BETWEEN THE WINTER AND THE DOG TRAP

Tony Griffin
Dip Art, Grad Dip Ed, BA (Visual Arts) (Honours), Ballarat

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Master of Arts

Arts Academy
University of Ballarat
PO Box 663
University Drive, Mount Helen
Ballarat, Victoria, 3353
Australia

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Abstract

This research is concerned with a visual exploration and recording of that small area of the Golden Plains Shire on the outskirts of the Western Victorian city of Ballarat.

Specifically I have investigated aspects of change as witnessed in the landscape within walking distance of my home between the Winter Creek and the Dog Trap Creek. The nature of change is significant as it shapes the physical, social, and spiritual narratives played out before the frequent visitor.

I have strong links to this particular region of rural Victoria and draw upon my phenomenological experiences of this area to investigate how real-life environmental issues such as drought, bushfires, land and water degradation and urban sprawl can be given visual expression. Through the processes of painting, drawing and printmaking, I have endeavoured to describe changes that are not only visible in this locale but may also be seen as indicative of broader social, economic, cultural and climatic changes.

I focus on how interpretations of the landscape may contribute to our knowledge of the environment. Research is undertaken in both art practice and the theoretical field. The understanding of landscape as a human-environment relationship; the effects of climate change and the growth of cities; custodianship; the body and walking; along with the imagery and poetics of nature are considered.

The impetus for this research is in the phenomenological experiences of extended walks in my immediate landscape. By limiting the area studied to a domestic scale, the notion of the area as a fractal becomes emphatic. The landscape traditions of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries and contemporary art practice have informed this research significantly as have phenomenological, historical and anthropological disciplines.

The artworks attempt to demonstrate a sense of flux, where previous erasures become the basis for future palimpsests.
Statement of Authorship

Except where explicit reference is made in the text of the thesis, this thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma. No other person’s work has been relied upon or used without due acknowledgement in the main text and bibliography of the thesis.

Applicant
Signed
Dated
30/10/09
Anthony S. Griffin

Principal Supervisor
Signed
Dated
30/10/09
Dr. Loris Button

Associate Supervisor
Signed
Dated
2.11.09
Dr. Jennifer Jones-O’Neill
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Preamble

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

T.S.Eliot, *Little Gidding*¹

My name is Anthony Stephen Griffin. I am named for the Patron Saint of those who have lost things and the Patron Saint of those who build roads, a place where many people truly find themselves. I have lived in Cambrian Hill for almost twenty years. The area around my home has become a persistent theme in, the motivation for, and subject of most of my work. The landscape has become familiar to me. Daily, it is the landscape in which I leave home and to which I later return. Time seems to move slowly and the days are always busy but the act of leaving and returning, to the heart of my family and my refuge, takes place in the same landscape and has become an intimate and resonant part of each day. It is a shifting landscape, appallingly dry and then achingly damp. It is a landscape full of landmarks and beacons that describe the seasons, the weather, the time of day, the day of the week, the work to do and the tasks completed. All have become, slowly through repetition, ingrained.

Where I live has become, for me, an intensely complex and multi-faceted place. Perhaps *where* I am is *who* I am. I have, over many years, accumulated an understanding of, and affection for, this small area or neighborhood. On the edge of a developing and spreading rural city of more than 80,000 people, Cambrian Hill is at once a refuge from the urbanisation of Ballarat and a point where the pressure of its growth is most keenly felt. The once quiet lanes are now often busy with builders’ vans and the detritus of a growing

city is often left under the senescing cypresses that once marked the scale of the dreams of those who planted them.

It is the way I have come to know this small part of Victoria that has driven me to paint and record in print my observations. It is the daily leaving and returning to this landscape that has imbued the place with meaning. It is my home and my hearth, where my children became the people they are, and where I am still discovering myself.
Introduction

My initial intention in undertaking this research was to explore the distances that could sustain a landscape. I was concerned with the limits and edges of that which constitutes a landscape. I wanted to consider whether possession of a landscape was possible. I was, and still am, interested in, the distances required before a sense of belonging is lost in a landscape.

Patrick McCaughey tells us that:

Landscape was destiny for Australians in the nineteenth century. Where you were was who you were. The environment shaped existence, be it the squatters’ rolling acres or the hard scrabble of the wallaby track, the tent cities of the goldfields or the urban splendor of Victorian Melbourne. Small wonder that landscape painting in Australia was the first artistic genre to achieve authority.¹

My research has confirmed for me the fact that environment shapes existence. By examining the environment in which I live I have discovered who I am. McCaughey continues:

From the quiet drama of the settled world emerging from the wilds of John Glover’s garden on Mills Plains in central Tasmania, to Arthur Streeton’s pink-bonneted girl on a bare Box Hill, painters enabled Australians to comprehend their ‘new-found land’.²

I have made specific critical observations over a period of three years as a part of this research project. I have scrutinised and evaluated, with nearly twenty years of experience in the area under study, and have represented my findings in print and paint. Now, just as McCaughey describes, some comprehension is possible of this new-found land.

¹ Patrick McCaughey, “Understanding the big picture” (The Age, March 29, 2008).
² Patrick McCaughey (The Age March 29, 2008).
Malcolm Andrews suggests in *Landscape in Western Art* that,

> Natural objects can be invested with spiritual or moral meanings that can congeal into an emblematic iconography, a visual language every bit as articulate as a developed literary language.³

This emblematic iconography may be discerned in the smallest aspects of a landscape. Visible when studied with care, my research has made concrete those articulations.

The careful observer will discover the spiritual meaning in the most simple of traces in the landscape. As Andrews describes, I have learned that cows leave tracks that follow the path of least resistance between dam and gates. I have learned that the tracks of old bullock teams are still visible in the soil with the first rains in autumn, that old trees are the natural resting places of unloved cars, that deep holes in creeks can double the price of land and good neighbours really are made by good fences. Pear trees will live longer than the homes of those who plant them.

Further, Andrews very succinctly describes our relationship with the landscape when he states that:

> Landscape in art tells us, or asks us to think about, where we belong. Important issues of identity and orientation are inseparable from the reading of meanings and the eliciting of pleasure from landscape.⁴

His sentiments are a corollary to the notion of an “environment shaped existence” as described by McCaughey⁵. This research investigates how a personal identity, and that of all of those who live between the Winter and Dog Trap Creeks, can be shaped by the landscape and its representation and reading.

After nearly twenty years of living in Brays Road I feel I am now starting to know and understand this place. As a long standing resident (almost, but never quite a local), I feel I have earned the right, or have in a sense gained permission, to represent it in print and paint. Through attrition, I have with my family, become the longest residents along this small road, with only one exception.

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³ Malcolm Andrews *Landscape and Western Art*, (Oxford University Press 1999), 8.
⁵ Patrick McCaughey (*The Age* March 29, 2008).
Having returned to formal study in 2005 to complete an Honours Degree at Ballarat after more than 20 years of teaching art to senior students at Loreto College Ballarat, I found that it was work, home, refuge, sanctuary and family and the journey between these vital elements of my life that was of creative significance to me. My study introduced me to, and in some cases re-introduced me to, artists such as Colin McCahon, Euan Macleod, Philip Wolfhagen, Rick Amor, John Constable and others. The thorny issue of representing the passage of time and imbuing works with a sense of place led me to paint and print, and the use of books as a means of communication. My initial formal studies in art were commenced in the late 1970s when I studied at what was then the Ballarat College of Advanced Education. I undertook a major study in Ceramics and for a number of years after graduating I made a living (however bleak) as a potter. Drawing, painting and printmaking as disciplines in their own right have come late in my creative journey. My Honours study provided me with a new voice and skills to pursue.

So with this new authority I set out to analyse my home and neighbourhood as a particular and specific location, as a locale, and through the eyes of a local, without leaving the security of its boundaries. These twenty years have seen a change in this locale to which I have been complicit as a participant, witness and examiner.

Bearing phenomenological witness to this change underpins the recognition and this recording of the landscape as a living and lived entity. And it is in that recording that reflection and contemplation is fostered. The artworks produced in this research will record elements of this change and, if possible, the previous changes and the manner in which they register as still visible palimpsests. I hope to analyse and record the life of this small community at this particular time as a concrete reminder of the way it now exists and is situated on a continuum of change. This is my challenge.

I thought that I knew my locale and through that knowing I felt I was in the best position to portray it in a manner which revealed the essence of the place, as a native speaker I understood the domestic vernacular. My anthropological understanding of this community, its social institutions, kinships and economic and human mechanisms had been shaped over many years. However, a three-week trip to Italy and France gave my eyes a rest and upon returning from the journey abroad, there was a new appreciation and understanding of this place. Upon returning I saw a raw, urgent and at times desperate landscape. The concerns of being a human at the start of the twenty-first century were
realised and were all too visible in that landscape. The drought, climate change, mortgage stress, another oil crisis and a range of petty bigotries were visible where I had once been blind to them. I had become a witness to the moment that this place shifted, in my own mind and as a landscape, from bucolic bliss to perhaps a festering sore. The focus of this research is to examine the concerns of those who live close to the edge of this rapidly growing regional centre. McCaughey and Andrews have made important links between the formation of the inhabitants and the landscape in which they dwell. It would be dangerous, however, to consider this notion as universally optimistic and sanguine. John Berger, for example, alerts us to the veiled nature of landscape.

