180) It comes back to which
knowledge is prioritised over others, and who can participate in the languages of the dominant knowledge's and their institutions.

**The Lure of the Real**

As texts are created and produced to make knowledge so too are my paintings a constructed text. On the one hand some might be mistaken as a mimetic and ‘transparent’, a reflection of ‘reality’, but they remain constructions, signifiers, separate objects.

The lure of the ‘real’ or mimesis is something I find difficult to avoid in their production. By this I mean it can be very difficult to deviate from making and keeping the surface in its apparent ‘real’ state. ‘Real’ a problematic word to use, but to disturb the surface, seems to present a particular psychological barrier. This is curious because they always end up quite different from the original surface in any case; yet at the same time often seem more real.

They are not only traces of an originary surface but are separate objects, a parallel existence. Perhaps this is a conflict with the literal trace cast from the surface and of memory trace, my memory; the two rarely seem to correspond exactly. As discussed in the previous chapter, this may be a result of our memories constantly being recontextualised within the present.

Comparing site photographs and on revisiting the original locations, many paintings seem to have become more real or seem in some way improved, than the actual ‘real’ surfaces. Notwithstanding personal bias, this may be due to the greater familiarity afforded to the works in the time spent in their construction. It may also relate to the fact that these paintings, as substitutes for the original, are separate objects with a life of their own, but at the same time refer to their origins. Or is this a form of hyperreality? How can those paintings (which have not become to abstracted) seem more real than the real?

This might be attributed to an aesthetic style, where something ordinary is made extraordinary; its lure is the promise, “that it will lift us out of the dreariness of necessity”. (Ewen cited in Smith, 1993, p.81) It may also be the “illusion that makes
the simulacrum more compelling than the reality itself.” (Eco cited in Smith, 1993, p.81)

Hyperreality

Baudrillard coined the term ‘hyperrealism’ to describe the phenomenon in the media saturated contemporary world, whereby reality has been largely replaced by its representations, “which have no referent or ground in any ‘reality’ except their own.” (Baudrillard, 1988, p.6)

Because we live in a world in which more and more time is spent using electronic communications through which we receive information about the world, our realities are often constructed from those different mediums of representation that are readily available for use, such as television, cinema and advertising. (Poster, 2000) The tendency is to compare image to image rather than image to place. (Crang, 1998, p.95)

And as signs begin to lose their relationship to the signified, lose their relationship to a ‘material or social reality’ - as with electronic media, advertising and commodification - then the realistic illusions of media communication, the ‘hyperreal’, hides the absence of reality. (Chandler, Modality and Representation, 1994)

Baudrillard suggests a possible definition for the real as, “that for which it is possible to provide an equivalent representation.” And as a consequence “the real becomes not only that which can be reproduced, [its representations] but that which is always already reproduced: the hyperreal.” (Baudrillard, 1988, p.145)

Recent advances in digital effects and animation, such as used in the Jurassic Park films, presents us with a paradox, in that we recognise and accept something as real even though it never existed as an original representation. Nobody has ever seen a real living dinosaur.

It seems fitting to extend the hyperreal analogy to non high-tech media such as the simulated Lascaux caves, where the hyperreal replaces the real with an
‘Artifactual’ surface. Under the pretext of saving the original, visitors are no longer permitted to enter the real Lascaux caves, instead viewing an exact replica nearby, which is taken by all to be the ‘real’. (Baudrillard, 1994, p.9)

How then are my works positioned in relation to hyperreality, simulation and representation? They are perhaps a combination of all. A simulation in that they are derived from a cast of an appropriated surface. A representation because they are not made of the same material as the original and are different enough to not be an exact copy, but similar enough to be an indexical signifier. They might be considered hyperreal in the sense that they simulate to a reasonably close degree what might be the taken as the real or original surface, and to that extent would displace the original. “Hyperrealism is only beyond representation because it functions entirely within the realm of simulation.” (Baudrillard, 1988, p.146) The paintings hyperreality increases the closer they move from representation to simulation. However, the absence of reality is not concealed, (it is hardly possible when they are hanging on a wall in a gallery) so they do not fall under the category of simulacra, or “copies without originals.” (Crang, 1998, p.126)

Work of a similar nature was pioneered in the 1960s by Mark Boyle, who assisted by his family, creates painted fibreglass replicas of randomly selected sections of the earth’s natural surface and sometimes man made structures which cover it.

