Crisis modes: Transforming patterns of ecocultural identity with the heterogeneous possibilities of creative nonfiction

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the ways that writers of creative nonfiction from Australian settler backgrounds can cohesively convey ecocultural identities that are open to or demonstrate transformation. Motivated by our current state of environmental crisis and the culpability of extractive colonising cultures, this work acknowledges that the narratives humans engage with, and the discursive environments they create, have consequences that extend beyond symbolic exchange and into the material world they represent. Just as environmental psychology has come to understand human perceptions of environments as ecological transactions in which identity, culture and environments are entangled, ecocritics argue that theoretically informed creative works have the potential to fulfil a transformative ecosemiotic function with material implications. This practice-led research recognises the urgency with which Australian creative nonfiction writers from settler backgrounds have begun to employ the heterogeneous possibilities of the creative nonfiction genre to engage in transdisciplinary conversations that examine, expose and transform the patterns of cognition encoded in established metaphors and tropes. In so doing, these writers transform their understanding of self as environment.

I draw on environmental psychology and ecocriticism — which I apply within the context of a transdisciplinary ecocultural framework — to explore the ways in which creative nonfiction strategies, specifically stance, modal patterning and metaphor, can facilitate a constitutive exchange in the text that mirrors processes of ecological exchange. To this end, I conduct contextual analyses of five exemplar case studies: three short analyses of three essay-length works and two extended analyses of two book-length works. All these works are by Australians from settler backgrounds, written between 2009 and 2019. I then apply my observations, through a recursive and diffractive interplay between theory and practice, to my own development of five essay-length creative nonfiction texts, responding to my relationship with familiar environments. Through the use of close narrative stance, modal patterning and metaphor, I demonstrate how cognitive shifts in these texts can be cohesively conveyed to expose the process of ecocultural identity transformation and demonstrate literature's ecological function.

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Chapter 1: Introduction and research question

It's easy to describe Cunnamulla as red. Or red-brown-orange. Or rust. All those hues that emit heat and fade in the memory to remnant embers. It's easy to forget that it does have its greens. Granted, those greens don't vibrate with the profligate energy of the tropics' mosses or roar with the chlorophyll-drunk confidence of the subtropics in which I live. The greens of Kunja Country in central western Queensland are of those more subdued intimations that pop only in contrast, as mulga against earth, or are flushed out as grasslands or riverbank red gums, glowing tentatively in once-predictable patterns of flood. Yet, Cunnamulla was dry when I was there, when this project first suggested itself, and the palette of enduring drought was stark to my visitor's eye: red dirt and blue sky. Hot-pink clouds purpling to black. Pinpricks of white fading in as the dusk chorus faded out; the amber glow of the workers' shed windows we followed to the evening's bird count crackling in the distance like twin campfires, like the eyes of the night itself.

We were staying at Bowra, the Australian Wildlife Conservancy sanctuary nearly 800 kilometres west of Brisbane, where birders descend in squabbling flocks to scoff at amateur sightings of the rare and vulnerable grey falcon. We — my partner and I — were navigating our own separate griefs at that time and it was there, in Bowra, that my mind had snagged on the concept of 'sanctuary', on its ability to exclude in order to preserve, on the cognitive and physical fence it drew between nature and not nature, belonging and unbelonging, destruction and restoration. It's hard to know if it was simply the grief I'd brought with me or the carapaces of eastern long-necked turtles I'd seen stranded in the Warrego's mudcracks, but I know that my senses were coloured by loss as I jotted down notes in my tent at night, realising that the metaphors I grasped at to understand that place told me more about how I understood myself there — as a human, a settler, a visitor — than they told me about the place itself.

Around that time, I'd been belatedly reading *A place on Earth: An anthology of nature writing from Australia and North America* (2003a), edited by Mark Tredinnick. The stories in that anthology inhabited such a variety of modes, metaphors and organisational patterns in their expression of person–place relationships that they seemed to fit no other description than that of creative nonfiction. This led me to read Tredinnick's

re-imagination of the Australian pastoral, *The blue plateau: A landscape memoir* (2009), and from there I stumbled over to Kim Mahood's interrogations of the explorer journal, *Craft for a dry lake* (2000) and *Position doubtful: Mapping landscapes and memories* (2016a). And then, with my pattern recognition on overdrive, I began to notice the groundswell of Australian settler writers turning to the creative nonfiction genre with an understanding that the discursive environments we create have consequences that extend beyond symbolic exchange and into the material world we seek to represent. A shared sense of urgency had begun to emerge about how we make sense of our place ecologically as well as culturally, with the understanding that, paradoxically, anthropocentric perspectives (perpetuated by the colonising cultures many of us have come from) are driving the environmental crisis we find ourselves in.

This would lead me to ask my research question: **in what ways can Australian writers of creative nonfiction from settler backgrounds cohesively convey ecocultural identities that are open to or demonstrate transformation?**

My practice-led research considers the dynamic relationship between culture and nature in creating the cognitions that shape identity and, in return, shape cultural responses to nature. In exploring this recursive dynamic, the project enlists ecocritical theory with support from environmental psychology to develop the transdisciplinary dialogue that is emerging as an ecocultural framework. Through a process of ongoing recursion between experience and knowledge (or information), and between my own story and the stories of others, my research and my creative practice attempt to reach beyond the 'green' — that overburdened icon and its often unconscious performance of what environmental psychologist Susan Clayton (2015) describes as an 'environmental identity' (p. 235) — to engage with what ecocultural theorist Hubert Zapf (2016) describes as a process of 'ecosemiotic' exchange (p. 4) '[in] an exploration of the critical–creative potential of the aesthetic as a vital mode of ecological knowledge and transformation' (p. 5).

Specifically, my research focuses on how Australian creative nonfiction, an experimental and sometimes enigmatic genre known for its heterogeneic qualities, accommodates transdisciplinary epistemologies while situating the human, in particular the self, in the posthuman turn. Through a contextual analysis of five creative nonfiction works, I seek to understand how the Australian settler writer of creative nonfiction can use the strategies of stance, modal patterning and metaphor to cohesively convey an ecocultural identity that is open to or demonstrates transformation. My responsibility to

participate in processes of decolonisation as an Australian from a settler (invader) background is embedded in the focus of this work, recognising the need for a commitment to both 'ideological and material' transformation, as asserted by Evelyn Araluen (2016), and not simply the 're-arrangement, re-presentation, and re-distribution' of Indigenous knowledges (Linda Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012, p. 122) co-opted into colonising systems of power. The question is, therefore, expanded to consider whether these narrative strategies, through their questioning of contestable cultural/colonial tropes, position creative nonfiction writers from settler backgrounds to develop texts that function as a heuristic for what ecocritics such as Donna Haraway (2003) refer to as 'naturalcultural' transformation — an understanding of self as environment, extended by an awareness of the differentiated terms of this understanding based, as ecocultural researcher Melissa M Parks (2020a) has suggested, on intersectional identity markers such as culture, gender, socioeconomic status, etc.

I then diffract my own creative practice (see Diffraction, Chapter 2: Key terms), in which I have aimed to lay bare the dynamic transactional process of ecocultural identity transformation through the use of close narrative stance, metaphor and organising patterns that support each other to achieve cohesion and coherence.

It is my hope that the transdisciplinary research at the intersection of these three emerging fields will contribute to knowledge about the potential for Australian creative nonfiction to address environmental crisis and its inextricable cultural implications.

Chapter 2: Key terms

In this exegesis, I use a number of terms that are well established in literary and cultural studies, the humanities and psychology alongside some that have emerged or transformed more recently to respond to pressing existential concerns. The definitions below are offered for clarity in their usage here.

Anthropocentrism

A perspective that places human life at the centre of all other life and human need as primary, regardless of the detrimental and irreversible environmental consequences.

Coherence

This exegesis uses this term to refer to *what* a text is communicating to the reader. It employs the definition provided by linguists Zoya Rezanova and Konstantin Shilyaev (2015): 'Coherence refers to the cognitive interconnections that make up the conceptual and content structure of the text' (p. 32).

Cohesion

This exegesis uses this term to refer to *how* a text is communicating the *what* to the reader. It employs the definition provided by Rezanova and Shilyaev (2015): 'Cohesion is mostly concerned with linguistic relations between the units of the text and its lexical content in particular' (p. 32).

Creative nonfiction

This diverse and adaptable genre is known for its conceptual flexibility and typified by the use of storytelling techniques and inventive structures combined with factual information. The dominant mode in the story lends itself to more or less of a declared subjective perspective and, as such, may also be variously known as the fourth genre, narrative journalism, new journalism, literary journalism, personal essay, lyrical essay — or more simply as essay, memoir, etc. Writer and researcher David Carlin (2017) has also proposed the term 'entangled nonfiction' to describe creative nonfiction that 'essays the Anthropocene' (p. 1).

Diffraction

Writer and researcher Kate Are (2018) has developed this term for use in creative practice research, building on the concept of 'diffractive learning' established by ecocritic Donna Haraway (2000). Diffraction expands the process of reflection 'in which students situate their writing, not as a reflection on/of objects "out there" in the world, but rather as an active and literal co-creation of the self-as-world' (p. 1). Are considers this a process of 'worlding' that, in emphasising environmental interconnections between writer and world, has more transformative potential than unidirectional reflection (p. 2).

Hegemony/Hegemonic

The long-established usage of this term explicated by Raymond Williams (1976) in *Keywords: A vocabulary of culture and society* is still useful in this exegesis. In Williams' explication, the term describes 'a way of seeing the world … that is seen to depend for its hold not only on its expressions of the interests of a ruling class but also on its acceptance as "normal reality" or "common sense" by those in practice subordinated to it' (p. 145). Williams identifies hegemony as existing in 'political and economic institutions and relationships' and 'in active forms of experience and consciousness' (p. 145). It is used in this exegesis to draw attention to uninterrogated cognitions.

Heterogeneity/Heterogeneous/Heterogenesis

From the Greek *heteros* meaning 'other' and *genos* meaning 'kind', this term was predominantly used in the chemical and biological sciences (with the spelling 'heterogenous') but has been more recently adopted by other fields, such as the humanities, to describe the transdisciplinary interests of ecocriticism and by the creative industries to describe the diverse composition of the creative nonfiction genre. For a discussion of the term's introduction to ecocriticism by Felix Guattari (2008) and its relevance, see Serpil Oppermann (2011).

Heuristic

This exegesis uses this term to describe the process of transferable learning from one context to another.

Ecoculture

Ecocritics and environmental humanities scholars have long searched for a term and framework that might adequately address anthropocentrism and the harmful

compartmentalisation of nature and culture that has emerged in post-industrial societies. In her explication of this new term, ecocultural communications researcher Melissa M Parks (2020b) concludes that 'ecoculture connotes inter-connectedness and place relations, and has been critically operationalized in ways that problematize dominant human-centered ideologies, making it a productive scholarly frame that emphasizes the relationships between humans, their cultures, and their ecologies' (p. 54).

Ecocultural identity

Drawing on an ecocultural framework, Parks (2020a) defines an ecocultural identity (often using the plural form to denote implicit intersectionalities) as a theory of identity that takes into account that the self in relationship with all other life is socially, ecologically and politically enacted and constructed both consciously and subconsciously (pp. 103–4).

Ecosemiotics

This term refers to an emerging theoretical framework that builds on the traditional field of semiotics and ecocritic Wendy Wheeler's (2008) theory of biosemiotics to explain meaning-making within and between texts as an ecological model of exchange. Ecocultural researcher Hubert Zapf (2020), a champion of the term, explains that, as such, selves, texts and culture are considered inner and outer environments in constant 'reflexive interactivity' (p. 56).

Metaphor

Widely recognised as a literary device, the fundamental role metaphor plays in structuring everyday communication often goes unnoticed. The definition provided by Rezanova and Shilyaev (2015) is useful for understanding the 'mechanism of the human cognitive system which consists in (partial) mapping of one conceptual domain (source domain) onto another (target domain) as a way of its conceptualization, e.g. THEORIES ARE BUILDINGS: This theory has a shaky foundation' (p. 32).

Mode

This exegesis uses the textbook definition of this term as described by literary research scholar John Stephens (1992), who states that 'features of a recognisable genre can function as a mode: that is, a selection of textual features associated with the genre appear in a text, but are secondary to other features and do not wholly determine the narrative

frame of the text … A mode may thus appear only briefly, or from time to time; it does not have to be present in all parts of the text' (p. 53).

Modal patterning (see also, Patterning)

This term refers to the internal pattern that the writer's movement between or integration of modes creates or follows. This may reveal or disrupt a form that correlates with the overarching conceptual metaphor (megametaphor) of the piece. The modal patterning may follow a design as explicit as an extra-literary or literary form, or it may move in a way that implies a form and metaphor.