Landscapes can be deceptive. Sometimes a landscape seems to be less a setting for the life of its inhabitants than a curtain behind which their struggles, achievement and accidents take place. For those who, with the inhabitants, are behind the curtains, landmarks are no longer geographic but also biographical and personal.6

I have had to look deeper, look behind that curtain of Berger's and perhaps even beyond it. The distances are deliberately limited to those able to be explored by foot within a normal days' walking. Landscape is a qualitative and not a quantitative concept. Where similar laws, practices, rituals, political systems, myths, memories and narratives exist, so does a landscape. Walking seems the most appropriate way to experience these qualities. The area I have investigated 'on foot' has integrity as a sample through the use of walking as a measure. By recording the specific, local and intimate I can comment on my concerns for the general. John Ruskin, the nineteenth century art critic and social thinker, suggests that the microcosm can serve as a metaphor for the macrocosm.

Ruskin had proposed that the minutiae of natural form could evoke the sublimities of vaster landscapes just as fertile countryside can be symbolised by the allotments, Ruskin considered that forests could be seen in a patch of moss, crags in grains of crystal, and that the surface of a stone could hold more interest than the slopes of a hill.7

Ruskin's ideas resonate with Zen philosophy. A Zen garden mimics the larger world through an examination of, and meditation on, the minutiae of its various parts. The discipline and practice of Zen creates order that leads to a deeper understanding of oneself and one's place within the world: the contemplative mind must be open and alive to the clues within the deceptive simplicity of the garden. This small area under research

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7 [http://www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk/arcpat.htm](http://www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk/arcpat.htm) (accessed 8/7/2008).
can be thought of as a microcosm or as a fractal from where observations and meaning may be extrapolated. The concerns visible in this particular, specific and local landscape are in fact universal.

The research therefore deals with the changes witnessed in this small community that are, like Ruskin’s microcosms, metaphors that alert us to changes in the wider world. I will examine in this research my association and relationship with the locale under examination. In Chapter One I will explore the nature of my understanding of landscape as it has been shaped through my lived experience and the historical and theoretical notions of the idea of landscape.

The method of gathering visual data and evidence is explored in Chapter Two. Walking has been at the centre of this research and is investigated here along with ideas of journey and travel.

The liminal nature of lived in landscape is examined in Chapter Three. My travel to Europe and the consequences of urban sprawl in the Australian setting become a focus of this aspect of the research. In Chapter Four and the Conclusion the manner in which I make art and my research outcomes are then considered.
Chapter One

Home and Away: The idea of landscape

Across a bare wide Common I was toiling
With languid steps that by the slippery turf
Were baffled; nor could my weak arm disperse
The host of insects gathering round my face
And ever with me as I paced along.

William Wordsworth, *The Excursion*1

The animals that I walk with, and their traces, are ubiquitous and suggest through their very frequency an ambiguity in relation to the strict delineation of the self-imposed parameters that walking imposes. They have witnessed so much change over so many years. The Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos (*Calyptorhynchus Funereus*) whose plaintive cries suggest that summer has ended are common visitors. They may live for eighty years or longer. One can only imagine the changes that they must have witnessed as they punctuate each year with their destructive passing. Habitats change, disappear or are created through the intervention of the inhabitants. Introduced species of plants and animals have altered the landscape in sometimes dramatic, and at other times imperceptible ways. The once rarely seen Superb Blue Wren (*Malurus Cyaneus*) is now a constant companion as I walk. Reliant on patchy scrub and woodland to hide its neatly woven and sumptuously cushioned nest that even 20 years ago was scarce in this area of heavily ‘improved’ pasture, this tiny and flamboyant presence is evidence of subtle habitat change.

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Frequency of observation is the key to witnessing this change. The transformations recorded in my work are by no means the first to be seen in this area, rather these alterations form part of a series of changes. As landforms are altered through constant weathering and erosion they attain a balance through dynamic equilibrium. In the manner in which a stream robs soil from one bank and over time deposits its spoil on its opposite partner, these subtle evolutions often remain insubstantial and unnoticed until a river bank collapses or a long-suffering fence fails. So it is with a myriad of subtle changes that only become evident when their accumulations reach a tipping point.

The evolutions or even revolutions in the area in which I have conducted this research are obvious and inescapable but their rate is far from constant. At times change appears as if glacial and is indiscernible. Millennia of erosion and volcanic activity have fashioned the landforms visible today. It is a landscape that would surprise an inhabitant of 40,000 years ago but one that would be instantly recognizable to a visitor from one hundred and fifty years ago.

At other times, and more specifically the last ten years, and possibly the next ten, the impact of human activity will make this small valley a foreign place to all but the most regular of visitors or inhabitants. This means that to understand this phenomenon we must consider the nature of the transformation and that, which makes it visible.

At what speed does change become visible? For the visual artist the representation of the passage of time becomes an issue. Change is as inevitable as the passage of time and time can, in many ways, only be measured through change. We are often left with the palimpsests of earlier erasures as the evidence of our place in a continuum. The landscape is rich in information and meaning.

My work is of and in many senses through the landscape. It is not the genre in which I work but the medium in which I struggle. It is through landscape that I first found the need to create.

Landscape is a term with multiple meanings and although recent art history and theory has dramatically altered the significance of the understandings that may be attributed to the idea of landscape, the tradition of representing the world in two dimensions remains, even if in an altered form. As the physical landscape has altered so too have the modes of its representation and the manner in which it is read. The research undertaken in this
project is a result of my direct and conscious experiences in this community and my
observations of the traditions, values and the human impact of its inhabitants, and so,
employs a phenomenological and anthropological study of Cambrian Hill in the
landscape tradition, which I suggest, can itself be seen as a valuable analytical tool.

Discussing the work of Tasmanian artist Philip Wolfhagen, an artist who has explored
the landscape of the Great Western Tiers, the landscape of his childhood and his
imagination, Peter Timms suggests that:

Today, the pastoral presents some particular problems for landscape artists, cleared
fields dotted with livestock or filled with crops can no longer be seen as socially
significant the way they were one hundred years ago.2

In some contrast my research suggests that while the associations we have with the
pastoral are different from those of one hundred years ago, they continue to remain
significant.

The urbanisation of the Australian population and the industrialisation and globalisation
of the economy prevent the same associations with the pastoral that were possible in the
past. No longer do Australians have an Aunt on a farm nor do children spend their
holidays with cousins in the country. Genetically modified cereal crops, intensively
raised battery hens and vast agri-businesses have replaced the family farm. There is little
of the pastoral bliss in the Australian psyche today. The most obstinate hurdle for artists
today in making use of the landscape as a device for expression is that it has been so
painstakingly and systematically explored by generations of artists in the past. The very
persistence however, of the landscape as a subject suggests to me that we are not yet
done with the topic and as Nelson so ably insists, “there are certain preoccupations of
western painting that we call timeless, not because they remain eternally the same, but
because they stay perpetually unsolved.”3

The landscape has become a stage upon which the dramas of the human condition are
played. It is a viable setting for the portrayal of a range of narratives. For me there is a
resonance in the depiction of the landscape that draws me to explore modes of
representing the land in a personally significant manner. The question remains however,
as the pastoral presents these problems for landscape artists, how and why does the

2 Peter Timms, Philip Wolfhagen, (Craftsmen House, Fishermans Bend, Vic. 2005), 36.
representation remain relevant? The discipline of Landscape Ecology is based on the premise that:

Culture changes landscapes and culture is embodied by landscapes...[and] a central underlying premise is that culture and landscape interact in a feedback loop in which culture structures landscapes and landscapes inculcate culture.⁴

Importantly, the appearance of a landscape may communicate the cultural values of a society.

While it is not the aim of this research to present an exhaustive analysis of landscape history and theory it is important to recognise that there is much research in this area. Influential to my understanding of landscape and our present day interaction with it, has been the work of the Landscape Ecologists Paul Gobster, Joan Nassauer, Terry Daniel and Gary Fry. Their interdisciplinary approach in their attempts to make sense of the landscape is significant. They suggest that the “arts and sciences are essential ways that we come to know the world, but much of our response to the environment is determined through individual experience of landscapes.”⁵

The scale at which we interact with the landscape is critical to our understanding and appreciation of our environment. It is at the human level or the perceptible realm⁶ that humans will intentionally alter the landscape. This knowledge will significantly influence the outcomes of my research. As a researcher in the field of aesthetics it is important to consider this,

Landscapes that are perceived as aesthetically pleasing are more likely to be appreciated and protected than are landscapes perceived as undistinguished or ugly, regardless of their less directly perceivable ecological importance. Aesthetic experiences may thus lead people to change the landscape in ways that may or may not be consistent with its ecological function.⁷

The term ‘Landscape’ is derived from the Germanic term Landschaft. During the fourteenth century, certain place-based communities in what is modern day Germany functioned through, and were bound by representative assemblies that were run according to common values and customary law. Known as a Landschaft, these regions

⁶ Gobster, Nassauer, Daniel, Fry, The shared landscape, 920.
were therefore places defined not physically, but socially. The suffix -schaft, -ship, or -scape, when translated through romantic roots and applied in the word landscape does not indicate size. As friendship is not a large number of friends but a quality of those friends, so a landscape is not to do with size. Landscape is a qualitative and not a quantitative concept. Much land does not make a landscape, as the knowledge of many people does not make a friendship. A landscape is a place where common values, customs, laws, regulations and habits occur.