In the sixties, he asked friends and members of the public to throw 1000 darts blindfolded at a map of the world, each place a dart landed “a work of art would be born”. (Hubbard, 1988) Precise locations were established by throwing darts at more detailed maps. At the actual site, a carpenter’s right angle was thrown to the ground, Boyle and his family replicating the area on which it lands. So began their “Journey to the Surface of the Earth” (Deakin, 1996)

This project, in addition to mapping out the Boyle’s lives for the decades to come, also becomes one of mapping the world. And although they may be claimed to be objective “maps are texts within discourses of power.” (Duncan & Ley, 1993, p.5)
"The whole point of our work is to be as truthful as possible," he says. "When we’re together the truth comes flying out. We’ve done everything but tear each other’s throats out." (Hubbard, 1988)

Boyle reiterates a scientific ethos of an objective search for ‘truth’, an objectiveness strengthened by its apparent arbitrariness. “It’s entirely random…our object is to ensure that the squares of earth are not chosen for aesthetic reasons.” (Hubbard, 1988) A random selection emphasising how ‘natural’ and ‘real’ they are. Although any claims to randomness, when humans are involved is doubtful, but by adopting this approach Boyle infers that his works are more representative of the real, than if tainted with intent, thus presenting “…apparently and as near as technically possible, fragments of the real world”. (Boyle, 1986, p.53)

All the same, they are abstracted and selected from the actual. As with other realist modes, which have a tendency to mask the processes used in representation, Boyle’s works have an implied neutrality, presenting a slice of the earth’s surface, as if ‘untouched by human hand’. (Chandler, Glossary, 1994) Locher maintains that Boyle “only wants to make himself aware of reality as it appears, of the innumerable unique moments it contains, and of the extraordinary way in which all existing things belong together.” (Locher, 1978, p.43) Nevertheless, there is intention and interpretation in Boyle’s representations and as with all ‘highly realistic’ representations they impart a particular point of view. (Chandler, Modality and Representation, 1994) Boyle creates, with the aid of his family, a particular version of reality. Duncan and Ley note the irony of objectivity, that it is based on a fiction, “that the researcher is an objective recorder of that which s/he sees and hears.” (Duncan & Ley, 1993, p.8) As discussed earlier, humans are far from objective, always influenced by their own cultural viewpoint.

What Boyle’s works do well however is to interrupt habitual ways of seeing things by removing them from their usual surroundings and representing them in a new context, in a similar manner to that of the found object. Locher suggest that Boyle belongs to this tradition, defining the found object as,

the transformation of ordinary everyday objects into art, not by depicting them but by detaching them from their normal context and
function and presenting them in such a way that they become exclusively something to look at. (Locher, 1978, p.20)

We are so used to attaching labels to familiar objects that we fail to see past them. The unfamiliar context such as with Boyles works “sharpened our perception that things are there for the seeing, that ‘ordinary’ things can be amazing.” (Deakin, 1996) Similar slices of the earth’s surface could be seen in the natural world rather than in a gallery, hung on the wall. “Except of course, that the unfamiliar context sharpens our perception of them.” (Boyle, 1986, p.53)

The most rewarding thing ever said to me was by a Dutch woman of a shape I had carved in sand. She said ‘Thank you for showing me that was there.’ (Goldsworthy cited in Tilley et al., 2000)

Art can express a particularity of place and aspects of a world that might otherwise go unnoticed. If that were not so and other mediums were able to do the same, then surely art would have less of a reason to still exist.

Although my work is in many respects similar to Boyles, it does not attempt to maintain any truth to reality, surfaces are not selected randomly, instead those which have some degree of visible trace, are used. By inviting interpretation, a reading as a text rather than objective mimesis, with intervention acknowledged and theorised upon, would suggest a more hermeneutical approach. Even though the works are on the one hand a form of replication, they still pose a challenge to mimesis, since “a ‘perfect copy’ of the world clearly is not possible if the interpreter is present in that textual copy.” (Duncan & Ley, 1993, p.3) Traces of my own intervention are present in each work, if only the fact that they are selected, framed and hung on the wall, although some may have different colour, subtle distortion, or have become abstracted beyond recognition from their original. My interest lies more with the traces themselves rather than an attempt at objective replication. Nevertheless, many pieces do retain the mark of their origins. My intervention in the history of a site or place becomes not only a trace of the original but as with Boyle’s, a parallel existence. Each painting is a separate object, a new object, yet at the same time traces the original and our own processes, each recontextualising a less obvious aspect of the world.
CONCLUSION

In this dissertation I have sought to examine areas relating to my area of interest in the arts. A broad survey of literature has been undertaken to inform this research and the textual discourse provided in this document addresses problems, which have arisen concerning those issues as they relate to my arts practice.

I have also endeavoured to position my research in relation to the landscape as a source of trace and the differing ways in which it may be read, from textual metaphor to palimpsest and oral narrative. Layers, fragments, remnant traces and evidence of events past in a temporal continuum that engulfs the landscape; the surface of the earth is a result of geological change, but also a legacy of humankind’s progression within the landscape. The symbolic nature of the landscape has also been considered and the potential to read much of that surrounding us, which is tainted with traces of its use and origins, yet may often go unnoticed.