Patterning

This exegesis uses this term to refer to patterns of cognition contained by a metaphor. In *Weathering*, environmental humanities scholars Astrida Neimanis and Jennifer Hamilton (2018) argue that climate change forces a physical connection to environment that collapses the divide between metaphor and event so that the icon and the expression are indexically identical. Similarly, in recognising human disruptions to established ecological patterns, it is possible to recognise how established cognitive patterns map directly to this. In much of my writing, I am asking, 'What happens when patterns are disruptive or disrupted?', 'What might the implications of this be for environmental patterns?' and 'How might we find the shape of transformational patterns?' As writer David Carlin (2017) explains: 'to essay is to make worlds in the sense that, as Donna Haraway puts it, worlds "are not containers, they're patternings, risky co-makings" (2016, p. 544)' (p. 11).

Post-anthropocentrism / Posthumanism / More-than-humanism

Post-anthropocentrism is a conceptual position that Zapf (2020) argues must follow the inadequate attempt by ecocritics to decentre human subjectivity by employing a posthumanist conceptual position, which he argues reduces the capacity to represent human agency in reconceptualising ecocultural relationships. The term 'more-than-human' is also used by ecocritical scholars to demote the centrality of human subjectivity.

Recursion

A term used in Peircean semiotics (Charles Sanders Peirce) and adapted by biosemiotician Wheeler (2008) to describe the process used in abductive logic of 'going backwards in order to go forwards' (p. 140).

Situatedness

A term central to the preoccupations of ecocriticism and arising out of the ecofeminist work of Haraway (1988), situatedness describes an approach to solving a perceived subjectivity–objectivity divide by proposing that embodied knowledge may be generated in part through physical engagement with environments, which may be seen to function in terms of semiotic exchange.

Stance

The position of the narrating subjectivity communicated in a text.

Subjectivity

Along with objectivity, this is a highly contested term among ecocritical scholars. While this exegesis does not seek to solve the problem of intention as it relates to consciousness, it employs a working definition used predominantly in neurocognitive and metalinguistic studies in which subjectivity is recognised as the sum of internal organising structures in constant interplay with the objective world. This draws on the developmental theory of psychologist Jean Piaget which, explains Olivier Houde (2004), postulated that 'from infancy to adulthood, experiential information is assimilated into the subject's logicomathematical structures. These structures in turn coordinate the action (or operatory) schemes that generate objective knowledge of the world' (p. 93).

Transdisciplinary

This exegesis uses this term to refer to theories and texts that draw upon and integrate learning from multiple disciplines to extend and connect disciplines.

Transformation

A process of examination and response to the pre-existing cognitive structures at work in conceptions of self as environment. Through a reflexive, constitutive, connective and intentionally reparative process, the writer seeks what Zapf (2020) describes as 'the active participation of the reader in the continual co-creation of those relational complexities which constitute ecological awareness and existence' (p. 60).

Trope

In this exegesis, this term is distinguished from metaphor and refers to a culturally recognisable recurring device in Australian literature that often justifies, reinforces or reifies dominant metaphorical expressions of coloniser belonging/unbelonging.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Methodology framework

My research and practice employ an ecocritical framework informed by developments and crossover approaches in the field of environmental psychology. These emerging fields provide the transdisciplinary scope to investigate in what ways Australian writers of creative nonfiction from settler backgrounds can cohesively convey ecocultural identities that are open to or demonstrate transformation.

In this chapter, I outline how I have applied this transdisciplinary framework within a practice-based methodology to meet the objective of producing works that are open to ecocultural transformation and, in the process, generate theoretical considerations for an emerging ecocultural framework. I also explain the role of a contextual analysis method within this practice-based methodology.

3.2 Practice-based methodology, incorporating contextual analysis method

This project recognises Linda Candy and Ernest Edmonds' (2018) definition of a practice-based methodology in which 'making an artifact is pivotal, and the insights from making, reflecting and evaluating may be fed back directly into the artifact itself' (p. 65). As the 'artifacts' or creative nonfiction pieces produced for this project relied on three categories of research — textual (or informational), experiential (or situated) and theoretical — the methodology also borrows from Barbara Bolt's (2010) practice-led research concept of 'material productivity' (p. 30), where, 'through the vehicle of the exegesis, practice becomes theory generating' (p. 33).

For the initial phase of textual research, the exegesis incorporates a contextual analysis method in which I initially examine five case studies. First, I examine three essay-length creative nonfiction exemplar texts to identify how creative nonfiction practitioners working with ecocultural themes draw together the heterogeneous qualities of these texts through the use of metaphor, mode and stance. I then provide a deeper analysis of two book-length exemplar texts to show how the strategies these writers use not only correlate with and form the pattern of a cohesive ecocultural identity but open it up to the possibility of transformation. Drawing on the theoretical framework of ecocriticism and

environmental psychology, I identify how the literary device of narrative stance functions to position, privilege or subjugate the subjectivity of the storyteller as a presence in the text in relation to more-than-human subjectivities or representations. I then consider how this subjectivity is expressed and transformed at the literary-transactional text nexus, a discursive feature of all creative nonfiction where the narrative stance interacts with discovered epistemologies or knowledge systems (what might be considered 'objectivity' or 'factual information').

For this analysis, I examine how this process of discovery produces a cohesive pattern in the chosen texts, where the organising strategies, such as parallelism and accumulation, facilitate the response that ecocritic Donna Haraway refers to as 'diffraction' (Are, 2018, p. 5). I argue that this process can begin with a metaphor or facilitate the development of a metaphor that gives the storyteller space to compare and contrast, connect, shape and reshape new understanding as well as the capacity to express culturally specific ways of knowing and understanding. I then consider how this interaction between subjective and objective truths exposes what environmental psychologist Harry Heft (2013, p. 13) refers to as the 'transactional' nature of meaning-making when relating to our environments — with the potential to dismantle accepted tropes.

This examination informs the exegesis, which, in turn, frames the five essay-length, ecoculturally themed creative nonfiction pieces that I have developed for submission to literary journals. The creative nonfiction pieces, as both developmental research and outcomes of this project, were regularly informed and transformed by the textual analysis of the exemplar texts and the provisional theoretical framework of the exegesis, testing and retesting the valence of ecocritical and environmental psychology connections in emerging creative nonfiction contexts. This process aligns with the ecocritical project of Serpil Opperman (2011): 'bringing theory into praxis for new conceptualisations' with the understanding that 'theory provides conceptual frameworks in which we think about and formulate the world' (p. 159).

This process of theoretically charged creativity is not only an 'iterative cyclic web', according to Hazel Smith and Roger Dean (2009, p.2), but is open to reversal and allows for multiple entry points in the process (p. 19). They explain that 'publication, for example, might result in a reversion to the ideas stage' (Smith & Dean, 2009, p. 20). In Chapter 6: Diffraction — creative practice case study, I discuss how a re-entry occurred in this process after *Pilgrimage to Frog Hollow* was published and how, after working on a piece

that placed a significant emphasis on the reflective mode, I became interested in looking for strategies to express greater dynamism and tighter compression of modes in the next piece.

This flexible iterative cycle lends itself to the requirements of situated research favoured by Astrida Neimanis et al. (2015, p. 88), where new sensory, associative or mutable (responsive) information may need to be incorporated at various unexpected stages. For example, in *Locating the nonfiction of place*, Robert Root (2008) refers to the 'feeling that is excited in someone by moving through [a] particular terrain' (p. 32), which will be different for an 'insider' or an 'outsider' (p. 31) and 'confronts the writer not only with what she [sic] observes but also with who she [sic] is' (p. 35). This occurred repeatedly in my own practice in response to both environmental stimuli and life events that seemed either linked to or comparable with our relationship to our environments, such as being confronted by the sudden life-threatening illness of my daughter, a global pandemic, the need to move to a satellite city, and a devastating flood (in that order). So, while iteration occurred during the creation of one piece, the space between the others left ample room for ideational, theoretical, technical and identity/relational revision, in keeping with the objective of seeking openness to ecocultural transformation.

Chapter 4: Literature review

When I first began to question in what ways Australian writers of creative nonfiction from settler backgrounds can cohesively convey ecocultural identities that are open to or demonstrate transformation, I knew that I needed first to understand the difficult relationship between our idea of our selves in relation to our environments and the implications of our subjectivity on our environments. In addition, I was interested in understanding how this subjectivity develops into identity and how the expression of this participates in contributing to culturally recognisable discursive environments. The environmental psychologists and the ecocritics provided key information about the role of culture and nature in developing and understanding identities and the ecocritics, along with the creative nonfiction writer–practitioners, suggested a range of approaches and strategies for not only representing identity but for pushing the creative nonfiction genre to question its role in affirming or transforming it as well. What became apparent in my research was that the three streams I would come to consider as essential to informing my practice — ecocriticism, environmental psychology and the heterogeneous strategies of creative nonfiction — were just beginning (after about five decades in the making) to coalesce in a transdisciplinary pool that is increasingly being recognised as the fluid emergence of an 'ecocultural framework'.

To show how this framework has developed to inform my research and practice, I travel back to the wellspring of ecocriticism and follow its push to move beyond the limitations of subjective representation before watching it swell over its blockages to branch into an ecocultural literary theory that views literature as 'cultural ecology'. I visit the place where environmental psychology first found itself, quite literally, in person–place relationships and chart its winding course beyond the parochial and the performative into the formation of 'ecocultural identity' before sitting on the banks beside practitioners of creative nonfiction as they attempt to capture the defining features of its protean form, sieving and straining, as it trickles into discussions of 'literature's ecocultural function'. Collectively, these diverse disciplines are recognising the nature of the existential crisis we find ourselves (human and more-than-human) facing, as we have in truth always faced everything — together. And their response, pooled, is appropriately ecocultural.

4.1 Ecocriticism: Subjectivity in the posthuman turn

To understand how subjectivity in creative works that aim to expose and decentre anthropocentric perspectives can be problematic, yet paradoxically necessary and arguably vital to the transformation of ecocultural identity, we must first understand how its central preoccupations and suggested solutions have developed over time.

Ecocriticism formed as a cohesive theoretical framework in the 1990s, chiefly in response to a growing sense of environmental crisis (Buell et al., 2011, p. 417). While the contemporary field draws on cross-disciplinary and hybrid theoretical approaches, the work of cultural theorist Raymond Williams can be pointed to as foundational (Buell et al., 2011, p. 418). It was Williams (1973) who noted the significance of a shift in the perceived division between culture and nature in post-industrial British literature and 'a new kind of alienation' that would permeate and influence the tradition of writing about 'nature' in the literature that followed (Buell et al., 2011, p. 150). Similarly, Williams' (1961) writing addressed the cultural dominance of polarising and universalising dichotomies such as 'reality/creativity', 'world/man [sic]', 'artist/scientist', 'emotional/rational' and 'subjectivity/objectivity' (pp. 31–39), leading him to speculate that 'we have to think, rather, of human experience as both objective and subjective, in one inseparable process' (p. 36).

Referring to the conceptual disconnections and cultural 'homogeneity' or 'assimilation' that Williams attributed to the capitalist project (Williams & McGuigan, 2015, p. 159), Martin Ryle (2011) contends that Williams 'reminds us that the cultural taste for 'nature' arose and flourished in societies that have systematically and ruthlessly exploited natural resources' (p. 50). This project responds to Williams' preoccupations, which have since provoked a pressing array of ecocritical approaches put forward for addressing them, most of which call for thinking beyond 'anthropocentrism' towards what is often called 'posthumanism', which Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin (2015) suggest is 'the courage to imagine new ways in which human and non-human societies, understood as being ecologically connected, can be creatively transformed' (p. 236). For example, Astrida Neimanis, Cecilia Åsberg and Johan Hedrén (2015), who identify 'alienation and intangibility … and compartmentalization of "the environment"' (p. 67) as two problems continuing to persist in dominant Western culture, borrow from posthumanist and trans/postdisciplinary theories to suggest that 'creative work as research' (p. 71) can respond with 'attention to diverse imaginaries' and develop 'citizen humanities' (p. 90).

In common with Serpil Oppermann (2011, p. 160), Neimanis et al. (2015) urge creative projects to employ 'situatedness', the act of considering 'more-than-human' systems and differently positioned subjectivities within shared environments (p. 88). This builds on the early ecofeminist work of Donna Haraway (1988) and her rallying cry for the deployment of 'situated knowledges' in which objectivity can be known not in totality or relatively but 'partially' from the body as a responsible, accountable, engaged site within a web, not in isolation but as part of communities (p. 590). Similarly, the act of situating humans in relationship with their sociohistorical and environmental conditions was also a valued strategy in Williams' critical and creative works (Ryle, 2011, p. 46). Through theoretically informed creative pieces, this project seeks to generate such responses by situating the narrating–narrated self in a self-aware interplay between subjective (experiential) and objective (informative) understanding. Reflecting on this approach in the project's critical work also accepts Opperman's (2011) offering of 'entanglement' (p. 158) — of theory, practice and reflection — as a tool for depolarising theory/practice dichotomies and accepting the potential offered by both a heterogeneic theoretical field (p. 154) and creative genre.