Martin Heidegger in his seminal work *Being and Time* describes this aspect of being a part of and constructor of the landscape as “being-in-the-world.” We find out about our world through our activities in it. Heidegger gives an intriguing example of how a landscape can be formed in this manner when he proposes that a bridge gathers the banks of a stream around it and, “The banks become banks only when and where the bridge crosses the stream. The bridge gathers earth as a landscape around the stream.” He calls the bridge a thing and as a thing it gathers together the sky, the earth, the divine and mortals. These elements when considered as an entity become, in Heidegger’s world, The Fourfold, the four vital elements that are required to be gathered together in constructing a place.

The place established by the bridge creates a space, which thereby contains a number of related nearby, or distant spaces. Heidegger considers this as the key to understanding the relationship between man and space. He contends that we only experience our world as relationships between places and distances. This relationship mirrors the concept of *Landschaft*, places experienced through similar laws and practices. This concept and Heidegger’s requirement for the gathering of the distinct related and shared elements of nature in order to create a landscape are Northern European constructs that I feel have a particularly resonant application in Cambrian Hill. Shared rituals and political systems, myths, memories, hopes, fears and narratives exist in Cambrian Hill as well as the shared distances and spaces; therefore, so does a landscape.

Cambrian Hill can therefore be considered a landscape that gathers all these elements and is a practical and rational subject for research. In order to make my research measurable

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I have limited the distances under study to those achievable by foot within a normal days walking; the space in which I dwell. Walking allows for the gathering of the Fourfold and for the experiencing of distance in ways that driving does not.

Martin Heidegger’s idea of landscape as the earth ‘gathered’ through the practices of dwelling, or as various parts of our world gathered together through our activity, encapsulates a phenomenological approach to understanding our environment. Landscape is so much more than just a painterly panorama in the Dutch tradition; landscape shapes us, and our response to it, as much as we shape it.

Landscape painting is a way of representing, and making concrete, the abstract social ideas of landscape. It is therefore these complex ideas made material and visible in the environment. However, as our understanding of the multiplicity of meanings for landscape grows, so do the attendant political and social implications of this rich diversity.

We must understand that the richness of this language of landscape carries certain implications. The shared political systems and rituals we require to form our understanding of landscape have by their very dual nature had winners and losers. The post colonial is a perspective that must not be ignored if we are to appreciate fully the most significant of changes visible in the environment.

European colonisation of the Australian continent has precipitated a central recurring artistic problem for the representation of landscape in Australia painting. Always present is the problem of the tension between the landscape as an untamed force and the landscape as a domesticated and forever altered colonised terrain.  

The early story of Australian landscape painting ranges from eighteenth-century topographical representations of a grotesque and bizarre new world to sublime nineteenth-century descriptions of nature controlled. All can be seen to have embodied a distinct flavour of possession and discovery. Such works map and survey a new world or in the case of the Heidelberg plein-airé group, a new world finally becoming a home. It could at times be political, socially aware and avant-garde, stridently patriotic or representative of land for the taking by the bold and strong. Mapping, surveying and notions of ownership have always been, and still are, closely linked to representations of the pastoral as Lumby notes,

The relationship between land surveying and landscape painting was particularly close in the first half of the nineteenth century. Painters such as William Govett and William Piguenit, for example began their careers as surveyors who made watercolour sketches of scenery for descriptive purposes. Charles Conder, one of Australia’s best known nineteenth-century landscape artists, painted his earliest pictures while working in a survey camp in New South Wales. 11

In 1827, Sir Thomas Mitchell, who was to become surveyor General of New South Wales, published a textbook on surveying techniques. A second lieutenant in the 95th Regiment of the British Army he served in the Peninsular campaign at the battles of Ciudad Rodrigo and Salamanca during the Napoleonic wars. He was engaged with the gathering of topographical intelligence and the production of plans for the major Peninsular battlefields. His textbook for surveyors in colonial New South Wales was titled *Outlines of a System of Surveying, for Geographical and Military Purposes.* It offered artists advice on recording the Australian landscape. Lumby suggests that: “The link between the militaristic, colonising function of exploration parties and their role in scientifically mapping and aesthetically rendering new terrain is made explicit in his title.” 12

Mapping was, and continues to be, a political, commercial and social device. The accuracy and extent of maps and the manner in which land is divided socio-politically is made concrete in the physical landscape. Fence-lines mark personal boundaries and borders, roads and laneways mark the divisions between parish and shire, as do streams and rivers. Catherine Lumby convincingly asserts that,

> The role of the Australian landscape artist in the first half of the nineteenth-century, then, was one that straddled a number of cultural and political functions. Surveying and mapping had a military function; it was the corner stone of European colonisation. 13

This role may be little changed. Landscape is, and always has been, political. Ecological and environmental concerns, development and land use issues, sustainability, land rights, water rights and the schism between urban and country dwelling, between European Australians and Aboriginal Australians, are all visible in the landscape; in its immediate, lived-in sense and in its representation. Martin Friedman writes,

> Increasingly, contemporary attitudes about landscape are premised on the understanding that all of nature’s manifestations animate and inanimate, material and

evanescent -irrespective of scale or locale- are inextricably interrelated and part of its dynamic.\textsuperscript{14}

It is for this reason that I have, and so many others have, chosen to work with and within landscape.

\textsuperscript{14} Martin Friedman, \textit{Visions of America: Landscapes as Metaphor in the late Twentieth Century}, (Denver Art Museum, Denver, 1994), 32.
Chapter Two

Neighbours: The ideas of walking and thoughts of journey

When window-lamps had dwindled, then I rose
and left the town behind me; and on my way
passing a certain door I stopt, remembering
how once I stood on its threshold, and my life
was offer’d to me, a road how different
from that of the years since gone!¹

Christopher Brennan, *The Wanderer*

Central to interacting with the landscape is the act of movement. Today, most commonly, we perceive the landscape in scattered glimpses through the windows of fast moving cars, changing the sky and vista as we change direction. Altering the sun visor without thought we re-orient ourselves and our sense of direction and place as automatically as our computer screens refresh. The car causes us to think as we move rather than how we move. We need not consider the placement of each footfall or the swing of a balancing limb. While this movement is ingrained and subliminal it nevertheless informs us as we walk. The landscape seems to move with us. The world moves at such a pace in a car that destination becomes paramount; the rapidity of movement is an aid in shrinking the landscape.

Walking, however, brings a different appreciation of the journey. Walking expands the landscape, it compresses images and arranges them differently as we move and thereby

forces them into new relationships through their juxtaposition. The Tasmanian painter Philip Wolfhagen recognises this and makes it implicit in his work. As he writes,

> We absorb information when we walk through the bush, switching our attention effortlessly from small detail to panoramas, then fusing these diverse impressions in our minds to form a coherent personal recollection...

As we move through these panoramas, observing the detail, our movement tells stories of our journey. Our physical movement, our gait, speed or carriage describes to others and ourselves our purpose and demeanor. In walking we construct our own stories or as Wolfhagen suggests “a coherent personal recollection” and we are touched in turn by the stories of those who created landscapes before or even with us.

Maxine Sheets-Johnstone describes this notion of movement as a method of experiencing the landscape. She writes,

> ...movement is a way of being in the world, of wandering or exploring the world directly, taking it up moment by moment and living it in movement, kinetically. Thinking in movement is thus clearly not the work of a symbol-making body, a body that mediates its way about the world by means of language, for example; it is the work of an existentially resonant body.

Thinking in movement or experiencing the world as a walker is therefore a way of experiencing or exploring a place directly. Places are made; they come into being, they come into our world as the person walks. Places take on a distinctive and personal character as the individual moves through them. We sense and experience our surroundings with our bodies. Sheets–Johnstone goes further and suggests that only by a physical experience can a person truly know a place, in fact,

> This is because a felt bodily sense of a situation is absolutely essential to spontaneous self-reflective self-utterances upon the situation. In a word, somebody must know what it is like.

Walkers then may be a part of landscape themselves. They sense the landscape by noticing its details and changes, or they may become introspective, or they may develop an awareness of the environment through an emotional interaction with their surroundings. Obviously all three of these may occur at any or all times while walking, in one journey or in many.

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Walking has a diverse cultural, spiritual and creative heritage. Pilgrimage, migration and exile may be considered to be the most significant forms of journeying. The motivation for our journey will often affect its mode, length and destination. Migration in Australia has typically been performed by means other than by foot. The journeys I have undertaken in this research and described in the associated body of work have been in dwelling not pilgrimage, exile or migration. Dwelling is the performing of those requisite tasks for us to simply live.

The medieval religious pilgrimage, the poetry of Wordsworth created while he walked, the art of Stuart Mugridge and Richard Long, have all depended on the act of walking. Richard Long, a British sculptor who uses text, natural materials and photographs as records of his walks suggests that walking provides “an ideal means to explore relationships between time, distance, geography and measurement.”

Hamish Fulton, a British artist/photographer, also records the essence and spiritual nature of his journeys taken by foot in photographs and text. His philosophy is “No Walk- No Work.” He makes artworks “only resulting from the experience of individual walks” and states, “if I do not walk, I cannot make a work of art”.