Trace also gives us a sense of temporal spacing, which is a condition of world that we live in. We live in the present, but the evidence of many presents, now past, surround us. Thus, also many realities that were one present are now past. That which we now accept as our reality will also become a past reality, replaced by as yet unconceived realities. That which we see and encounter we also represent in the process of knowledge production, meaning and understanding. This distinctly human activity, which results in different cultures responding in different ways with differing codes and conventions, creating and communicate meaning in the world around us. Awareness is made of differing positions and priorities in producing knowledge, and as a process of actively making knowledge rather than finding it as already existing truths.

This study of trace has considered both its material and nonmaterial characteristics and the ways in which they may relate to each of the other. Physical,
memory, virtual – all are intertwined in a network of traces. This rhizomatic nature of trace also corresponding to the rhizomatic nature of knowledge.

Trace also has a significant role in signification and language, as a function of difference and in deferral of meaning. Material traces are of particular interest to a number of disciplines of science, archaeology the main focus in this paper.

Similarities between the nature of archaeology and art have also been considered, both creative and interpretive in approach, both are human activities and also subjective. Each considered as translators or intermediaries constructing narratives and meaning, rather than arbiters or observers of objective realities and truths.

Conflicts within my own practice of underlying issues of mimesis have been addressed in relation to representation and intervention and a balance between signification and ‘empty’ or ‘floating’ signifiers. Their positioning also in relation to hyperreality, simulation and representation, with the likelihood that they probably combine aspects of all. Cosgrove and Domosh suggest that representation only faces a ‘crisis’ if it is thought that an “independent truth about the world”, is conveyed or that it is “an authentic representation.” (Cosgrove & Domosh, 1993, p.36)

The works I produce use surfaces that are intentionally selected because of their traces. Rather than acting as a constraining factor, it instead producing art works through the collection, interpretation and re-presentation of the past in the present, which has the potential to enhance its significance because of the inclusion of trace. As well as becoming part of the cultural discourse of the present day, as we have seen trace invites cross-disciplinary discussion.

Klee’s often-quoted phrase “Art does not reproduce the visible; rather, it makes visible.” (Delahunt, 2001) although almost a cliché, is somehow still appropriate. Bryson suggests this means that, “we see by means of art something not
to be seen in other ways, something in effect that must be made visible.” (Bryson et al., 1991, p.10) In comparing Boyle’s work to my own, one of the ways this is put into practice is by representing the everyday, making visible that which is already there. Art seems to be a suitable form to express a particularity of place and aspects of a world that might otherwise go unnoticed.

The painting works I make from the environment of a bygone time, remind us of what we may see, yet often not notice. They invite us to consider our relationship to a past from which we may have become alienated. ‘Trace’ connecting ‘lived’ time, the past, with ‘physical’ time, the present. They are not presented as a solution or conclusion rather as a construction of a particular reality, with which to provoke comment and interpretation that may or may not result in meaning and understanding.

Our future can only become apparent by looking behind at where we have been, at the patterns that trace our past.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Fig 1. Wall Painting I Diptych (section)
Found paint, acrylic and glass fibre, 90 x 130cm x 2, 2001

Fig 2. Wall Painting III Diptych (section)
Found paint, acrylic and glass fibre, 90 x 130cm x 2, 2001

Fig 3. Wall Painting II Triptych
Found paint, acrylic and glass fibre, 90 x 130cm x 3, 2001
Fig 4. Fitzroy 66
Oil, acrylic and glass fibre, 138 x 165cm, 2001

Fig 5. Waychinicup
Oil, acrylic and glass fibre, 153 x 165cm, 2000
Fig 6. Render I
Oil, acrylic and glass fibre, 64 x 83cm, 2000

Fig 7. Render II
Oil, acrylic and glass fibre, 64 x 83cm, 2000
Fig 8. Boiler
Oil, acrylic, iron oxide and glass fibre, 106 x 137cm, 2001

Fig 9. Render III
Oil, acrylic and glass fibre, 122 x 137cm, 2001
Fig 10. Division II Diptych
Found paint, dirt, acrylic and glass fibre, 2 panels 56 x 122cm, 2001

Fig 11. Traces
Found paint, dirt, acrylic and glass fibre, 104 x 185cm, 2001
Fig 12. Parrys Rock V
Acrylic, oil and glass fibre, 35.5 x 51cm, 2001

Fig 13. Parrys Rock IV
Acrylic, oil and glass fibre, 35.5 x 51cm, 2001

Fig 14. Parrys Rock VIII Diptych
Acrylic, oil and glass fibre, 61 x 84cm x 2, 2001
Fig 15. Parrys Rock I Diptych
Acrylic, oil and glass fibre, 35.5 x 51cm x 2, 2001

Fig 16. Parrys Rock II
Acrylic, oil and glass fibre, 35.5 x 51cm, 2001

Fig 17. Parrys Rock III
Acrylic, oil and glass fibre, 35.5 x 51cm, 2001