Like Oppermann (2011), Neimanis et al. (2015) and Wendy Wheeler (2008), Timothy Morton (2012) also identifies the need to embrace heterogeneity in communicating 'connectedness' (p. 22) through 'ecological thought' (p. 23). Morton's 'mesh' (p. 28) equates with the 'entanglement' of Oppermann (2011, p. 158) and Neimanis et al. (2015, p. 2), while his concept of the 'strange stranger' (p. 38) re-describes 'posthumanism' without the temporality or the centrality of humanity that might still be implied. Similarly, his 'coexistentialism' (p. 47) mirrors Wheeler's (2008) 'ecophenomenology' (p. 137).

However, while Morton resists a systematic approach, Wheeler embraces it. Responding to accusations of ecocritical relativism, Oppermann (2011, p. 154) suggests Wheeler's biosemiotics, which draws on Peircean semiotics, as a cohesive starting point for a framework. In this, humans are nodes enacting a recursive interplay between inner and outer worlds or 'semiospheres', and 'recursive' 'abductive logic' is valued in meaning-making (Wheeler, 2008, p. 147). Wheeler (2011) extends this process of interpretative exchange to include all organisms from an internal biological level to external environmental interactions, noting that in humans recursive 'communication' is 'both natural *and* cultural' (p. 272). As recursion is a distinctive feature of creative nonfiction,

borrowing tools from a biosemiotic framework presents opportunities for this project to experiment with representation in a way that reflexively and consciously considers the textual and cultural qualities of environments. In a practical sense, this allows the project's creative nonfiction pieces to draw attention to the way in which the narrator's first-person subjectivity is re/created in an interplay between environmental interactions in significant places and a set of unique sociocultural and ecological conditions. Similarly, in the interlacing of personal narrative with more objective 'information' about the ecological features of these places, the writing aims to reveal a parallel in how the narrating self has constructed meaning and identity over time and place with how human knowledge systems construct and transmit information about environments.

Further to this, the project demonstrates the important development brought to ecocriticism by Hubert Zapf (2020) in his expansion of Wheeler's biosemiotics into an ecocultural framework that considers the 'ecosemiotic complexity' (p. 53) of literature — acting within the function of individual texts and in their relationship to each other and to readerships — defining this Peircean-derived 'triadic' (p. 61) exchange as the basis for declaring literature 'cultural ecology' (p. 52). Regarding literary texts as 'ecological metanarratives of their culture' (p. 64), Zapf reconnects the 'interpretant' to the 'creative process' (p. 61) of ecocultural transformation and locates this 'in the cognitive-emotional participation of the reader in the textual process' (p. 64). He explains:

> From the microstructure of tropes to the macrostructure of narratives, the imaginative processes of texts are shaped by the tensions and connecting patterns of living interrelationships, which transgress the separations of hegemonic discourses and release creative energies that can be activated for the self-criticism and self-renewal of the cultural ecosystem. (Zapf, 2020, p. 64)

As nodes with the potential for overwhelming destruction or transformation, it seems pertinent to make obvious to humans the terms of their subjectivity and their agency in regulating the expression of the cognitive functions that interact with and shape their environments to pursue what Zapf refers to as literature's 'potential of self-correction and self-renewal' (p. 54). This is where the emergence of an ecocultural framework crosses over with the preoccupations of an ecocritical framework to suggest opportunities for the investigation, representation and transformation of ecocultural identities.

4.2 Environmental psychology: Place attachment and ecocultural identity

As discussed, ecocriticism's early concerns about the possibility of subjectivity reaffirming anthropocentrism have been answered by more recent ecocritical insight into the process of interpretative exchange that takes place in human–environment interactions and expressions. Furthermore, the ecocritics have suggested that literature plays a vital role in exposing this exchange and draws parallels between ecological processes in physical and discursive environments. In recognising the agency of the human as a node in these exchanges, it is essential to identify what constitutes the development and expression of such a node. To this end, it is helpful to trace the contributions of environmental psychology to the transdisciplinary composition an ecocultural framework and identify the course that humans have taken to understanding their conceptions of themselves (their identities) through this framework.

The field of environmental psychology emerged in the early 1970s and incorporated a range of approaches and perspectives recognising 'that person–place influences are both mutual and crucial' (Gifford, 2014, p. 543). The cognitive processes behind this environmental meaning-making became the specific focus of environmental psychologist Harry Heft's informative case study of 2013. In this, Heft examines cartographic maps from different cultures to show the benefits of applying a dynamic transactional model of psychological inquiry. He postulates that the way humans perceive and relate to their environment is a dynamic process that mirrors the ecological sciences' understanding of 'constitutive exchange' and develops through transactions involving 'ecological inheritance' to become the 'underlying tools that structure thinking' (Heft, 2013, p. 23). In this model, humans are understood to be open to both biological and sociocultural influences all through life and in all spheres.

In asking the question, in what ways can Australian writers of creative nonfiction from settler backgrounds cohesively convey ecocultural identities that are open to or demonstrate transformation, Heft's work opens up a concern central to this project: if the inheritance of environmental cognition is in part culturally transmitted, how reliant is human cognition on attachment to place for openness to connectedness, entanglement and situatedness — and how might the exchange, mediated through literary strategies such as metaphor, be transformed or reasserted in creative nonfiction works? An examination of the place-based exemplar texts (discussed in Chapter 5: Contextual analysis — exemplar

texts) provides insight into how five Australian creative nonfiction writers consider these questions. In considering each writer's deliberate positioning of self in relation to place, the research aims to identify how each writer accumulates and arranges experience and information to communicate shifts and re/developments in their place attachment and identity and how their use of metaphor performs or transforms as a transmitter of their inherited environmental cognitions.

While debate about the exact significance of place attachment abounds in both ecocritical and environmental psychology, ecocritic Axel Goodbody (2011) addresses the proposition made by Ursula Heise (2008) — and shared with Morton (2012) — that in a world of increased globalisation and human migrations, humans need to learn to think in terms of global rather than local attachments and relations to place. This project's creative pieces contribute to this dialogue by seeking to understand the effects of geographically contained transience on the narrating self's own place attachment and identity, aligning with Goodbody's argument that ignoring local attachments 'ignores … collective memory and individual psychology' (p. 66).

The project also takes into account the significant role that symbolic interactions play in determining how attached humans become to their environments, as investigated in the studies conducted by Bernardo Hernández et al. (2007, p. 318), and recognises that the more attached to a place a human is, the more likely they are to form a 'place identity' (p. 310), which also contributes to an individual and collective 'environmental identity' (EID) in the case studies conducted by Susan Clayton (2015, p. 230). It also takes into account that this transactional process may work in reverse, as postulated by Gerard Kyle, Jinhee Jun and James Absher (2019) in the investigations in which they used a Place Attachment Scale to collect data on the relationship between 'cognitive' (thoughts, beliefs, meanings), 'conative' (function, dependence) and 'affective' (emotion) dimensions of human–place relationships. In these studies, they found that the cognitive dimension expressed as place identity also drove place attachment (Kyle et al., 2019, p. 1020). Employing a social identity approach, Kyle et al. assert that humans need 'congruence' or 'self-verification' between their own and 'perceived' 'meanings associated with their identity' (p. 1020).

This aligns with Clayton's (2015) findings that the more 'salient' and 'socially motivated' an EID, the more likely a threat to place will be taken as a 'threat to self-concept' (p. 234). The challenge here for identities steeped in dominant cultural cognitions,

such as the narrating self in this project's creative pieces, lies in sitting with the discomfort of such a threat. As Christine Norton (2009) explains, Western culture's disconnection from its relationships with the natural environment betrays 'an attempt to avoid vulnerability' (p. 142). Again, heterogeneic and transdisciplinary understanding is useful here. As Dan McAdams' (2011) work in narrative therapy shows, humans are capable of holding together an identity that is not always fully 'integrated' and often 'performative' but ultimately aimed at 'sense-making' (p. 102), a feature shared with creative nonfiction in the search for meanings that work in a temporal and spatial sense.

It is at this point that the work of environmental psychology (and the bioecological or social ecology models of human development that are outside the scope of this research; see Lerner et al., 2015, pp. 373–388) meet with identity theory more generally — where, as ecocultural communications researcher Melissa M Parks (2020a) points out, the adjacent fields of sociology, law and feminism (among others in a long list of disciplines identified in her operational guide *Explicating ecoculture: Tracing a transdisciplinary focal concept*, 2020b) can contribute to the development of an 'ecocultural identity framework' (2020a, p. 107) that looks beyond the 'normative', 'positive' and 'performative' prerequisite of an environmental identity (p. 107) to accommodate the 'subconscious' dimension of identities (p. 108) and reveal, in its recognition of 'intersectionality' (p. 104), its connections to the 'relations of power' (p. 107) that constitute it and that it may perpetuate or transform. While Parks recognises Clayton's contribution as pivotal, she asserts that the concept of 'environmental identity' along with other 'eco-identities' has neglected to recognise 'the relation between anthropocentrism and forms of systemic oppression and exploitation' (p. 106). She notes that 'the ecocultural identity framework, in contrast, broadens the scope of identity theories by attending to relationships among ecology and culture in non-normative and transdisciplinary ways' (Parks, 2020a, p. 107).

The chosen theorists here agree with the premise that identity is dynamic and seeks internal and external congruence. In searching for shared cultural narratives that drive change behaviour, this project considers Clayton's (2015) assertion that 'social value' plays a driving role in contributing towards an 'environmental identity' (p. 235). It extends this, drawing on Parks' development of an 'ecocultural identity framework' (2020a, p. 107) to identify how the writers of exemplar texts look for opportunities to reveal where their identity intersects with other aspects of their identity, how this is influenced (or not) by relations to power structures, and how both conscious and subconscious ecocultural

transformation might be noticed in the texts. Through a selection of creative nonfiction strategies, I apply this process in the development of my own work as well.

4.3 Creative nonfiction: Transformational strategies

To understand how creative nonfiction makes a unique contribution to a cultural ecology capable of illuminating ecocultural identity transformation, as identified within an ecocultural identity framework, we must first scope the emergence of creative nonfiction in an Australian context before considering the strategies it offers.

The place of creative nonfiction in negotiating personal and cultural identities proves elusive in Australia, though it is more developed in the US and UK (Joseph, 2016, p. xi). Defining creative nonfiction as 'cinematic' and 'rigorous' … 'writing that envelops intellect, analysis, empathy and grace', academic and creative nonfiction teacher Sue Joseph (2016, pp. xvi–xvii) invites further development as a contribution to Australia's 'cultural pathway' (p. xvii). This project responds to that invitation and, unlike most of the writers interviewed by Joseph for her book *Behind the text: Candid conversations with Australian creative nonfiction writers*, accepts the term as a suitable description of this genre.

Joseph notes that despite the Australian lack of creative nonfiction analysis, the genre enjoys popularity — a popularity that David Carlin (2017) attributes to the 'performative and heterogenic' (p. 8) qualities it affords writers, specifically social scientists responding to the 'Anthropocene' with transdisciplinary experimentation. Such experimentation in Australian creative writing is critical, according to Marcus Bussey et al. (2018), for responding to 'postnormal times' with 'dialogous engagements' (p. 1) and 'anticipatory imaginaries' that 'move across a landscape that is empirically informed and creatively charged' (p. 3.). This is echoed internationally by Lee Gutkind (2017), the writer popularly known as the 'Godfather behind Creative Nonfiction' (*Creative Nonfiction Magazine*, n.d.), who suggests that 'creative nonfiction may well be the form for our times … because it is a way to evaluate and express facts with clarity, artfulness and honesty' (p. 3).

Where Carlin (2017) favours the lyrical and personal essay forms (p. 42), ecocritic Timothy Clark (2019) exercises more caution, questioning the ethics of highly subjective language representing more-than-human subjectivities outside fiction. He suggests that creative nonfiction writers can still innovate without compromising reader trust if 'aesthetic consumerism' and the resultant virtue signalling are avoided (Clark, 2019, p.

39). Clark maintains that creative texts keep 'their force by implicating major philosophical and political questions — about identity, property, anthropocentric concepts of what is "important" [… and] by juxtaposing various genres and modes of knowledge' (p. 42). Gutkind (2017) is similarly committed to not 'paving the way for alternative facts' (p. 2); however, on the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity, he asserts that 'this tension is at the heart of creative nonfiction itself' (p. 1) and, furthermore, that 'science itself (not unlike a work of creative nonfiction) is an assembling of somewhat subjective components into a story' (2016, p. 1).

This project takes the ethics of 'truthfulness' seriously within the freedom provided by Wheeler's (2008) Peircean 'abductive logic' (p. 147) and the methodological tool of 'diffraction' that Australian academic and creative writing teacher Kay Are (2018) borrows from Haraway. Diffraction in creative nonfiction and thesis writing offers the opportunity to consider how subjective change and identity development happen in relationship with the 'objective' or material world, bringing to attention the process of 'naturalcultural' 'co-creation' (Are, 2018, pp. 5, 1). This process contributes to the creative pieces and the narrating self 'acquiring understanding of the social, historical, political and economic contexts that accrete in these objects [of the environment and the creative works themselves], and from which these objects are extracted' (Are, 2018, p. 3) — a venture into writing that addresses the environmental alienation identified by Williams and, hopefully, one of shared cultural and natural value.