The Australian painter Jan Senbergs’ is also an artist who walks. Like me, and in a different manner to Long and Fulton, Senbergs uses the walk as a tool for the gathering of information to be used at a later time. The seminal Port Lidiaret drawings that renewed Senbergs relationship with the constructed environment were a direct response to his walks in this part of the industrial landscape.

A keen walker in the city, Jan explored the area on foot, wandering around the port on Sunday mornings, enjoying the stillness, getting the feel of the place, photographing it, as well as making notes and sketches of prospective motifs.

Being physically ‘present’ as a walker in the landscape was a revelation for Senbergs. He describes how the act of painting and the activity of walking can both be creative and in many ways related to each other: “It’s strange - the things that you paint, or the way they

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come out in your paintings are also the things you look for when you’re walking down the road.”

Like Senbergs my research has also found and built upon a relationship between walking and creating. This relationship was more multifaceted than I had imagined. My initial plans were to construct, through walking, a method of collecting visual resources for use in a body of drawings, paintings and prints. As a researcher on foot, a simple *flaneur*, this seemingly simple construct was to become much more complex.

Cambrian Hill, as a community, now only functions through and by the wheel. Paths once used for walking, moving stock from farm to farm, for managing bulls by gently walking from one pen of cows to another are now over grown with gorse and blackberry. Trucks carry livestock, trailers deliver bulls. Determined tracksuit clad women, heads down while they concentrate on maintaining a certain pace, are the walkers most often seen today.

The roads in Cambrian Hill in fact discourage walking. With little to protect the walker from the dust or mud of rapidly moving traffic, and no separate footpath for the pilgrim, a pedestrian is at the mercy and goodwill of those passing motorists. A more common sight than walkers is the arrangement of cars on the shoulder of opposite sides of a road; windows open while the drivers in each converse at a distance of exactly one chain. Roads and the primacy of the car have, in many ways, become central to our lives.

Humans tend to describe the world in their own image and likeness: the furthest point of a river from its 'head' to its 'mouth'...Only one part of the human body is regularly used to describe the shape of a road. A road has shoulders. It is there to do a job, to bend its back, to carry loads. A road is a restless beast of burden.

A road is no longer a venue for the social occasion that it once was. In a short time the roads in this part of Cambrian Hill have become places where walking is unusual. Fifteen years ago, George Bray a small man in his seventies, while returning from the cattle market with a truck heavily laden with recently purchased heifers, became bogged and almost rolled his truck in the mud on the verge of this still unsealed road that bears his

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8 McCaughey, *Voyage and Landfall*, 60.
name. I watched as he casually unloaded the cattle on to the road and then set off, on foot for home leaving the cattle to wander. He was confident that there would be no problem with his cattle while he walked home to get his tractor in order to retrieve his truck. His composed manner was a measure of the level of traffic in those times, the accepted use of a road and a lesson in calm crisis management that has remained with me.

Bus stops however, have become places where people gather. As Michael McGirr discovered, “a road does not begin at a place but at a time.” Each weekday afternoon at four o’clock, when schools are operating, small congregations of cars gather at unmarked corners to collect children as the country buses spread purposefully across the shire.

Cross-country walks for the pure delight of placing one foot before the other were rare before Wordsworth. I always think of him as one of the first to employ his legs as an instrument of philosophy.

Unlike Wordsworth, my walks have been resource-gathering exercises rather than art works in their own right. Unlike the painter John Wolseley I have left nothing on my walks, no cairn nor buried diary. Walking has enabled me to gain a sense of the emptiness of this area on one scale and its richness on another. I have come to know my neighborhood on a more physical level. I have found and collected the most remarkable objects.

Walking has placed me in situations that driving does not. A walker is conspicuous and sometimes suspicious. Walking with a camera has been the cause for concern in some neighbours. Walking without an obvious purpose is also a concern to some. It has however provided an opportunity to meet and talk with people as they go about a myriad of tasks essential in this part of the world. I have been invited in for cups of tea and to meet “Grandmother, who well remembers the way the roads once ran”, as I interrupt what always seems to be the never-ending work of maintaining fences.

Walking cross-country carries with it a sense of trespass that heightens the excitement of discovering new bends in the creek and the discarded cubby houses of children who have long grown up. There is also an anxiety with which one walks through paddocks of unknown cattle, crossing creeks at unfamiliar gravelly fords and forcing oneself through

10 McGirr, Bypass: The Story of a Road, 14.
unusually well maintained and heavily strained wire fences. It can exhaust the walker and fully occupy the mind. If the purpose of the walk was to gather visual cues and come to a better understanding of my neighborhood, I have found that only the repeated use of a path, and a simple path at that, is essential.

Through walking over familiar paths many times, and indeed from the variety of routes I have walked, my research has caused certain constants to emerge. I have discovered, like Jan Senbergs, a discarded history, and a past in decay. I found an extraordinary number of bones. I found a huge number of nondescript, yet always flawless, feathers. I seem to always come home with a particularly smooth pebble in my pocket and a pervading sense that I have missed more than I have observed. I found a wet, but perfectly preserved, thirty year old prayer card bearing an image of Pope John XXIII in the grass at a spot where no house could be seen. There are other constants I have observed while walking. There are always birds and litter.

I walk past the century old relics of gold mining on an industrial scale and the desperate scratchings of rabbits; I have discovered unmarked wells capped with fallen trees punctuated only with an exclamation of Jonquils. The dry weather reveals the glint of countless shards of cup and bottle around the remnants of fallen chimneys. In the creek bank, a metre from the surface, a thin layer of dark soot and bone is revealed suggesting a meal many, many hundreds of years ago. Hedgerows of Hawthorn have hindered my passage but at their feet I have found the discarded chains of old harrows and a set of hand-forged hinges from a gate whose memory is long gone. The Hawthorn is a home to foxes who seem to mimic the brightness of the hedgerow berries and litter the small tunnels in the mass of twigs with the bones of everything smaller than themselves and the inevitable clinging threads of wool.

Discarded from cars, most litter is soon bleached the colour of dry grass and wind-swept from the edge of the road to finally rest under the bottom wire of boundary fences. It mostly becomes invisible to all but the walker. More visible is the furniture, oil and paint drums, computer monitors, even the electric organ that have found the way to the verge of the roads I have walked. Much as I would like, my walks are not always in beauty. A walk may reflect or even induce a state of mind. Walking meditations are a feature of Buddhism and require disciples to exude 'loving-kindness'. I have found that I have been able to ignore the litter and dust and embrace the beauty of my walks. This Navajo
prayer, I would suggest, is a prayer not of supplication but one of determination. I was determined to walk in beauty, not litter.

In beauty may I walk.  
All day long may I walk.  
Through the returning seasons may I walk.  
Beautifully will I possess again.  
Beautifully birds . . .  
Beautifully joyful birds  
On the trail marked with pollen may I walk.  
With grasshoppers about my feet may I walk.  
With dew about my feet may I walk.  
With beauty may I walk.  
With beauty before me, may I walk.  
With beauty behind me, may I walk.  
With beauty above me, may I walk.  
With beauty below me, may I walk.  
With beauty all around me, may I walk.  
In old age wandering on a trail of beauty, lively, may I walk.  
In old age wandering on a trail of beauty, living again, may I walk.  
It is finished in beauty.  
It is finished in beauty.  

My walks are not carried out everyday nor are they everyday in nature. They profit from the difference they have from the norm, the difference from those Wordsworthian cross-country strolls for the sheer delight of it all. My walks have a purpose; they are research. They mark a certain stage of life, a time of day, a change of season or routine, a desire  

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for activity or a need for privacy or even a simple break in the weather. They are the means by which I gather the material that will become prints and paintings.

Pilgrimage in anthropology and religion is often focused on the arrival at a sacred predetermined site, the walker seeking the sacred or significant in an otherwise secular landscape. The journey itself is relatively unimportant compared to the attainment of some form of grace at the final destination.

The physical journey or walk, as a metaphor for our life journey is not a new concept. The *Divine Comedy* written in 1300 by Dante Alighieri describes the journey from darkened forest, through hell and purgatory to a never ending and perfect vision of God. The hundred cantos describe only one week in the life of a pilgrim. There are as many readings of his work as there are readers. Embarking upon the journey with Dante, the reader enters a world of fear, isolation, and trial. We volunteer to join his journey by the simple act of reading. He makes it clear that for each of us the journey starts in the same place; we each set out on the same road. In the First Canto of the Dante’s work but halfway through the journey we are all living, we find ourselves at a fork in the road.