As a diverse range of scholars and writers across disciplines are now identifying the need to progress a transdisciplinary, interconnected and situated approach to communicating about the environmental crisis we find ourselves in, the narrative strategies offered by creative nonfiction are, as environmental humanities scholar Julia Martin (2020) contends, coming to be seen as fundamentally crucial within the ecocultural functions of literature — in response to the preoccupations of ecocriticism and as part of the cultural ecology outlined here in Section 4.1: Ecocriticism: Subjectivity in the posthuman turn. In her essay 'Why I write creative nonfiction', Martin explains how a range of creative nonfiction strategies contribute to her research and practice, three of which are also central to mine — the ability to situate subjectivity (through stance) (p. 230) and the opening up of (ecocultural) identities to showing the terms of their cognitions and potential for transformation; the interdisciplinarity (p. 219) afforded by heterogeneous modes to create a

'composite picture' (p. 229); and the use of metaphor to convey the connections between these strategies and their messaging. Martin explains:

> the prose can itself be a vehicle of meaning … So in my own experiments, I'm continually trying out forms that might work to represent interconnectedness, rather than simply to discuss it. This often takes place through choices regarding metaphor and narrative structure. Metaphor is, of course, about connections, often emotional ones, and it recognises the resonances between disparate areas of experience, without being too explicit. This makes it an obvious vehicle for representing eco-social interconnectedness. (p. 229)

Together, these strategies offer a viable approach to achieving a correspondence between modal patterning and metaphor to progress or explore an ecocultural theme and convey a cohesive ecocultural identity that is open to or demonstrates transformation. In so doing, there is the potential to meet the emerging and, arguably, urgent need to consider the relationship between culture, nature/environments and identity in Australian creative nonfiction. This research is, furthermore, a novel contribution coming from the creative field rather than the environmental humanities, where exploration of creative nonfiction to make transdisciplinary content more accessible tends to dominate current ecocultural research.

I now briefly identify the definitions and descriptions of the creative nonfiction strategies of stance, modal patterning and metaphor that experienced practitioners have contributed to my research and practice. Where necessary, I make distinctions between how these terms are generally used and how I use them.

Narrative stance

Through the voice of the self, the point of view or the narrating 'I', a creative nonfiction writer automatically conveys, whether consciously or subconsciously, an ecocultural identity and relationship of self to the more-than-human and their environment. Instructor–practitioners Sondra Perl and Mimi Schwartz (2006) note that 'in creative nonfiction, in particular, we are not making universal claims of Truth, but rather presenting one person's truths … a voice that speaks the words that, as Adrienne Rich says, have "the heft of our living behind them"' (p. 69). Such living invariably reveals itself in the choices the narrating 'I' makes in the text, whether intentional or not.

While ecocritical and ecocultural theorists debate the danger of reasserting anthropocentrism by positioning human subjectivity at the centre of a text, practitioners

often make use of ‘stance’ or a positioning of the self to reprioritise other subjectivities or information and show a relationship between the composition and terms of selfhood to the material and/or other subjectivities represented. Perl and Schwartz (2006) refer to the stance or stances a writer might take within a creative nonfiction text diagrammatically as ‘I on center stage’, ‘I sharing the stage’, ‘I near the sidelines’ and ‘I offstage’ (p. 62). Through the employment of other modes and devices such as ‘dialogue’, ‘quotations’ and ‘challenges’ to the narrating point of view, the stance may shift (Perl & Schwartz, 2006, pp. 63–65) and invite what Zapf (2020) refers to as ‘polyphonic complexity’ (p. 60). How this stance is positioned may either contribute to maintaining a unified voice across modes or communicate a sense of fragmentation and, through situatedness, may be more or less open to transformation.

Philip Gerard (2001) further defines narrative stance with more granularity, describing it as what happens when the writer ‘combine[s] point of view, tone, and … *psychic distance*’ (p. 53), making it possible to look inward as well as outward ‘like the aperture of a camera admitting more light to expose the film’ (p. 55). Looking beyond what he refers to as ‘the upright pronoun … the “I”’ (p. 51), Gerard explains how it is possible to develop a sense of the writer’s relationship to the story through experiments with point of view using, for example, pronouns in the second person (you) to convey a tone and strategic detachment that invites an ‘us’ reading and involves the reader in conscious participation (p. 56).

When referring to and using narrative stance in my research and creative practice, I consider the role of the expressed subjectivity in communicating a cohesive ecocultural theme, metaphor and identity and the techniques used to invite reader participation in the meaning-making.

Metaphor

In a creative nonfiction context, metaphor functions to repeatedly confirm the theme and consciously or subconsciously reveal cultural cognitions specific to the author’s worldview. In the most basic terms, Brenda Miller and Suzanne Paola (2019), authors of the influential creative nonfiction instructional guide *Tell it slant: Creating, refining and publishing creative nonfiction*, define metaphor as ‘the use of comparison’ (p. 179) and a ‘clustering’ of ‘associations’ that ‘seems fundamental to the way the human mind works’ (p.180). A more technical linguistic definition is offered by literary linguist Masako Hiraga (2004), who explains metaphor as ‘a mapping from a source to a target [and] this mapping

is a projection of image-schemas' that are culturally and linguistically influenced 'skeletal patterns or structures that recur in our sensory and motor experiences, perceptual interactions and cognitive operations' (p. 6). He also notes that these schemas become 'unconscious' and 'automatic' in their use but notes the capacity of literature to draw our awareness to the conditions that produce them (Hiraga, 2004, p. 13).

With these schemas in mind, it is easy to see why, as Miller and Paola (2019) point out, 'organisation through image or metaphor has become much more common' in creative nonfiction (p. 180). Whether a text is highly segmented or unified and fluid, the role of metaphor in linking and organising is an indispensable tool that can enhance and emphasise the unconscious automatic schemas we live by just as well as it can interrogate them. Drawing on linguist George Lakoff's 2008 contribution to conceptual metaphor theory, in which these schemas are identified as culturally shared, modified and understood (p. 26), fellow linguists Zoya Rezanova and Konstantin Shilyaev (2015) use the term 'megametaphor' (p. 31), borrowed from Paul Werth (1994, p. 97) to understand how conceptual metaphors can function as the organising, overarching or thematic metaphor of a text. Megametaphors, argue Rezanova and Shilyaev (2015), in their communication of cognitive structures, help to provide a text with sense-making 'coherence'. When supported by 'micrometaphors' (Werth, 1994, p. 97) — which Rezanova and Shilyaev describe as 'metaphorically used lexemes' or elements of language (from words to sentences to paragraphs) with non-concrete contextual meanings — megametaphors also provide a text with 'cohesion', a clear linking together of the whole (2015, pp. 31–33).

Combined with the final feature of creative nonfiction that I consider here — the availability of heterogeneous and transdisciplinary modes — metaphor offers a unique opportunity to show how we are constituted by our environment and the reverse, and the ways we make sense of it. This will, as Zapf (2020) explains, expose how metaphor functions in an ecosemiotic framework:

> The 'metaphorical' reading of one form or pattern and its transference to another is at the core of creative activity both in processes of life and in processes of literature and art, and 'creation via metaphor' (Wheeler 2011, p. 275) constitutes a common ground between them … Literature becomes a paradigmatic cultural form representing the play of similarities and differences which make up the ecosemiotic processes of life itself. (p. 56)

This accounts for the use of metaphor so explicitly in texts that pattern themselves literally to a form or transform an existing pattern to fulfil a transformed point of view.

Modes and modal patterning

To understand the use of modes in creative nonfiction, we must first understand the broader aim of creative nonfiction as explained by one of its greatest promoters, Lee Gutkind (2012), who writes: 'the general tenet of creative nonfiction is that the writer is permitted and encouraged to use the techniques of the fiction writer in order to communicate facts and ideas' (p. 94). It is the fulfilment of this tenet that gives the creative nonfiction writer unprecedented access to ways of communicating these facts and ideas (along with observations, experiences and feelings) more commonly associated with any other genre in combinations that may never have been used before. The Oxford dictionary of literary terms defines creative nonfiction as a 'broad but identifiable kind of literary method, mood, or manner', going on to give the examples of mode as 'comic', 'pastoral' and 'didactic' (Baldick, 2015, p. 236). To this, creative nonfiction practitioners would add the poetic, transactional, reflective and so on, demonstrating the heterogeneity that the genre typifies and the transdisciplinarity it facilitates.

As observed in discussions of metaphor, the forms or shapes (organised patterns) these modes occupy often come to communicate a particular cognitive schema or position or, indeed, a conscious or subconscious ecocultural identity. However, in the hands of creative nonfiction writers, the meeting of modes offers opportunities to connect them to new metaphors and organise them into new patterns of meaning using the organising strategies available to the genre. Instructor–practitioner Robert Root (2007) offers a delineation of the organising strategies commonly used in creative nonfiction, citing them as 'juxtaposition … to comment back and forth', 'parallelism, alternating or intertwining one continuous strand' as a means of comparison for similarity to another, 'accumulation … to add or enrich', 'journaling … writing in episodes or reconstructing the journal' and 'patterning, choosing an extra-literary design' (p. 404). These delineations inform both my contextual analysis and my practice, with one significant variation to the understanding of 'patterning' as posited by Root and arguably espoused in Miller and Paola's (2019) description of the 'hermit crab essay', which wears a pre-existing shell as its shape (p. 127). When I refer to modal patterning, I am referring to an organising of modes that may follow a design as explicit as an extra-literary or literary form, or that may simply move in a way that implies a form and metaphor. This modal patterning may also reveal or

disrupt a form that correlates with the thematic, conceptual or megametaphor of the piece. Therefore, in the spirit of transdisciplinarity, my operational definition of modal patterning is closer to that used by Professor of Creative Writing Jane Allison (2019) in her fiction-focused book *Meander, spiral, explode: Design and pattern in narrative*, where she draws on the definition provided by textile scholar Charlotte Jirousek: a '"skeleton" that organises the parts of the composition' (p. 70). The patterns of cognition contained within the megametaphor this modal patterning supports are more generally referred to as 'patterning' (as explained in Chapter 2: Key terms). Patterning, therefore, implicates an internal exchange between stance, metaphor and mode for its cohesive expression of the cognitions underpinning identity and for opening it up to or demonstrating transformation.

4.4 Literature review conclusion

A recurring feature common to the three streams of research conducted for this literature review has been the preoccupation with and value of understanding constitutive exchange in its various conceptions. For the ecocritics, writing that employs situatedness provides an opportunity to consciously observe and co-construct cognitive shifts that meaningfully transform how the self might conceive of and express environmental belonging through a process of ecosemiotic exchange. For the environmental psychologists, recognising constitutive exchange provides an opportunity to consider how attachment to a place contributes to identification with environments; it also exposes underlying cognitions or patterns of thinking and being in place that have structural linkages and impacts on environments. And, finally, for the creative writing practitioners, the heterogeneous possibilities generated by the possibility of intra-textual discursive exchange offer a field of rich opportunity to develop transformative conversations between disciplines, texts and experiences.

With this understanding of ecocriticism's preoccupation with human subjectivity and the creative transformation that ecocritics invite through the application of an ecocultural framework, along with an understanding of how environmental psychology has contributed to the emergent recognition of ecocultural identities, I will examine the ways that five settler Australian creative nonfiction writers use the strategies of stance, metaphor and modal patterning to cohesively convey ecocultural identities that are open to or demonstrate ecocultural transformation.

Chapter 5: Contextual analysis — exemplar texts

I now briefly examine three short essay-length creative nonfiction exemplar texts before offering an extended analysis of two book-length exemplars in the same genre. The three essay-length exemplar texts are *Triangulation: In ironbark country* by Inga Simpson (2016), *A vernacular landscape* by Caitlin Maling (2019) and *Owl* by Angela Rockel (2019). The two creative nonfiction book-length exemplar texts are *Position doubtful: Mapping landscape and memories* by Kim Mahood (2016a) and *The blue plateau: An Australian pastoral* by Mark Tredinnick (2009). All texts are by Australian authors from settler backgrounds, have been written in the past 15 years and demonstrate the qualities of situated knowledge within the Australian landscape. All include heterogeneic composition, interdisciplinary material, representations of identity and considered language for positioning the narrating self. Importantly, all texts offer variations in the writer's place attachment and environmental setting. In environmental psychology and ecocritical terms, these writers are conscious of exploring their ecocultural identity within the Australian landscape and have written what might be considered significant works in an emerging genre.

I have made a conscious decision to limit the scope of this research to only examine the works of writers from a settler background for two reasons. The first is out of respect for the precedence of First Nations scholars and practitioners when responding to representations of First Nations works that communicate connection to Country. The second is my concern with understanding how, as a representative of settler culture, I might become open to ecocultural transformation without perpetuating the violences inherent in settler narratives of belonging and environmental relationship and to commit in this way to walking the path of decolonisation.

Analysis of these texts draws on the hybrid theoretical framework offered at the nexus of ecocriticism, environmental psychology and creative nonfiction by the theorists previously referred to, informing the question: in what ways can Australian writers of creative nonfiction from settler backgrounds cohesively convey ecocultural identities that are open to or demonstrate transformation? My analysis considers how these writers achieve a correspondence between modal patterning and metaphor to progress or explore

an ecocultural theme. My brief analysis of the three essay-length pieces provides a broad taxonomic snapshot of the strategies these writers use. In the deeper analysis of the two book-length works I consider how these strategies are used to develop an ecocultural identity that gives voice to the creative nonfiction writer's role as a naturalcultural co-creator (Are, 2018). As creative nonfiction emerges as a form for facilitating dialogue about environmental alienation in an Australian context, the analysis considers how these modal patterns correlate with an ecocultural identity open to exposing and re-evaluating established landscape and nature-related tropes or mythologies. Therefore, in Chapter 6: Diffraction — creative works, I discuss my own creative practice in relation to the strategies at work in the writing examined in this contextual analysis.

5.1 Essay-length works

5.1.1 *Triangulation: In ironbark country*, Inga Simpson

In her 2016 creative nonfiction essay *Triangulation: In ironbark country*, Inga Simpson employs a memoirist's close narrative stance to reflect on her relationship with her parents' ironbark-dotted property, which she grew up on in central–west New South Wales. The emotional connection attributable to this close stance is established early in the piece when Simpson writes: 'Ironbarks are my heartwood' (p. 295). She then repeats this motif, which functions at the lexical level in micrometaphors, throughout the piece: 'I am made of ironbark and stone' and 'It is by the big ironbarks that I orient myself, get my bearings' (p. 303).

Returning to this motif performs two functions: it allows Simpson to re-establish her close stance when her perspective has taken a momentarily less central position and contributes to reinforcing the story's megametaphor of TREES ARE GUIDES. Using the ironbarks, a trigonometry station on the property and reference to Wiradjuri arborglyphs, Simpson sets up concrete points in the text from which to map the source domain to its target domain and the theme of the piece: *orientation is personal, natural and cultural*. This also connects the megametaphor to a narrative pattern — that of orientation through triangulation.

This pattern of triangulation is then employed at a modal level, guiding the reader to participate in the offered process of wayfinding through less familiar territory. In her practice-focused essay *In an emotional place*, Simpson (2014) writes that 'it requires more active reading, a kind of pleasurable, mental stretch to unpack a metaphor and see it in our

mind's eye' (p. 8). While the story contained within the essay is ultimately about her father's death, Simpson's blend of parallelism and accumulation as organising strategies facilitates her stepping away from the story of her father to tell a multifaceted story of the place, linking her ancestor's gold rush history to a personal recount of mining company exploration on her parents' property to the 'assault on the land' and 'displacement' that Wiradjuri people have experienced — a section that, in itself, oscillates between exposition, local history and memories of artefacts Simpson has encountered on the property. The result is both an acceptance of the legacy of her ways of knowing the place and a means to expose the exclusionary cultural construction of 'trigonometry' as a way of knowing (2016, p. 303).

This interlacing of factual, intertextual, historical — comfortable and uncomfortable — knowledge with her own experience or description of the place creates the space for Simpson to repeatedly expand the narrative view beyond her own scope and reconnect this to the personal or narrating 'I' even where this does not drive the contained story itself or where there are acknowledged silences and violences. It is through Simpson's maintenance of an intimate voice, oriented as she is by her landmarks, that she is able to traverse a deceptively broad range of modes with great subtlety, always returning to her own close stance. Together, these techniques geometrically fulfil the story's promised metaphor to achieve personal orientation through triangulation.

5.1.2 *A vernacular landscape*, Caitlin Maling

Western Australian writer Caitlin Maling draws on poetry, a genre in which she has published three books, to craft the creative nonfiction piece *A vernacular landscape* (2019). As short segments (ranging from 50 to 200 words) that appear on the page as expanded forms of poetic stanzas, Maling's arrangement immediately references the poetic form. This deliberate construction and its connection to the piece's vernacular theme is then asserted in the very first line: 'In poetry, we speak often of finding your voice' (p. 232). From that sentence the reader is ready to be attuned to it.

For the first two stanzas Maling's perspective (her stance as subject and narrator) is central — close — as she describes the regional peculiarities of her voice and her idiosyncrasies as a poet, before linking this vernacular identity to the Grey Shack Settlement in Nambung National Park, Western Australia, where she wrote her last book and that is described in 'a bureaucratic report' as being typified by 'vernacular building types' (p. 233). In so doing, she identifies the megametaphor as VOICE IS PLACE and begins

extending the source and target domains to the understanding that *a voice is only one voice of a place.*

The details of her family's relationship to the place as regular visitors are only revealed as the piece progresses, in stanzas that build on each other, interlocking to provide exterior histories from reports and ethnographies to local knowledge while sheltering Maling's personal story of intimate connection. This compressed poetic patterning, the joisting of accumulated modes, moving straight from description to intertextual quotation (spanning song, poetic theory, speech pathology, translation, architecture, history, ecology, law) to reflection and then back to personal narrative, happens at both an intra-stanza and inter-stanza level and is held together by association, juxtaposition and parallelism. An example of this occurs when Maling moves on from a stanza in which she describes the first time she went to the shacks with her now husband, on a trip with his university mates, where she developed glandular fever and lost her voice for two weeks afterwards. She begins the following stanza at the time of her next return several years later, drawing chiefly on local history and ecological information held together by observation and completed with brief, descriptive memoir:

> When I come back to the shacks to write this book, it is to a landscape under dual threats. John Selwood (a good Cervantes footy family name) and Roy Jones identify gentrification as the largest: the road introducing a new vernacular to the place not dependent on the cobbled together poetics of recycled iron and timber. The larger threat is global warming and the rising sea levels it brings, particularly dunal erosion under the winter king tides that have left a one-metre sheer sand drop from where the dune scrub ends and the pure beach begins (84–85)[1]. I have to leap this gap to take my daily morning and evening walks along the edge of the ocean, trying to notice changes in the patterns of the weed and debris washed up. (p. 235)

Harnessing her description of the place's rough-and-ready-made shacks to the new 'occa-ness' of her accent since her stepfather's death, Maling's megametaphor is further confirmed through direct instances of parallelism and micrometaphor (likening the workings of the buildings to her voicebox — 'a body turned inside out to the eye') and supported by the macro-structure that her organising strategies pull together, which are

[1] Selwood, J, & Jones, R. (2001). 'Western Australian battlers and coastal squatter settlements: Heritage from below versus regulation from above', *Prairie Perspectives: Geographical Essays*, *13,* 78–85.

clearly indebted to that other working of her voice: poetry (p. 233). At the stanza level, again, each shift in focus is supported by the gliding movement she attributes to the 'musicality of dipthongs' in her writing, noticing the way her 'language … relies on the way things flow together' (p. 232).

Bolstering Maling's greater theme, though, is the issue of accessibility and risk. The dunes the shacks sit on are crumbling, claimed by the sea. Her stepfather, who first took her to Grey, has died. Maling's singular 'voicing' of the place's history risks adding to 'invisibility' of the Noongar people's enduring claim (p. 236). Not to speak in her stepfather's voice of this disappearing place 'is to risk finding that grief unfathomable, inarticulate, stuck in the shifting nasal vowel sounds never reaching the end of the word' (p. 238). Maling does not introduce this implication at the start but builds to it, as if towards the apex of a roof. The micrometaphors she uses to get there, however, contribute to the piece's overall coherence and cohesion.

5.1.3 *Owl*, Angela Rockel

Unlike most of the discrete-yet-interconnected pieces in Angela Rockel's book *Rogue intensities* (2019), *Owl* appears to fulfil the extra-organisational pattern of the traditional narrative arc of rising tension and resolution with Rockel recounting the discovery and recovery of an injured owl. However, written as testament to one month (February) in the first year of a five-year cycle — through which Rockel documents and reflects on the seasonal and thematic shifts on the eastern Tasmanian farm where she lives, after migrating from New Zealand in the early 1980s — *Owl* shares a feature common to all the pieces: it is conceived via direct response to a temporally specific environmental stimulus. In Rockel's (2021) own words, it is a 'divination by attention; allowing that opens out'. This technique, as a modal patterning process, is referred to variously by creative nonfiction and fiction practitioners as 'the whorl of reflection' (Bascom, 2013), the 'looping essay' (Miller & Paola, 2019, p. 185) and even as 'fractal' (Allison, 2019, p. 221). For Rockel (2021), it is a process she follows with the aim of bringing together two different things she has noticed that month 'to see how they converse and interact'. In this story, that second thing is the subplot of a friend who passes away during the telling, propelling Rockel to develop the source in the megametaphor of THE OWL'S WOUNDEDNESS IS THE AUTHOR'S WOUNDEDNESS into a target domain that progresses the theme of *healing is not perfectly restoring — that accepting* TO LIVE*, to be connected to the network of life,* IS TO LIVE WITH DAMAGE.

While framed by the story of the owl, the piece begins as a highly descriptive and partially historical account of the bushland Rockel and her husband are regenerating on their farm before moving into a memoir-driven storytelling mode interspersed with highly integrated factual and reflective modes. Rockel achieves vocal consistency through the maintenance of a close stance and a declarative selfhood within both the physical and discursive landscape: 'Our farm sits on the ridge,' she begins, moving into the owl's discovery with:

> This time last year we went for a walk there … I usually walk alone, on the road or in the bush closer to the house — except that I was restless and heartsore and full of dread at news from Aotearoa New Zealand that my friend M was sick. (2019, pp. 14–15)

This self then follows associative connections to progress the narrative, investigating the implications of juxtaposition and parallelism on her story through poetry, description, memoir, genealogy (her family name means 'owl' in languages originating in Northern Europe), spoken quotes, animal husbandry, and reflection.

In a traditional arc of rising tension and resolution, we might be left wondering at the message in the metaphor, left to decipher the internalised moment of change for ourselves. Yet Rockel closes the psychic distance, smoothly mediating the relationship between her stance as both central and shared. In so doing, she allows her own reflection on the owl to wheel outward and inward, drawing on micrometaphor to maintain coherence (and make ecocultural connections) as she prefaces the death she is about to process in the story of her friend:

> It's a very young self who is summoned by the wounded owl, looking as if for the first time into the face of damage and death, understanding that some hurts are irreversible and must be accommodated, somehow. Feeling the dread of that knowledge, bone-deep and throwing out links across all space and time to other damages suffered and inflicted, intended and unintended, to persons both human non-human, and to communities and cultures. (p. 18)

This subversion of the arc's peak pays homage to the multiple alternative structures or patterns to be observed in nature beyond the wave. As Jane Allison (2019) writes, 'spirals are actually fractal, too; they don't branch, but do self-replicate at different scales, winding inward or outward' (p. 222). Rockel makes her intention here explicit — that the space she creates in the narrative for generating intimate reflection owes its existence to the structure

of life she seeks to mimic, writing ‘Humans love to identify with nodes in the fractal soul of things as it buds up, buds down to infinity, its parts at once discrete and unified, continuing. Universes come and go’ (p. 20). It is, therefore, not the owl alone that the reader looks to for metaphorical coherence and cohesion, but the owl’s woundedness as its story winds along a regenerative path to an unexpected place of healing and acceptance — as ‘out of the background twigs and chiaroscuro emerged the form of a masked owl — my death, my life regarding me, calm, alert, wild’ (p. 21).

5.2 Book-length works

5.2.1 *The blue plateau: An Australian pastoral,* Mark Tredinnick

Mark Tredinnick wrote *The blue plateau: An Australian pastoral* (2009) during and after his time living in the area north-west of Sydney that is known on Australian maps as the Blue Mountains. Tredinnick, who was in his late thirties at the time, moved to the area from Sydney in 1998 with his partner and lived there until 2005. While there, he started a new family with the idea that it would become home. In Tredinnick’s own words, he had moved there ‘to leave the city behind, a place that never wanted as much of me as I had wanted of it’ (p. 7) while being haunted by an understanding he manages to articulate by the end of the book: that ‘all settlers belonging in Australia must feel subjunctive’ (p. 236). In the nomenclature of environmental psychologists Bernardo Hernández et al. (2007), Tredinnick’s environmental identity could be defined as *non-native with short-term length of residence* (p. 310; my emphasis).

Tredinnick’s (2009) narrative of arrival lends the book its overarching motivation: the quest and conditions for belonging in a new place. However, it is Tredinnick’s observations of his external world and stories of those who live or have lived there that steer the book’s direction. Henceforth, he becomes witness to the place as representative of constant change, modification and, consequently, loss. This position, of narrator as ‘witness’ (p. 141) or translator of the expression of place rather than as central subject, is reflected in Tredinnick’s (2003b) PhD thesis, constructed alongside writing of the book:

> The good essayist is represented most truthfully in their work … not within the letter ‘I’ in the essay, but in the nature of the work, the way the strokes are made, the way the view is chosen … Essays work in the first person … but if they are any good, they do not write about their author. The essayist — at least the good one — speaks not about personal experience, but through it. (p. 36)

While Tredinnick's preoccupation with the language of place provokes him to categorise his writing as lyrical essay-writing, his narrative stance resembles the literary journalist's, where the narrator's own character is revealed through the privileged point of view, sometimes from within the story and sometimes outside of it (Perl & Schwartz, 2006, p. 71). This distancing treats other characters — both human and more-than-human (particularly the landscape as a more-than-human character) — as equally important selves with the capacity to destabilise and re-sculpt the unfinished narrator's perspective. To this end, Tredinnick (2003b, p. 52) borrows the term 'the middle voice' from interdisciplinary postcolonial scholar Paul Carter (1996, p. 31) to explain its potential and his intention to collapse the subject–object binary. This technique, in its conscious decentring of the narrator's privileged (and cultural) point of view, reveals an ecocritical attention to reprioritising the more-than-human and to usurping coloniser notions of 'human ontological exceptionalism' (Neimanis et al., 2015, p. 71).