Halfway through the journey we are living  
I found myself deep in a darkened forest,  
For I had lost all trace of the straight path.13

My walks have had no specific destination, no straight path; in fact they have all ended where they began, at home. The search for ‘home’ is an important aspect of my work. As John Glover used Patterdale Farm as a subject to describe his dislocation from the familiar setting of his English home, by using motifs from my environment I am commenting on my search for a refuge, for a place that is real and at the heart of my existence and at the heart of my landscape. Art concerned with landscape is often considered to be an anachronistic mode of communication, out of step in a modern digital world but landscape is the métier through which I am able to engage with the world and my place within it. My home is in the landscape, it is formed by the landscape and my home in turn forms the landscape. Home is however much more than simple shelter. Were it so our weary hearts would rest;

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O tame heart, and why are you weary and cannot rest?
here is the hearth with its glow and its roof that forbids the rain,
a swept and a garnished quiet, a peace: and were you not fain
to be gather'd in dusk and comfort and barter away the rest?14

More than a hearth, roof and possessions, Berger again seems to state this fundamental concept of home in a manner that resonates strongly with me and is reflected in my research. He states,

Originally home meant the center of the world—not in a geographical, but an ontological sense. In traditional societies, everything that made sense of the world was real; the surrounding chaos existed and was threatening, but it was threatening because it was unreal. Without a home at the center of the real, one was not only shelterless, but also lost in non-being, in unreality. ‘Without a home everything was fragmentation.’ 15

My understanding of what constituted home and my appreciation of it as a refuge in an aesthetic and physical sense has been influenced or perhaps explained through the work of Jay Appleton. In 1975 English geographer Jay Appleton published *The Experience of Landscape*, in which he proposed the Prospect/Refuge Theory of Human Aesthetics. According to Appleton:

Aesthetic satisfaction, experienced in the contemplation of landscape, stems from the spontaneous perception of landscape features which, in their shapes, colours, spatial arrangements and other visible attributes, act as sign-stimuli indicative of environmental conditions favourable to survival, whether they really are favourable or not. 16

He proposes that we desire both opportunity (prospect) and safety (refuge) in a landscape. It is even more than necessary; he suggests our survival is reliant upon this ability:

At both human and sub-human level the ability to see and the ability to hide are both important in calculating a creature's survival prospects...Where he has an unimpeded opportunity to see we can call it a prospect. Where he has an opportunity to hide, a refuge.17

We have, it would seem, retained a genetic predisposition, through our primitive survival instincts, for all that is optimal for our survival and reproduction in the savannah. Appleton’s theory suggests that we respond to such things in art and our surroundings

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17 Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, 73.
subconsciously. In other words we are inevitably attracted to, and choose to spend time in, the sorts of places that would have, in earlier times, afforded us shelter and provided a better chance of survival.

Broad, open vistas with visible places for easy refuge such as a group of trees, water, plants and a smattering of prey species provide the ideal landscape according to the theory. The visitor to Cambrian Hill, if aware of Prospect and Refuge Theory, would be struck by its satisfaction of the criteria set out by Appleton as would all the inhabitants of Cambrian Hill before me. Tilley further makes a point of the significance of these notions in the lives of modern people.

People routinely draw on their stocks of knowledge of the landscape and the locales in which they act to give meaning, assurance and significance to their lives. The place acts dialectically so as to create the people who are of that place. These qualities of locales and landscapes give rise to a feeling of belonging and rootedness and a familiarity, which is not born just out of knowledge, but of concern that provides ontological security.

After nearly twenty years of living in Cambrian Hill I am a product and producer, not just an admirer, of this landscape. I have created refuges and habitats.

With my family I have planted thousands of trees, created gardens, fought salinity and struggled with drought. We have rehabilitated our small portion of the Ross Creek that forms our boundary with indigenous plantings and constant efforts in weed control. Our efforts in creating habitat for native creatures, according to Appleton, may have been little more than the subconscious stocking of a potential pantry and the trees planted only an attempt at providing a place to hide. I am it seems as Tilley suggests, a person of that place. A place where I belong, where I am rooted and I am familiar.

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Chapter Three

Utopia and Reality: The liminal nature of the lived in landscape

Care is an aesthetic that ...depends on perceptible cues of continuous human presence. It invites human engagement in changing and maintaining landscapes, and this engagement is perceived as benevolent...landscape features that are cues to care are read not only as pleasing patterns and colours, but as social gestures of neighbourly consideration.¹

Through my painting and printmaking I am involved in the recording and analysis of Cambrian Hill. Representing the landscape and its components in paint or ink explains my environment to me. Both the recording and the physical act of mark making itself provides a method of explaining to others my observations and findings. When the opportunity to travel to Italy and France as a part of a study tour² became available I was very keen to take my new understanding of my home with me. Many of the experiences resulting from this trip have had an enormous impact upon my work and indeed me. It confirmed for me the truism that suggests that all art grows from other art.

To see for the first time, and first hand, works that had inspired me and had informed my creative world, and to see works previously unknown, altered the way I perceived my own work. Central to this epiphany was the proto-renaissance work of Ambrogio Lorenzetti in the Tuscan city of Siena. The city of Siena is composed of narrow streets, paved in brick or with grey cobbles, and lined with houses made of brick and the signature black green granite. Entering the Palazzo Pubblico, having walked through its surrounding shell-shaped plaza the Piazza del Campo to see the works of Lorenzetti, a student of the master of the Sienese School Duccio, was a confronting and humbling experience.

² Australians Studying Abroad. An Art Education Victoria Study Tour of Italy. Conducted by Dr. John Gregory through Monash University, Melbourne. 2007-2008
Ambrogio's task was unprecedented, for he was apparently called upon to paint allegorical depictions of good and bad government and to represent the effects such regimes would have in the town and the country. The result is the first panoramic city/countryside since antiquity, and the first expansive portrait that we have of an actual city and landscape.3

Lorenzetti died of Plague in 1348. His work describes a well-governed utopian world and a corresponding opposite dark companion resulting from the mismanagement of the medieval city-state. The didacticism of this work is as alive today as it has been since it was produced in c1328.

That ethical and political ideal, Utopia, which is by its very nature destined to remain unrealised in a practical sense and yet continues to act as a motivating force within us, is described so ably in Lorenzetti’s monumental work *Allegory of Good Government*. This vast and ambitious work

...physically depicts the condition of the well-governed city of Siena, at the same time creating an imaginary world with a historical and spatial context. This great masterpiece portrays a medieval city in a symbiotic relationship with the countryside, set within an extensive and varied territory that would appear to be Sienese, but at the same time is not entirely identifiable with any city or specific countryside.4

The fresco cycle is painted over three walls in the Palazzo Pubblico of Siena in the Sala dei Nova and the Sala Della Pace where the Council of Nine met between 1338 and 1339. On one of the shorter walls in this rectangular space is a window that provides light for the other of the short walls. Significantly it is this wall that is painted with the *Allegory of Good Government*. The other walls contain the *Allegory of Bad Government and its Effects on Town and Country* and the *Effects of Good Government on Town and Country*.

Commissioned by the ruling body of Siena, a guild like secular group, Lorenzetti’s fresco represents the effects of good government for the prosperous and beautifully dressed people of Siena going about their lives in harmony and joy. Traders and citizens, families and noble men and women on horses fill the busy city streets while fertile fields are stripped of crops. His allegorical representations of the effects of bad government are as

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Figure 1. Ambrogio Lorenzetti *Allegory of Good Government: Effects of Good Government in the City* and a portion of the *Effects of Good Government in the Country*. 1338-40 Palazzo Pubblico, Siena, Italy.

Figure 3. Ambrogio Lorenzetti. Allegory of Good Government: Effects of Good Government in the City. Fresco. Palazzo Pubblico, Siena, 1338-40

Figure 4. Ambrogio Lorenzetti, The Effects of Bad Government on the Countryside (detail), Fresco, Palazzo Pubblico, Siena, 1338-40
powerful. Drought grips the countryside, trees are stunted and barren, marauders raid and burn villages and everywhere is the rubble of decay.

The painting is a manifesto, and like all propaganda was intended as a reinforcing vision to those who were already convinced-- a lesson for the members of the Nine, who rotate every two months, reminding them of their values and goals.\(^5\)

The representation of town life has the same proportions and occupies the same space as that of rural life. Each aspect of the fresco cycle communicates with another distinct corresponding partner element of the painting. He made concrete the ideal of a balanced bond and relationship between city and rural dwellers. The fresco is illuminated with the light of the bright sun of high summer and its implied source, the allegorical light of divine wisdom; the Sun. Travelers follow roads and paths as they move in arcs across the landscape and connect the elements of the fresco in real and imagined ways. His winding roads link these two separate worlds.

In this painting an orderly world is created through man's continual intervention and hubris. This is a highly theatrical work where good government has provided stability, abundance, safety and a harmonious world full of flowing streams. The obvious effects of proper management are evident for all to see. The crops illustrated represent the points at which the agricultural year pivots; a metaphor for life's necessities. The crops, orchards and vineyards described place a value on the cycles of nature and on our place within those cycles. We are connected to each other, to nature and to the Divine. We are not alone; we have a purpose. We are a community. Or we were!

I was struck by both the harmonious and respectful co-existence of urban and rural dwellers in the fresco and then the savage effects of drought that Lorenzetti used as a metaphor for bad government or poor stewardship. The scenes of devastation in this painting struck a chord with me. They resonated profoundly and caused me to consider the state of the environment and the quality of custodianship in Cambrian Hill. To what extent was our predicament at home due to bad government? What economic, political, cultural and even spiritual forces were responsible for the lack of care evident in that

small area under research? I recognised a prophetic element in this painting that surprised me. That a painting from so long ago and so far away could describe so viscerally the truth about my home was astonishing.

When I had returned home from my trip I became aware of something that I had previously been blind to; the emergence in rural communities of that which real estate agents call the ‘Lifestyle Property’. This commercial construct has created a new rural suburbia based on a 20-acre block. The *Lifestyle Property* has its own section in the real-estate pages of the weekend newspapers and building companies and designers that cater specifically to this perceived niche in the property market. This struck me as the parallel and contemporary neighbouring rural zone that Lorenzetti had depicted in his fresco cycle almost seven centuries ago. Much was changed. Lorenzetti’s utopia was built on a genuinely harmonious relationship between those within and without the walls of his city-state.