Tredinnick (2009) achieves this middle voice through segmentation, relying on the overarching organising system of 'extra-literary' 'patterning' to hold the book's internal organisation together (Root, 2007, p. 414). Based on the pattern of the pastoral genre, the book provides a cast of characters that populate the areas and land formations around the Blue Mountains (which Tredinnick calls 'the plateau', insisting on geologist Griffith Taylor's 1930s correct naming of 'the dissected sandstone plateau' and not real estate agents' later superlative misnomer [p. 10]). Organising the cast of 'characters' under headings that introduce features of the place — Valley, River, Catchment, Escarpment, Pasture, Fire, Home — Tredinnick prioritises the landscape as primary, its character shaped by geological occurrences and interactions as much the people that inhabit it.

In an early 'Valley' segment, 'Telling it', Tredinnick explains that he is telling others' stories as well as his own and that some of what he tells isn't story but 'broken pieces of a broken plateau' connected by his 'living for a time among them on a piece of ground where they all meet' (p. 11). This expository functions to deepen the prologue in which the megametaphor LANDSCAPE IS THE STORY/IES OF BELONGING is supported by micrometaphors that link processes of geomorphic change in the landscape to processes of human connection and the mutual shaping implicit in human–landscape relationships.

'I am a landscape of loss,' he begins. 'And so it is with the plateau … all we can ever know is some of the parts … each an allusion to some kind of truth, most of it eroded long ago and borne away by slim and persistent streams' (pp. 1–2).

Tredinnick progresses this metaphor in which destruction and recreation are in an eternal relationship with each other through multiple organising techniques. These include parallelism, to move back and forth through time and themes, and accumulation, where time and themes step over each other, allowing room for the narrator's continual diffraction on self; place, understood through a multidisciplinary lens involving Indigenous perspectives and shared knowledge, local settler histories, and scientific knowledge; and the relationship of these to belonging and the more-than-human. Tredinnick (2003b) writes:

> A nonfiction writer imagines reality something like a geologist or archaeologist, for instance, or physicist, imagines it … they are imagining things that lie within what is observable — coherence or poetry or music; ancient, fragmentary, infinitesimal stories. (p. 48)

Literary theorist Jessica Ballantine (2014) proposes that this disruptive structuring process, or 'narrative strategy', acts as a 'fragmented cognitive frame' through which 'the veracity of our [human/cultural] cognitive approach is threatened' (pp. 128–130). In other words, Tredinnick uses his distanced storytelling stance to 'express his anxiety surrounding "truthful" representation' (Ballantine, 2014, p. 132). As a dubious inheritor of omniscience, his ability to zoom in close to another character from outside the story, adopt the voice of the character as if it were transcribed or use his own to reflect is a way of 'undermining the set-up' (Ballantine, 2014, p. 131). This depositing of perspectives and experiences into a layered landscape of shifting and traceable movements ensures that his geomorphic metaphor aligns itself with the movements of both culture and nature in its 'reciprocity and intersubjectivity' (Tredinnick, 2003b, p. 53) and retains a cautious distrust of established hegemonic norms.

Subsequently, Tredinnick (2009) rarely appears 'centre stage', to draw on Sondra Perl and Mimi Schwartz's (2006) description of close narrative stance, but occasionally makes an appearance as a character in some of these stories as an 'I sharing the stage' (p. 62). In these, he is either led (through the winding terrain around a dry Kanimbla creek bed, by horseback through Jim's valley), or he is affected (by a neighbour's death in a nearby bushfire, by the unsettling press of strong gusts or by a visceral encounter with a yellow-eyed frogmouth). For the most part, he maintains a middling-to-far 'psychic distance', as described by Philip Gerard (2001, p. 53), stepping between the positions of an 'I on the sidelines' and an 'I offstage' (Perl & Schwartz, 2006, p. 62). Direct journaling is

restricted to one character, a long-time valley inhabitant called May whom Tredinnick describes as having kept a 'journal of exile' (p. 60) while her husband, Les, 'a minor geomorphic force', was out 'exploding', 'dozing' and 'chiselling' roads through the 'stratigraphy of the mountain' (p. 140). Through the use of these micrometaphors to comment on May's journaling, Tredinnick maintains the metaphor's coherence and cohesion while shifting his stance to move in from the sidelines. It is in such moments of reflective exposition when he discusses and revises the nature of belonging, the meaning of home and leaving that Tredinnick is most present, most open to speaking in an intimate voice and reducing the psychic distance (p. 143). In his thesis, Tredinnick (2003b) borrows the term 'bracketing' from the phenomenologist Edmund Husserl to describe how he hoped to make clear those which were his 'own ideas, experiences, interpretations' and not those of his subjects (p. 33).

In this way, the reader witnesses Tredinnick's understanding of belonging morph, along with the terrain of his quest, to reach the eventual conclusion that you can try too hard, too self-consciously, to belong to a place. For example, in 'Escarpment', Tredinnick (2009) intensifies and tightens the relationship between the narrative and its metaphor. Here, without losing the middle voice, he penetrates and exposes the plateau's lithology through geological time, interspersing it with the life that Les had quite literally carved for himself. This leads Tredinnick to contrast this — through parallelism and micrometaphor — with his own 'sandstone' childhood. 'Sandstone,' he writes, 'is given to going away. It's an exile and a nomad; it has a journey to take to somewhere else that, who knows, might feel like home' (p. 143). He surmises that 'attachment' is a 'practice', a continuous enactment and 'not a birthright' (p. 150). However, in coming to this conclusion, he does not dispute the belonging of the displaced Gundungurra, the Aboriginal people who belong to the valley (Burrangorang) but can no longer reside there due to the recent human interventions that have flooded it. Rather, he acknowledges that the violence of such a loss, like evidence of violent forces on a landscape, never dissipates.

> If a place is your life, if it is the very words in your mouth, and it is taken, what do you say, and who are you then, and where? You grieve; you fall silent; you pass. Or you weather and you scatter like so many of the plateau's former lives among the townships of the plateau's current incarnation, and you carry on. (p. 20)

In this reaching to understand the Gundungurra people's sense of enduring connection to Country, Tredinnick points to language and silence (silence to the colonisers' ears at least)

as carriers of culture that carve out the landscape like elemental forces, forging a sense of place as much as any solid machinery.

By contrast, the story of pastoralists Les and May works in counterpoint to the Gundungurra story of loss and subtly subverts the colonising trope of sacrifice to the land by pointing to the erosive qualities of farming culture. Here, again, Tredinnick uses both parallelism and accumulation to build a narrative that accepts Les' belonging but questions its terms. Tredinnick's exposition and use of micrometaphor suggests that cultural processes such as isolation, individualism and use value wear down humans as much as the natural processes of the land they live on.

> He [Les] diminished the valley he loved. He weathered it, and he weathered May, and he weathered himself in the process … Each of us erodes and is eroded by what we love. We are made into what we become by what we lose of ourselves in intimacy. Who we are in the end is what love leaves behind. (p. 211)

These themes of loss and sacrifice that recur in Tredinnick's recounting of geological change, along with both settler and Indigenous stories, invoke the colonising trope where surrender to the landscape signals that settlers have earned their place. But here, Tredinnick seems to be searching beyond this. In these stories, a reversal of the emphasis takes place, where the humans are backdrops to the landscape as character. The humans — Oonagh, John Underhill, David — are lost, confused, overwhelmed, clumsy, lacking some attunement with the undulating moods of the central character: place. Nothing is earnt or gained by their loss. The loss is acknowledged and the sacrifice allowed but only as one event within the magnitude of time that has shaped this place, viewed as an ultimately self-destructive attempt to understand belonging through a stubborn cultural lens. Of belonging to 'a place where we can know each other', he laments, 'we ache to know it and return ourselves to it' (p. 236).

Tredinnick returns to the knowledge that an entire people have been lost not *to* but *from* this place. By contrast, he points out, the Gundungurra had modified the land with the land's interests at heart, with replenishment being central to their relationship with it. In attempting to represent First Peoples without speaking for them, Tredinnick searches for how he as part of the 'settler' culture can reconcile belonging and non-belonging without transposition over Indigenous histories and enduring connections to Country. This mirrors the approach that Tredinnick takes towards representations of the landscape too. His own stories surrender themselves to translating the land for much of the book. In this, his

commitment to a detached stance and his geomorphic metaphor become problematic. As witness, he denies us access to himself. In so doing, he makes a sacrifice of his own identity and inadvertently reinstates the trope:

> It is these complex structures of place that make an experience of self possible at all — then to witness one's place, or even just to do one's work under the influence of that place, is to draw a picture of one's soul. And to lose sight of one's place is to lose sight of one's self. (p. 228)

We know that Tredinnick is made of more than sandstone but we never learn what. He keeps this information from us and offers instead a generalised version — the figurative self, his position in the postcolonial panorama, but never the specifics of self or the forces that contributed to his making. This detachment might be seen as a way of reconciling the transience attributable to his cultural legacy with a way of living that does not extract too much from one place. However, this sidelined self paradoxically asks us to understand why he cannot attach himself to one place while asking us not to attach ourselves to the narrating 'I' or sympathise with his worldview. Ballantine (2014) suggests that in this distancing, 'his writing remains in danger of perpetuating these dichotomies of indigenous/settler or sacred/rational' (p. 139) in his singular pursuit of subverting his cognitive approach and collapsing the subject–object (human–more-than-human) binary.

However, there are moments where histories/dichotomies meet and he attempts to share the space respectfully through the geomorphic metaphor, such as in 'Legends of the fall', where the shape of an emu inscribed on the cliff-face becomes an entwined mythology, a symbolic signpost where perspectives merge (p. 199). But even here, we see what has endured change again when the emu loses its neck in rockfall. Tredinnick wonders how the emu can survive without a neck, its lifeline? In geomorphic terms, Tredinnick returns repeatedly to the idea that 'bearing witness' is the only way to capture the ephemeral and that perhaps this shared understanding is at the heart of all our stories, that 'half of love is grief' (p. 202). More hopeful, though, is his speculation about the stories and the language of the place returning 'and you begin to speak the plateau slowly together again' (p. 20) after displacement, pastoral ruin and environmental degradation. And perhaps this is where Tredinnick makes his strongest point about surrendering the voice of self in order to find a voice of place:

> Somebody described creative nonfiction as the musical arrangement of passionate facts, and that'll almost do to characterise this book. It is not a social or natural

> history of the place. It's a kind of divination, an experiment in seeing and listening. (p. 239)

In such terms, we know something of the self that the blue plateau has moved through. For all his searching for a common language born of the landscape anew, Tredinnick has committed to changing the direction of cognitive influence in favour of 'individual–environment transactions' (Heft, 2013, p. 24) that flow more strongly from place to person. He is motivated by the idea that an expression of place through the metaphor of geological movement might open up a channel for new cognitions founded in phenomenological experience, to flow regardless of the type of attachment.

In other words, Tredinnick is searching for the country's *lingua franca*, a common language that, when spoken, will allow him to belong. Invoking Peircean semiotics, linguist Masako Hiraga (2004) holds that the ongoing search for 'the relationship of form and content in language, between physei ("nature") and thesei ("agreement, convention") as Plato described it, is recognised in the role of metaphor' (p. 14) and 'it is natural to apply the pattern knowledge gained from the experience … to the invisible, complex functioning … This is the experiential basis for metaphorical conceptualisation' (p. 5). Therefore, in Tredinnick's witnessing, it might be said that the old adage — *wherever you find yourself, there you are* — neatly maps the less abstract source domain to its more abstract target domain (Hiraga, 2004, p. 16), opening up and noticing, if not fully achieving, the possibility for ecocultural transformation.

5.2.2 *Position doubtful: Mapping landscapes and memories*, Kim Mahood

Kim Mahood's *Position doubtful: Mapping landscapes and memories* (2016a) extends temporally, spatially and conceptually the preoccupations first visited in her creative nonfiction memoir *Craft for a dry lake* (2000). In *Craft*, Mahood retraces the maps and records of white explorer Allan Arthur Davidson and of her (Mahood's) dead father, Joe Mahood, along a southern Kimberleys stock route (marking places along the way with the eponymous 'position doubtful') through to central Australian grasslands. Here, with her mother and the help of Aboriginal labourers, her father established the Tanami Desert cattle station Mongrel Downs, which the artist–writer grew up on. With the station returned to the Walpiri and Ngardi custodians through the Central Land Council for the Mangkururrpa Land Trust in 1994, this second book recounts her annual return to that country, driving dog and ute from her home in Canberra's outskirts to work on mapping,

artistic, environmental and cultural projects with the local Walmajarri community through the Warlayirti Art Centre in Balgo.

The ambiguous nature of Mahood's attachment to this desert country informs the perspective she brings to each of the book's stories, taking into account her transience, her whiteness and her femaleness. It is this ambiguity and uncertainty that drive the searching personal narrative at the heart of the collection. Archivist Tom Denison (2017) suggests that this is 'a place where she appears, at least to the reader, simultaneously an insider and an outsider' (p. 261). Indeed, Mahood (2016a) does not fit neatly fit into the schema proposed by Hernández et al. (2007, p. 310) as either 'native' or 'non-native', and she argues that despite 'exploration and colonisation' being part of her heritage (2016a, p. 7), she does not fit neatly into the cultural or gendered boundaries this implies. This is evident when she describes the origins of her ambiguous attachment: 'The desert took up residence in my psyche when I was very young, in an impersonal, obdurate sort of way that made it impossible for me to form lasting attachments to any other place' (p. 5). For Mahood, a sense of home is not necessarily made by the act of staying but by continually, psychically and physically, returning. In an interview about the book, she explains the difficulties and the compulsion in terms that mirror those of an adolescent searching for self-definition:

> I come and go. I don't have the temperament or the constitution to be out there all the time. It can get incredibly tough. There are a lot of people who do it for a couple of years and that's it. I'm interested in maintaining a lifelong relationship, so I just manage it in a way that's sustainable for me. (Mahood, 2016b, p. 61)

While superficially this might suggest a disorganised place attachment, Mahood (2016a) is compelled to demonstrate the ways in which her identity is both embedded in the place and yet caught in a constant state of un/becoming: 'Mine is the unfinished map, the search for a moral compass with which to travel the same ground' (p. 200), she states, establishing the megametaphor the MIND IS A MAP. She returns repeatedly to this concept and the metaphorical geography of selfhood, framing herself as perpetually ambiguous and the terms of her relationships to and within the landscape as liminal and nascent. It is only through conscious awareness of her interactions that she can attempt to address and search for ways to express her belonging and an adequate sense of place. As Denison (2017) notes, 'Self-analysis is central to the book' (p. 262).

While the presence of Mahood's selfhood drives the narrative, the immediacy of her stance is, by necessity, both diffracted and shared. The narrating 'I' occupies much of the

stage but always as an observer open to transactional exchange with the land, its people and forms of understanding, knowing and feeling it. For Mahood, telling these shared stories relies not just on her presence but on her continual declarative and performative search for both the discursive and symbolic act of being in place, for a situatedness that fuses multiple 'ruptures' (Hinkson, 2018, p. 53). In this way, her voice is that of the 'I sharing the stage', occasionally slipping to the 'sidelines' (Perl & Schwartz, 2006, p. 70) and less frequently moving completely offstage. These shifts in stance make it possible to understand Mahood's frustration with a singular or inherited point of view and are reflected in the disruption of the first person when her alter ego, the photographic character of hyperfeminine explorer, Violet Sunset, appears in the text's poetry. Kylie Crane (2012b), a literary theorist concerned with environmental postcolonialism, suggests that similar splits in the first book allow 'for a voice that does not need to meet rational expectations' (p. 100). Here we hear echoes of ecocritic Wendy Wheeler's (2011) investigation into Peirce's abductive logic as a means for un/earthing loaded signs. But performing Violet for her artist friend and travelling companion, Pam, Mahood describes the character as troublesome to her, someone she views as simplistic in Pam's postcolonially motivated co-construction of her. She is hesitant to follow Pam's interest in 'dystopethesia', a term coined by Canadian anthropologist Christopher Fletcher 'to describe what she [Pam] felt to be a fundamental condition of displacement for both black and white Australians … feeling out of place' (Mahood, 2016a, p. 296). In response, Mahood reveals her own preoccupation with 'what happens when the unconscious mind experiences a fundamental displacement, triggered by the opposite of feeling out of place — when the body feels an almost cellular affinity to a place that has been constructed by a different cultural imagination' (p. 296). This preoccupation aligns with ecocultural communications researcher Melissa M Parks' (2020a) assertion that 'ecocultural identities include not only our conscious, cultural, and socially-constructed identity formation, but also the ongoing exchange between our bodies and the rest of the world' (p. 108). It is this tension between these constituent interdependencies within her ecocultural identity that Mahood seems to be striving to represent.

In this striving, Mahood does not express an ambivalence to the effects of colonialism but, rather, offers a lamentation that responses to the resultant double-worlding collapse more nuanced ontologies and make much about the relationships within the place unnecessarily complicated and sometimes dysfunctional. Instead, this 'split' from the

restricted self is more comfortably expressed when Mahood speaks of herself as Napurrula, the skin name her nanny, a Walpiri woman, had conferred upon her and that the community continue to know her as.

> Napurrula is a sisterhood, a set of relationships and responsibilities … She is generations of women connected through time and space. In a world where individual identity draws its conviction from collective identity, she is both one and many … In the fractured looking glass through which black and white regard each other, seeing shadows and reflections, she is indispensable … a more robust and unselfconscious being takes hold … a skin both absorbent of cross-cultural nuance and resistant to manipulation. (pp. 269–271)

Through the identity of Napurrula, Mahood begins to adopt the Dreaming organisation of simultaneous time and place — close to the sensation of Heidegger's *dasein* and closest to a unified intercultural understanding of the experience of subjectivity as she can get. Notably, it is only by stepping outside the 'rational' terms of her selfhood that she can describe this perspective. However, Mahood does not properly embrace this split and find a suitable, if provisional, resolution of identities until the end of the book. What drives the narrative is the search for representation of this, a quest to redress erasure and blur the separating line in simplified dualities, to represent herself and the stories of the landscape as 'palimpsests' (p. 103). This quest for the resolution of both embodied and discursive expression is problematised through the emblematic mapwork that pulls her back to the place in life and in the book. In the book's opening, she employs an explicit micrometaphor to explain this when she writes:

> Imagine the document you have before you is not a book but a map … a line that is neither latitude nor longitude opens in the hidden geography of the place you are about to enter … The map has been annotated by more than one hand. (p. 1)

Similarly, near the book's end, she describes it as an unfinished 'lattice of tracks linking people, place, memory, and metaphor' (p. 299). This is evident in both the content of the stories and the coherence and cohesion she creates through the constant use of micrometaphor but also in the way each chapter of the book works as an accumulative series of thematically and temporally linked vignettes, driven by a memoir-style narrative mode that draws both implicitly and explicitly on journaling. The timeline moves from 2001 to 2014, occasionally backtracking to previous periods of time that are thematically linked to their containing chapter, offering moments of parallelism. Poetry, mythology,

fable, artwork, photography, maps, verbatim journal entries, scientific diagnostics and direct transcripts of conversations or elders' stories are also interspersed throughout the narrative. As transactional devices, they appear unannounced, like marks on a landscape rather than enhancements, marking terrain in the narrative thrust. External to this, the patterning of the book borrows from the historical journal with each segment dated, as if written to claim space beside the records of white explorers. While this orients the reader in time and location, it also functions to suggest that Mahood recognises the cognitive organising systems at work in her 'heritage' as both privileging and exclusionary.

By contrast, the map as metaphor and a device in itself is held up by Mahood as a kind of third space where it is possible to expose and record the transactional dynamic at work in the cognitions of cross-cultural place- and meaning-making. Mahood explains that 'The central purpose of the map is to create a cross-cultural document that shows the interplay between Aboriginal knowledge and western scientific knowledge in a form that is accessible to both Walmajarri and *kartiya*' (p. 102).

Traces of this occur throughout the stories as well — for instance, when two different cultural knowledges of wattles meet in the same paragraph. Mahood finds herself able to name, locate and discuss the traditional and recent uses of *parrayari* or *Acacia pachycarpa* and *pukurlpirri* or *Acacia stenophylla* — the latter's uses ranging from edible gum, spearheads and woomera pegs to mending holes in car radiators (p. 186) — to the recent 'western' botanical knowledge of the former wattle's ecological rarity. Similarly, in accounts of the mapmaking work, Mahood writes that

> The use of dotting on maps to show vegetation and fire … opened up the prospect for using mapping as a tool that could take land management practices beyond the fraught zone of ownership, and anchor them to the monitoring of changing land conditions, especially the impact of fire. I hoped this might help to bridge the gap between environmental-management pressures and traditional management pressures. (p. 196)

In these transactional exchanges, the metaphorical cognitive maps are exposed for the reassurance of their connective agency, not simply their use in the receptive mode.

As Mahood follows her existing mental map through time, place, story and relationships, sometimes backtracking and rediscovering new insight, she begins to notice it breaking down, along with her ability to resist the dominance of cognitions embedded in Walmajarri ways of knowing, seeing and navigating the landscape. 'In putting together

these two ways of conceptualising the same place, I experience a cognitive shift from which I will never entirely recover,' she writes (p. 110). In this, the complexity of the settler psyche is glimpsed. Without committing the symbolic violence of cultural appropriation, though wondering if she has in fact 'crossed a line' (p. 216) when using dots to symbolise pisoliths in a painting, considers how else the influences transforming the processes at work in her revised cognitive map might be ethically represented. The difficulty inherent in this shift is that it is neither entirely possible or useful to resist some level of influence.

Hiraga (2004) explains the strength of metaphor in such a context as 'immediate and straightforward'. He asserts that it becomes difficult to free oneself from such an interpretation, that 'it becomes an automatic and therefore an unconscious cognitive operation prevalent in language' (p. 14). Resonances of ecocritical objectives can be found here too in the potential for 'diverse imaginaries [that respond to] the need for modes of inquiry and theoretical frameworks that are adequate to understandings of the "environment" that are shifting both with and against the new idea of the Anthropocene' (Neimanis et al., 2015, pp. 68–80).

In these terms, the physical and metaphorical map serves to facilitate the required cognitive shifts that result from direct connection with the land and that have potential to share non-exclusionary, non-privileged mythologies. These allow for the simultaneous centring and decentring of the human experience of understanding 'nature', but one that is also connected in networks of traceable transactional dynamics. Environmental psychologist Harry Heft (2012) emphasises that

> Among the environmental factors that play a formative role in cognitive development are cultural artifacts and social discourse. Because development is a dynamic, epigenetic process, particular 'tools for thinking', such as thinking about the environment in Euclidean geometric, map-like terms, become constituted in the course of individual–environment transactions. (p. 24)

Mahood's book demonstrates the potential for creative nonfiction to participate in this constitutive process: metatextually, *Position doubtful* functions as a map of traceable transactions. For example, Mahood *shows* us the interplay between the objective and subjective, knowledge and understanding, cognitions and emotions, nature and culture through the practice of artmaking and mapmaking. In her recounting of an environmental art project, the Paraku project, which involves a book published by CSIRO and an

exhibition at the Araluen Cultural Precinct in Alice Springs, she describes a painting by Hanson Pye, which fulfils the aims of the project 'to bring together Aboriginal and European interpretations of the history, culture, and physical environment of Paraku' (p. 245). His 'Parnkupirti Layers' reinterprets an account of the archaeological dig along his Dreaming track, using geological information from the dig, 'formal geometry' and traditional figurative painting techniques. Mahood writes that 'As a seamless appropriation of science into an Aboriginal worldview, it is breathtaking' (pp. 246–247). Through her accounts of this practice, Mahood seems to be addressing the shortcomings of one mode (here, the written) by connecting it to discussion of enactment in another (the visual). In this transactional process, the writing becomes a conversation (or a palimpsest) that mirrors the aspirations of her mapping exercises. This seems to address the earlier concern that Crane (2012b) levelled at *Craft* in the assertion that Mahood had only succeeded in expressing a less bounded perspective in her description of a performative visual work, which

> reduces the distance between her body and the natural world, between her body and her art, and thus, by extension, between her environment and her art … This form of art no longer has the distance, the schooled perspective, of landscape art; instead, I read it as an engagement with the environment. It is, accordingly, possible to read this scene as a manifestation of Mahood's desire for unity, particularly between body and environment and between culture and nature (pp. 104–105).

Furthermore, Mahood *tells* us how the metaphor in her text mediates between her mental map and the landscape — how its abstraction is the glue between two physical manifestations. In a culminating chapter, 'Unstable horizons', which is noticeably undated and written in way that traverses all time represented in previous chapters, Mahood seems to gather her thoughts, experiences and external sources into a congregation of understanding that leads her to agree with 'the hard evidence' of 'neuroscience' and views shared with the transactionist perspectives of the environmental psychologists. In this chapter, she states:

> There's a continuous feedback loop between the interior self and the external environment … That the neural receptors which allow us to know where we are occur in the same nub of the brain that governs emotions and the laying-in of new memories suggests that these capacities are wired into the same circuit. Does a map, registering in the hippocampus as a navigational tool, send a sympathetic

> ripple along the nerve thread of memory and feeling … it goes some way to explaining why certain places cast a spell of enchantment on us. (p. 298)

As artefacts, Mahood proves through *Position doubtful* that stories fulfil a similar role in helping us to understand and share how and where we fit and crave to belong. Through the mapping of iconicity to metaphor, creative nonfiction offers opportunities for connections, markers and exchanges to become visible to us. 'For a moment, the map comes to life. This is what it is for — to generate stories, to gather people together, to remain forever unfinished, its edges open, its voices continuing to speak' (p. 234).