Now, when approaching a city, the land moves from pastoral idyll through a liminal 20-acre dystopian zone to the edge of established suburbia. A fractal for fringe dwelling has emerged. We have created a liminal world, neither urban nor rural and I came to realise that I was now in fact exploring a 20-acre dystopia between the Winter and the Dog Trap Creeks. Constructed by developers and the pressures of capital growth the zone around this regional city resembles the raw edge of a scar like the paralysed and corrupt landscape described by Lorenzetti.

Howard Arkley suggests “The use of the rural landscape as a metaphor for the Australian experience is fictional and romantic.” I disagree. The rural landscape is a prosaic fact of everyday life for many, if not the majority of, Australians. It still conveys much in the form of metaphor for those who care to look. Where Arkley’s work resonated with neo-nostalgic representations of the suburbs through careful observation, he acknowledged an identifiable emerging iconography that communicates with a generation of Australians. The Hills Hoist, The Victa lawnmower, swan shaped planters crafted from discarded tyres; decorative iron fly-screen doors, venetian and canvas blind clad double fronted cream brick veneer homes were the grist of his mill.

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So too I feel, is a developing range of icons that speak volumes to the rural fringe dweller. An old bath in a weedy paddock, never ending cloned Cypress windbreaks and unloved cars under dying trees, colourbond iron sheds that bristle with antennae and the flues of wood burning stoves. Horse floats and shipping containers have now become as universal and ubiquitous in the zone of *Lifestyle Properties* as the carport in Oakleigh.

One does not always have to travel great distances to find a universal truth. Immersed in his immediate surroundings, the suburban experience provided Arkley with his creative language and voice. His approach to his locale can be compared to that of John Constable (1776-1837) who painted his early landscapes, not by going on grand or picturesque tours as was the painterly tradition of his age, but by discovering his own simple landscapes around his home in East Bergholt. Considered at the time as unworthy, paradoxically those locations are now viewed as ‘picturesque’ and have become part of the tourist industry’s cultural itinerary in recent decades.

It was the Melbourne painter John Brack, almost three hundred years after Constable who firmly believed that any artist who could not find a “lifetime of inspiration a mile from his or her front door was not worthy of the title.”

My self-imposed limits in both distance and mode of research have echoes of the unworthiness of the landscapes explored by Constable.

Analysing and describing that which is familiar can produce unexpected surprises. The pursuit of economic growth throughout the region I found has caused a change in the nature of the region. My front door opens on to the Golden Plains Shire of which Cambrian Hill is a part. According to its publicity documents the shire is,

> A vibrant and progressive municipality situated between Geelong, Ballarat and Melbourne, offering residents and businesses access to city services while enjoying a country lifestyle.

Established in 1994 after the contentious local government restructures introduced by the Kennett Government, it incorporates the former shires of Bannockburn and Leigh and parts of the former shires of Grenville and Buninyong, all rich in gold mining history and character. The Golden Plains Shire covers an area of 2705 square kilometres and boasts of a population that exceeds 17,250.

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The Shire makes a great feature of ‘Lifestyle’ in its publicity and promotional literature.

Situated between Geelong, Ballarat and Melbourne, Golden Plains offers access to city services within a country community. Rich in history and character, our small towns and settlements provide for a healthy rural lifestyle within easy reach of the state capital and the two largest regional cities. Here, you can enjoy location and lifestyle!

Our region offers fantastic residential, employment and investment opportunities that mean economic prosperity and time to enjoy it!

The shire’s growth rate of 3.6% outstrips Melbourne’s 1.3% and makes Golden Plains the fastest growing municipality in provincial Victoria and the sixth fastest growing statewide.9

The Location and Lifestyle brochure distributed by the shire suggests that the notion of ‘Lifestyle’ should be considered thus,

Our residents enjoy all the benefits of a country lifestyle, without having to sacrifice access to the first class services and amenities they need. From shopping to eateries, recreation facilities to national parks, schools to businesses a Golden Plains life means opportunities for a range of social, business and recreation activities in a setting of scenic valleys, meandering creeks and rivers, natural forests and bushland, vineyards and wineries, and old gold mining towns. Escape the traffic jams, the gridlocked public transport system and get more out of every day. In some rural areas, isolation and remoteness are part of every day life – but not in our shire!10

These bucolic descriptions of scenic valleys, meandering creeks and rivers, natural forests and bushland, vineyards and wineries, and old gold mining towns in the glossy brochures have become a dream for some that is dependant on them living in ‘temporary’ structures such as sheds and securing their belongings in shipping containers. Far from Lorenzetti’s utopia I have witnessed a desperate and sustained flight from the city at almost any cost. The balance so emphatically described by Lorenzetti between the urban and rural dwellers and the harmony of that situation is barely visible in the outskirts of the equivalent urban centre of Ballarat and the corresponding hamlets that surround it.

Urban planners have an urge to create a place, defining it with bold architectural statements and gateway art features. But, as with community, a place can’t really be made on a whim, it has to evolve and find its own balance. This is an organic process that relies on a whole host of factors, not least time. Sometimes the places that planners wish to impose destroy an existing place that has developed over many years, but maybe now doesn’t meet the glossy brochure expectations of today.11

The economic realities of rising property values and the scarcity of available houses to

rent in urban centres and the various attendant costs have forced many to seek alternative living conditions. Walking enhances our sense of being diminutive in the face of an ever expanding and spreading urban sprawl. Cambrian Hill is in fact an enormous and representative area and illustrates the concerns and struggles of a much broader community. Cambrian Hill is in many ways similar to the garden C.S. Lewis describes in *The Last Battle*,

> I see now...It is far bigger inside than it was outside...Lucy looked hard at the garden and saw that it was not really a garden at all but a whole world, with its own rivers and woods and sea and mountains. But they were not strange: she knew them all.\(^\text{12}\)

So the area I have researched can be considered as a fractal. As Ruskin suggests, the microcosm can serve as a metaphor for the macrocosm. So too is a fractal an exact replica of that in which it exists in all but size. Each part of Cambrian Hill approximates the entire Shire that then in turn reflects the state and so on. Further I have discovered, each block can be seen as a diminutive element of the entire. Each block or lot has a preferred demeanor, or face it gladly presents to the world. Each block has its own liminal zone between the public and living zone and the functional and less attractive ‘behind the shed’ or ‘under the old tree’ zone where lie the off cast furniture and broken accoutrements of modern life. The liminal dystopian zone of lifestyle properties that surround our cities can be now seen as spatial metaphors of a more general malaise.

If we look hard, as Lewis’s Lucy does, we see that like Lorenzetti’s fresco, the area under examination is a whole world, much larger than ever imagined. Andrew Crompton, a lecturer at the Manchester School of Architecture with interests in distance perception and fractals, explains that space is amplified when observed as a pedestrian,

> Small-scale environments may be much larger than they appear on maps if their size is gauged by their ability to house human activity. This, it is suggested, is because they are fractal and the size of a fractal is an ill-defined quantity that depends on the unit of measurement. Experiments at Manchester University exploring how size and scale are related, indicate that we may be able to make space appear as is from nothing by reducing our scale. These gains become very substantial when we go from the scale of cars to that of a pedestrian.\(^\text{13}\)

Again, Arkley’s suggestion that the rural landscape as a metaphor for the Australian experience is fictional and romantic is unsustainable. I suggest that the space between the

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Winter and Dog Trap is a space transformed by people who are factual representatives of the Australian experience without the presupposed romance of pastoral bliss. Cambrian Hill is a legitimate representative sample of this experience.

Space is not a neutral medium in which objects stand but a social construction with which we interact. This concept of space is different from space as seen by surveying and is more like space as conceived by Lefebvre, who sees space as being transformed into lived experience by social subjects of all sorts, young people, children, women, active people and so on, at work and at play.\(^\text{14}\)

\(^{14}\) Andrew Crompton, *How big is your city, really?*
Chapter Four

Walking to work: Things of stone and wood

I only went out for a walk

and finally concluded to stay out till sundown,

for going out, I found,

was really going in.¹

By walking we develop an “awareness of an all-pervading mysterious energy articulated in the infinite variety of natural phenomena [that] seems to be the primordial experience of human consciousness.”² This awareness through walking has been at the centre of my work. Unable to draw or paint during my walks I have used a camera to record visual cues for later prints or paintings. I draw from these photographs in black and white to further ‘remove’ myself from the photographic record. My prints and paintings do not seek to represent a photographic likeness of the area under research.

I have tried to construct works from a number of views and sources that are all within walking distance of home. In this manner various pictorial elements can be combined to produce a landscape with significant and recognizable elements never seen in such juxtaposition. Consider, for example, the works produced by Rick Amor that may include images of the Battersea Power Station and the Brooklyn Bridge under an Australian sky with elements of the West Gate Bridge.³ These landscapes are not

³ Such elements may be seen in works such as The Bridge 1996-7, and The Empty District, 2006 illustrated in Rick Amor by Gavin, pages 118 and 176.
straightforward representations of a specific place but are a combination of views as seen over many years and drawn from a variety of sources.

I have worked in a range of materials and processes in this research. Printmaking through various relief techniques such as wood engraving, woodcut and linocut, have formed an important element of the completed body of work. Initially the wood engravings came about through my interest in the Hawthorn hedgerows that are a feature of the constructed environment visible today in Cambrian Hill. I used the Hawthorn as subject matter in one print to convey a sense of the successful interloper in the landscape. (See Figure 6)⁴ It is prolific in this area and has been used to create shelterbelts for stock for almost a century. It marks creeks and long disused boundaries and is often the first indicator of spring with its show of white blossom. As a result of a motor accident where a car had destroyed a fence and an old Hawthorn tree, I was able to gather and take home an entire fallen tree that was still heavily laden with berries. My initial motivation was to collect it in order to draw carefully the berries and thorns. While cutting the tree I discovered that the wood from the slow growing Hawthorn is well suited to carving and indeed had a long history of use in this form.

The wood of the Hawthorn is hard with a fine grain and lends itself to a beautiful polish, as such is used for making small luxury items such as walking sticks, handles for knives and daggers, and other fancy turned objects. The root-wood was used for making trinket boxes and combs for the ladies. The wood also makes excellent fuel and made the hottest wood-fire known, it was often considered more desirable than Oak for heating ovens. Charcoal made from its wood has been said to melt pig iron without the need for a blast furnace.⁵

Having gathered a number of quite substantial branches I machined these into slices of about two centimetres in thickness. On these discs of Hawthorn I carved images of the natural companions, the birds and insects and the regularly observed manufactured objects from my walks. (See Figure 8) Once printed on a small and very old bookbinding press they enabled me to fix these images permanently as mementos of the journeys that seem to become blurred in my memory. Significant for me was the ability to make works about a place with materials sourced from that place. The prints are constructed from materials that contain, in many ways, the essence of this place. Grown from the soil and

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⁴ Tony Griffin Interloper Woodcut, Linocut, Wood Engraving 80 cm x 100 cm 2009.
Figure 6 *Interloper* 2009
Linocut, Woodcut, Wood Engraving  20 Panels each 20cm x 20cm
Figure 7 *Nesting* 2009
Woodcut, Wood Engraving, Lino-cut 12 Panels each 20cm x 20cm
Figure 8. Loris Button *Gathering Time*, 2007.

Linoprint on hand made papers, unique state, installation size 102cm x 115cm.
made from the very minerals and elements of this landscape the wood seemed a natural, sustainable and sympathetic choice of media.

These small works became more important as they began to include more and more subjects. The detritus of the natural world, bones and feathers and also that of the constructed world, the nuts and bolts, screws and tools found on my outings all found their way into my prints.

The process of printmaking and its link to my investigation became integral to this research because, as I have come to understand, “a print is the halfway point between a thing and a thought.”6 The prints in my body of work have contributed an element of meditative thought in response to the observations made while walking. Working with sharp tools at once focuses the mind and yet at the same time the manual task of cutting repeated small incisions is quite hypnotic. The prints, by the very nature of their multiplicity, also recognised the potency of the frequency of observation of the things that then became subject matter. They form part of a list of usual suspects that can be relied upon to accompany me on each and every journey. Willie wagtails, blue wrens, crows, hares, sheep, feathers, bones, huge numbers of nails and screws and always Cosimo, my faithful and long suffering dog, have made their way into print.

Printed individually, and as a part of more complex works that employ a range of media, these pieces allowed me to effectively and meaningfully catalogue the finds of each walk. They allowed me to produce distinct records of my observations. Artists such as Loris Button, David Frazer, Lawrence Finn, Tim Jones and Rosalind Atkins (see Figures 9, 10 and 11) have been important influences. Atkins controlled and precise approach gives her works a certain significance. The time and focus devoted to the rendering of such seemingly simple motifs imbues the works with a sense of timelessness. Her sense of restraint is masterful. David Frazer is able to tell, in such small spaces, universal stories. There is a humour and narrative that is so strong in his work that is at the same time expressed so economically. Similarly Tim Jones empty spaces also convey so much. They place the viewer in correct perspective, as a tiny, lone, and often lonely, entity in a vast universe.

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Figure 9 Tony Griffin, from top left, *Cosimo, Crow, Feather, Wagtail, Fine Bone, Spanner, Long Bone, Stone and Moth*. Each 10cm x 10cm (approx). A selection of the woodcuts produced from found Hawthorn and Elm. 2008-2009.
Figure 10 David Frazer

*Downward Mobility II* Wood Engraving 7.5 cm x 10cm 2001

David Frazer

*Good Morning Wanderlust* Wood Engraving 4 cm x 7 cm 2004
Figure 11. Tim Jones. *Tree with Shooting Star*, 2001, 45.5 cm x 58.5.
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.
Figure 12 Rosalind Atkins. *Gate*, 2007 Wood engraving: edition 25, 15cm x 11 cm.
The tree is a common thread throughout these works. Solitary and often exotic trees standing as silhouettes against huge skies are highly evocative of this part of Western Victoria. Because these prints are in black and white the viewer is forced to consider the subject without the distraction of colour. The structure of the print is paramount. The marks that construct the prints are so telling. They describe and permanently record the artist’s gestures and the physical force of the press.

The work of Loris Button is also important in the way that large works are constructed from many smaller works creating a broad investigation of her subject through the use of multiple images. Printed, painted and drawn these self-portraits are more than the sum of their parts. (See Figure 8) Nuances are developed and visual layers are created as the viewer gathers information as if reading each of her works like the words of a poem. Hung individually these works avoid a fixed narrative and leave elements open to interpretation.

My printed works are used in a manner that owes a great deal to this technique. They rely on a method by which many images are read against each other. Many of my printed works employ a broken up or divided composition that invites us to read the work in ways a single composition does not. This can be compared to the way a triptych altarpiece creates a reading that a single panel does not. We as westerners read text from left to right, scanning back and forth as we progress. An altarpiece creates a pair of framing works that compliment a central and dominant image. Our eyes move over the images in this style of work in an intuitive fashion. A work composed of divided panels then, is initially read from left to right, before we instinctively scan the work for detail becoming an involved participant in the interpretation of the work.

In the act of walking our eyes gather and reject information creating new narratives, associations and connections as our eyes scan from our feet to the horizon and the sky. Like being present in the landscape, we construct an individual and unique response both to the component parts or elements and simultaneously to the whole of the imagery in a work composed of many elements.

By dividing my work, new visual relationships become evident. The manner of division becomes significant and voids, gutters and empty spaces carry new weight. The union between divisions becomes a medium for much implied information. Time exists in the
spaces between the panels of a comic known as gutters. We instinctively understand the notion of the passage of time expressed in this manner. The gaps mean, ‘later’ or ‘next.’ The large installation print/artist book *House Block* is an example of this. (See Figure 12)

By the very nature of their multiplicity, prints have a democratic notion. I have been able to employ them as bookmarks and have exhibited them as a part of a series of exhibitions held in Europe and the USA in 2008 and 2009. In some of these situations works are available for the public to take. Undertaken through the Centre for Fine Print Research at the University of West England, Bristol, the Bookmarks project has, since May 2004, visited 50 venues in Italy, the Netherlands, the UK, Germany, Poland, Canada, Brazil, South Korea, Cyprus, Croatia, New Zealand, Japan, Australia and the USA. As prints they also allow for a range of uses in the construction of several of artist books.

I use a variety of sketchbooks to organise my ideas visually. The small studies when viewed as if in a flipbook and as complete in their own right, forced my work into the broken, grid like elements seen in many of my works. Being able to complete a work, no matter its size, provides a small sense of achievement and has become a strong motivating force in my work. Combining a small number of works also forestalls the inevitable sense of denouement and defeat a completed painting provides. I have been able to build a work element-by-element, component-by-component wherein the sum of small beauties may provide a greater truth. Small landscape paintings, paintings of bones and drawings in books have been a significant outcome of this research. They catalogue, in a more immediate manner, views and observations of the change witnessed in my study.

The drought, if indeed it is a drought, and the very fact that it is so universally understood and accepted that it requires little explanation, has had an enormous influence upon my work. At the time of writing government agencies are reporting that rainfall for the first half of 2009 is 20% below average making this the thirteenth consecutive year of below average rainfall.

Dry winds have scarified the landscape to an extent that the structure and detail of the landscape has been revealed in incredible detail. The tracks of animals and vehicles long

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7 http://www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk/bookmark.htm
Figure 13 Tony Griffin. *House Block*, 2009.
Folded Artist Book. 18 Panels each 20 cm. x 20 cm. Acrylic, Linocut, wood engraving, woodcut, intaglio on Hahnemuhle mounted on calico.
gone have revealed themselves in paddocks like mad earthy vapour trails. Unusually wide pairs of paths indicate the routes of trucks or even wagons in fields with no access to roads. The footings of houses, sheds and goldmining structures have been revealed. Bricks in small concretations indicate the futile efforts of cement in the face of time and nature. The wind has exposed rocks and scoured them of the lichens that made them until only recently invisible. Fence lines have become more distinct as they have been robbed of their weedy camouflage by hungry sheep. Older boundary fences, that signify for me, modes of demarcation and systems of ownership that reflect the manner in which the landscape is forced to comply with a rigid map driven world, have failed through the constant pressure of livestock straining through them for elusive fresh pickings on the roadside verge.

The poetry of T.S Elliot, and particularly elements of *The Waste Land* has been a significant influence on my work. The ache for water or even the sound of water is so real. I used a series of prints with some small painted images in a book as a response to this dry season and a few of the lines of this poem to convey this desperate want.

If there were water
And no rock
If there were rock
And also water
And water
A spring
A pool among the rock
If there were the sound of water only
Not the cicada
And dry grass singing
But the sound of water over a rock
Where the hermit-thrush sings in the pine trees
Drip drop drip drop drip drop drop
But there is no water

*The Waste Land* 1922

Working from photographs taken in a range of climatic conditions I have tried in my paintings to ignore the range of seasons and weather of almost three years and have

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sought to create rather, a sense of one day only or perhaps a week, in order to produce a more homogeneous viewing of the area being researched. I have worked to produce paintings that allow for, or even embrace, fictional narratives that are ambiguous and allusive. I want to convey some small measure of anxiety, or a suggestion of anticipation that something important may be about to happen, but given the nature of these things, probably will not, rain will only threaten and clouds only gather.

The potential of objects and the effects of the sky have driven much of my painting. The emptiness of the landscape should not be read as a place devoid of people. On the contrary, the landscapes are heavily populated. At any moment I feel, a pedestrian may enter as if from stage left. Piles of sand or incomplete sheds suggest the nature of construction in this region and the nature of its population. I have witnessed many times, when walking, the wires of a fence that are cut to allow for the delivery of a pile of gravel. Weekend by weekend the accoutrements of building appear until a prefabricated steel structure appears to gather itself in a much braced and supported skeleton. A pile of sand or a hole in a fence can mean neighbours. Change—neither good nor bad—but certain change.

Industrial sheds are built with television aerials and hot water units in paddocks that until only recently were the domain of solitary bulls. Houses sometimes follow the sheds but often the sheds become homes after seemingly endless weekends of work. Roofs then appear on the horizon catching and reflecting light in a colourbond palette.

Shipping containers and plastic water tanks appear through the holes in fences with the piles of gravel. Old pear trees and sheep yards disappear and are replaced with empty oil drums, denuded patches of pasture and rusty baths and all, it seems, as if by magic, created by invisible people whose only earthly presence is indicated by the constant warning beep beep beep of their earthmoving equipment as it dances forward and then in reverse. Earthmoving equipment in a bewildering variety seem to sit idle for months in paddocks now unable to contain livestock and too dry to work. There is an uncomfortable juxtaposition between the established and the new. Old fences and farm structures appear embarrassed by the brashness of the new buildings and paraphernalia. The old bore and tank stand seems anachronistic beside the new brick home and its fence of identical treated pine poles. Arcane practices such as harrowing and spreading 'super'
Tony Griffin *Study for The Good Life*, 2008. Acrylic on canvas, 20 cm x 30 cm.

Tony Griffin *Study for L’Arc*, 2008. Acrylic on paper, 9 cm x 17 cm.

Tony Griffin *Study for Erasure*, 2008. Acrylic on canvas, 30 cm x 34 cm.
continue in paddocks beside manicured fields that include approximations of golf courses complete with little flags.

All of this occurs under a shared sky. The sky became a major interest and force in my work. The transitory nature of clouds and the effects of light throughout the day imply in my paintings a specificity of place, the passage of time or the time of day or season. Images of the sky I feel can be interpreted as metaphors for openness, possibility, potential, forgiveness and redemption. The sky provides structure and pattern and evokes rather than illustrates a time or place. Constable's cloud studies completed mostly in 1821 and 1822 (See Figure 16) have been a source of considerable influence upon my work. His attempts to fully understand and portray a variety of cloud forms has provided an insight into the discipline and rigour required to resolve even this seemingly most simple of visual problems. He employed an ochre ground in his studies and scumbled white, green and violet in extraordinary combinations to describe time, place and mood with amazing truth. He explained his preoccupation with clouds and skies,

> I have done a good deal of skying. A landscape painter who does not make his skies a very material part of his composition neglects to avail himself of one of his greatest aids. It would be difficult to name a class of landscape in which the sky is not the 'keynote', the standard of 'scale' and the chief organ of 'sentiment'. The sky is the source of light in nature and governs everything.  

I believe that the sky sets an agenda for the day without us consciously knowing. A glimpse of the sky tells us the season, the time of day, the temperature, now and in the immediate moments to come. The shifting patterns of sky examine the differences between the rapid passage of time and the enduring permanence of the land. The constant motion and formlessness of the sky and clouds makes us aware of our concrete and physical world. Our shadows move, develop and disappear constantly providing a light show at our feet. The clouds convey a sense of temperature in my painting. They inform the work with a glimpse of the sky as the day or year progresses that the viewer may remember. They may remember the sun on their shoulders or the chill in the wind.

Philip Wolhagen has also been an influence in my painting. (See Figure 15) I share his love of clouds. He says, “My desire to paint is certainly a way of ordering and aestheticising the world.” As I have discovered through this research and as Wolhagen

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10 Sunderland John, Constable, 13.
Figure 15 Philip Wolfhagen *Winter Nocturne IV*, 2007.
John Constable (1776-1837) *Study of Cirrus Clouds*, about 1822, Oil on paper.

John Constable  *Study of clouds*, 5 September 1822, Oil on paper 29.8 x 48.3 cm.
describes "Landscape is such an amorphous subject matter, and trying to order it is a way to try to find meaning."

By being a part of this region, living and working in Cambrian Hill, responding to the daily needs of maintaining gardens, the raising, selling and slaughtering of cattle and the sometimes minute to minute changes in the weather make our connection to the natural world inescapable. Wolfhagen's work captures this essence of place and sense of order so evocatively and as he reflects,

...because living close to nature is a very clear way to notice time and the changing seasons -- to observe the poignancy of moments, and how things pass. Culturally, we have become so far away from the natural world and so disconnected from what's real. As a painter, I see my raison d'être as being a go-between between the high culture and the natural world.12

Not unlike Wolfhagen, I have found through this research, a manner of being a go-between myself. Not between high culture and the natural world, as in Wolfhagen's case, but between the natural world and the natural within me. I have recognised in the landscape elements of myself, traces of my own idiosyncratic marks. And I have come to recognise within myself remnants of the land, an understanding of cycles, the weather and the fragility and transience of things.

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12 Gabi Mocatta. *Looking for the perfect cloud.*
Tony Griffin *Entrance* 2008. Acrylic on Canvas, 120 cm x 120 cm.

Tony Griffin *Making Do* 2008. Acrylic on Canvas, 120 cm x 120 cm.
Tony Griffin *L’Arc* 2009. Acrylic on Linen 100 cm x 100 cm.

Tony Griffin *Gathering* 2009. Acrylic on canvas 820 cm x 1800 cm.
Figure 19

Tony Griffin  *Study for Roofline I*. 2008, Acrylic on Linen 12 cm. x 50 cm.

Tony Griffin  *Study for Roofline II*. 2008, Acrylic on Linen 30 cm. x 35 cm.

Tony Griffin  *Study for Roofline III*. 2008, Acrylic on canvas 29 cm. x 36 cm.
Conclusion

So the sometimes georgic nature of my painting and the use of found local materials and subject matter in my prints are a direct response to the observed natural world I have researched. The results of my research are evident in the paintings, drawings and prints that form the other part of this document. I have analysed and borne witness to the change evident in this landscape. I have discovered through, and in the landscape, a series of desperate competing models of land use affected by climate change, economic necessities and urban growth. I have seen and recorded in the landscape the slow-motion catastrophe of change. I have observed and recorded the continuum of change in this small area of regional Victoria.

The joy and pride that must have been experienced when a new truck first entered the farm gates remains in some sense as that truck weathers and then becomes a platform for a makeshift stock trough. Some of its dignity remains. The irony of power poles providing a source of no longer required electricity to a bore now dry perhaps due to the profligate carbon emitting nature of those power plants is a constant mocking element of this landscape. There is a visible pioneer spirit in the sheds bristling with antennae and smoky flues that is echoed in the crop marks that remember the simple miners huts and cottages of the past. I have also witnessed and experienced the attentiveness, determination and care required to make this change positive in the generous efforts of individuals who gather litter, plant trees and relentlessly hunt foxes. All this and more has taken place under ever changing skies that paradoxically have remained a constant and powerful reminder of our insignificance and the folly of our vanities. More than a witness and recorder of change in the landscape, I have become both a subject and victim of change by and through this landscape.

The raw, urgent and desperate landscape I saw when returning from Europe and the concerns of drought, climate change, and mortgage stress, financial crisis and a range of
lifestyles and bigotries are still visible in the landscape. I have witnessed the moment that this place altered, in my own mind and as a landscape, from pastoral bucolic bliss to the livid pressure point of a spreading city. Through the research process, I have examined and recorded the concerns of those who live close to the edge of this rapidly growing regional centre and the fashion in which their responses are expressed in the landscape. The thesis therefore describes the manner in which the identity of those who live between the Winter and Dog Trap Creeks have shaped the landscape, and in turn, have been shaped by the landscape. The concerns visible in this particular and local landscape are not specific to this site but are in fact universal. The research confirmed that the changes witnessed in this small community are, like Ruskin’s microcosms, as fractals, metaphors that alert us to, and warn us of, the effects of these pressures and changes in the wider world.
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