5.3 Contextual analysis conclusion

Informing my research question — in what ways can Australian writers of creative nonfiction from settler backgrounds cohesively convey ecocultural identities that are open to or demonstrate transformation? — the essay-length works in this analysis demonstrate key strategies used by three Australian creative nonfiction writers seeking to convey cohesive ecocultural identities that are open to transformation. Each fulfils a vital prerequisite to this transformation by revealing the terms of their selfhood, or subjectivity, environmentally and culturally. Their stance is managed through a range of textual choices such as motif, repetition and language choice facilitated by organising strategies such as parallelism, segmentation, juxtaposition and accumulation. They use micrometaphors to achieve metaphorical cohesion and cohesiveness while drawing on the heterogeneous qualities of creative nonfiction to reach across disciplines and assemble such diverse modes as the literary, the transactional and the hybridised into patterns both reimagined and freshly formed, each capable of supporting and interrogating the themes implied in their metaphors. Significantly, each writer seeks to acknowledge the damage implicit in the formation of their ecocultural identity, exposing the interdependent and contingent conditions of their experienced environmental attachment.

Likewise, in the two book-length works, the writers explicitly invoke their specific place attachments as central themes, offering these up and repeatedly returning to them as an opportunity for ecocultural exploration and, particularly in Mahood's case, interrogation of the organising megametaphor. Essentially, Tredinnick and Mahood are on the same quest, but their use of stance to communicate their cultural legacies transforms their ecocultural identities to different degrees. Mahood, through her close stance and deconstruction of the metaphor available to her, has benefited from an undeclared legacy

— that of feminist posthumanism. The influence of this legacy, when considered within an emerging ecocultural framework, allows her to declare herself, to openly shed the tightened scales of an ill-fitting cultural perspective and explore how to situate herself in a landscape of belonging. She expresses this best when she writes that

> some earth-born incubus has been hatched and nurtured on the austere geography of the place, giving rise to a stretching of my psyche to embrace ways of knowing and being that I struggle to translate. Partly it's about believing that we all had that capacity once, that the physical attributes of place were among the earliest factors to shape the human mind, and that the template is still in there among the tangled circuits of *Homo sapiens*. It's about wanting, as a white Australian, to find a vocabulary to tell as best I can the story of a place. (Mahood, 2016a, pp. 258–259)

In comparison, Tredinnick's quest, his distanced stance, denies exposing how his identity is constituted, denies access to the cognitive exchange at work in his psyche and reaches past it to show the impossibility of his being 'born again' directly from the land. Ballantine (2014, p. 139) describes this as 'quasi-religious' and in danger of affirming the dualities Tredinnick hopes to address. Here, the felt (or lyrical) reinstates its split from the thought (or transactional), offering only metaphorically disruptive hope that once others follow, the discomfort might eventually dissipate.

Taken together, both texts suggest that, when cohesively conveying ecocultural identities that are open to or demonstrate transformation, the narrating self in an Australian landscape can be an uncomfortable construction. Like travelling to places we have not come from or cannot adequately use our own language to describe, the writer experiences the discomfort of being outside known comfort zones, pushing boundaries. In their own ways, both writers open up this opportunity for Australian creative nonfiction writers to explore.

Similarly, in the use of metaphor to connect — nature to culture, literary text to transactional text, subjectivity to objectivity — we must find a way for it to share space, for it to be adaptable and participate in its own revision. Through the diffractive capacity of multiple organising structures, we can explore the metaphor itself. We can move it beyond the restrictions of inherited cognitions: as limitation and misrepresentation is the constant danger of metaphor. We cannot force things to a pre-known shape. As a pattern, a story — like a self, a map and a landscape — must also be unravelled and its arrangements considered.

Chapter 6: Diffraction — creative works

So, how does a white settler woman such as me — a formally educated, working class–raised, first-generation Australian urban dweller with English and Scottish parents — open up their ecocultural identity to transformation through creative practice? How do I move beyond the problem I encountered in Cunnamulla, where I first noticed the impulse to use the outback trope of psychic interiority for exploring my own perceived absence of understanding or knowledge of my place as/in my environment — or, as cultural critic Roslyn Haynes (2013) has described the coloniser's compulsion: to explore 'the culturally repressed dread of alienation, of an inner void' (pp. 164–165)?

In asking this question, I started with what, to a greater extent, I do have experience with. I started by engaging in an exchange with my own inner-city yard (which is just as well considering how much time I would spend locked down in it) and the yards I have known, contemplating the terms of my subjectivity in relationship with them (and the life in them) and that to which they are connected. In considering places that I had already formed attachments with — either as a resident or recurring lifelong visitor — I found that I could be more readily on the lookout in the discursive environment of my writing for ready-made metaphors and culturally dominant tropes, and I could ask myself what the implications of these were on the life I shared the place/s with. This helped facilitate my experience of being in my environment, my situatedness, so that I could look beyond my performance of what environmental psychologist Susan Clayton (2015) describes as an 'environmental identity' (p. 235) to expose and examine absences in my own stories and patterns of being in a place and find, through other voices, modes and disciplines, a way to address these absences.

6.1 Interpretation

To this purpose, the contextual analysis of exemplar texts that inform my works and that my works respond to exemplifies how creative nonfiction participates in the dynamics of ecoculture that Hubert Zapf (2020) brings to light, 'acknowledging the indissoluble interdependence and semiotic co-agency of individual texts with their intertextual and historical–cultural environments' (p. 54). Likewise, in my experimentation with the innovative strategies observed in the exemplar texts, I hope to show how the exchange at

work in the ‘transformation’ (Zapf, 2020, p. 54) of ecocultural identity at the individual and discursive levels mirrors ecological processes, aligning with Zapf’s summation of Wendy Wheeler’s legacy — that ‘creative processes in nature and culture share an element of agency and improvisational flexibility, with which they respond to changing demands of their environments by rearranging and recombining existing patterns of life, communication, and interpretation’ (p. 56). Most significantly, my work tries to push this transformation into territory where the revision of foundational ecocritical concepts themselves transform, reflecting shifts from Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin’s (2015) ‘posthumanism’ into Zapf’s (2020) preferred ‘postanthropocentric … approach’:

> since the posthuman somehow suggests an overcoming of the human whereas a cultural ecology asserts that the ‘human’ in an always evolving, qualitative sense of the term still remains an indispensable concept. By more explicitly including the nonhuman in our epistemic, ethical, and aesthetic considerations, we must strive to becoming more human rather than simply leaving the human behind. (p. 70)

I have thus tried to address the paradox of subjective dominance by consciously locating myself and the terms of my selfhood in my textual and physical environments through a considered use of stance. And I have tried to show the interrelationships between the cognitive, discursive, historical, cultural and environmental patterns in my own experience and understanding of my relationship with the places that have shaped my identity. For this, I have developed metaphors that support and question the patterns that emerged in my arrangement of heterogeneous modes.

I now consider how I have employed the creative nonfiction strategies that I identified through the contextual analyses for developing and interrogating these patterns, how I drew on the contextual analyses to understand how to apply them and how my creative works use these strategies to participate in a process of ecocultural transformation.

The following explanation and critique refers to the creative practice component of this project and to the five creative nonfiction works in Chapter 9: Creative work. The works are *Double eyed: Finding and feeding the patterns that sustain us*, *The kissing disease*, *Pilgrimage to Frog Hollow*, *Pioneer species* and *The mends*.

6.2 Explanation and critique: Use of strategies in creative practice

About a year after my trip to Bowra, in the first year of my research for this exegesis (and only months before our state borders would close), I travelled to Sydney University to

attend the Sydney Environment Institute's Unsettling Ecological Poetics Symposium (24–25 October 2019). It was in listening to several key speakers at this one event, specifically the Aboriginal writers and academics — Evelyn Araluen, Charmaine Papertalk Green, Ellen van Neerven, Peter Minter and Jeanine Leane — that I began to grasp the complex responsibilities implicit in my position not only as a human, but as a settler human in a place/places still resonating with the ongoing violence of colonisation and extraction. From this point, I understood how important it was for the narrating 'I' to fulfil those responsibilities in the space taken up (and, therefore, taken away from Indigenous Australian writers) to engage critically with the terms of my ecological and cultural relationships. It was necessary, I realised, to respond to transcultural ecopoet and theorist Peter Minter's (2021) invitation to participate in 'a withdrawal, [a] peeling back or refiguring of settler modes of eco-coloniality — a walking back out of Country' (p. 196).

In response, I made a conscious decision to limit the scope of my research to examine the creative nonfiction works of writers from a settler background. This was both out of respect for the precedence of Indigenous scholars and practitioners when responding to representations of Indigenous writers' works that communicate connection to Country and as step towards considering how the settler writer fulfills their own responsibility to decolonise Australian literature. To this end, most of my creative work uses a close stance with near-to-medium psychic distance to best expose the cognitive and experiential processes at work in the ongoing work of decolonisation, in conversation with the work of Indigenous writers and academics. Through this stance, and in the constitutive exchange between cultures, texts, self and environment (as I contemplated the significance of my place attachments and/or my situatedness), opportunities to recognise what Parks (2020a) describes as the 'intertwining, inextricability, and constant co-influence of culture and ecology' (p. 107) as markers of 'ecocultural intersectionality' (p. 103) opened up for the narrating 'I'.

The role of the close stance for this purpose is particularly evident in *The mends*, which functions as a metanarrative for the narrating 'I' across the set of creative works produced for this research to consider the challenge of forming a cohesive ecocultural identity from the inherited destructiveness of a colonial legacy — particularly as the pattern of my attachment to places in these stories is a recurring stimulus where the personal has parallels with the colonial–national. In response to a provocation offered by Jeanine Leane (2019) at the Unsettling Ecological Poetics Symposium and that I write

about in *The mends* — 'Instead of restoration, instead, can we refer to mending? Repairing what was broken but not erasing history?' — I found myself consciously grappling with the micrometaphor of brokenness to express my recognition that a lack of a cohesive ecocultural identity (and the damage caused by this) must be acknowledged to be addressed:

> As each word left the writer's mouth to join the one before it, an uncomfortable feeling swept through the room. Each word a hammer, revising into pieces previously complete vases of incomplete knowledge. Each word releasing neat, convenient constructions into rubble that could never be convincingly re-truthed.

Likewise, I found that this close stance also facilitated association, juxtaposition and my resulting reflection in *Pilgrimage to Frog Hollow* as I compared my perception of the difference in Yuggera and settler concepts of 'passing through' and its consequences:

> What I can't help notice is how different this is from the 'passing through' that I knew. It is a way of connecting people and places together. It is a sharing of the stories of place.
>
> When I think about my idea of Algester, the place where things had felt most right for me even when they weren't, it becomes apparent to me that I too was only ever passing through — without permission. That the familiarity I craved depended on the Yuggera people's despair at what may have seemed a rapidly spreading sickness.

A similar exposure occurred again in my reflection on the concept of 'country/Country' in *Pioneer species*, where the subjective expression of the narrating 'I' is central to the story but less so in the transactional modes where the etymology of terms is explored. I found that employing what Zapf (2020) refers to as 'polyphonic complexity' (p. 60) not only lent multiple perspectives to each of the pieces and allowed the reader to recognise my subjectivity in relation to these perspectives but was also an important tool in ensuring that the explications of Aboriginal knowledge systems by Aboriginal voices were acknowledged and maintained. For this purpose, I adapted Tredinnick's (2003b) use of 'bracketing' to indicate vocal and cultural ownership (p. 33) followed by a shift to a closer stance to reveal the effect of this on my subjectivity — an effect I hoped to produce in the reader as well. On the use of polyphony for this purpose, Zapf (2020) states that

> Such juxtapositions of heterogeneous views and values produce gaps, uncertainties, and indeterminacies in the texts, which may be seen to resist rather than support

> unidirectional ecological agency and political engagement. Yet it is these uncertainties and indeterminacies which create a textual space for otherness that alone can break up the presumed certainties of (eco-)politics and open the text for the active participation of the reader in the continual co-creation of those relational complexities which constitute ecological awareness and existence. (p. 6)

Employing a close stance generally across each of the pieces fulfilled two key requirements: first, to maintain the voice of and acknowledge the source of Aboriginal knowledge systems and, second, to expose the influence of hegemonic norms and reveal ecocultural intersectionalities encoded in what Heft refers to as the 'underlying tools that structure thinking' (p. 23). I also found the need to strategically shift the stance to suit the psychic distance required at certain points to support a piece's 'cohesion' and 'cohesiveness' (Rezanova & Shilyaev, 2015, pp. 31–33) as it reached for the possibility of ecocultural transformation. For instance, in *Double eyed*, after much reworking, I began to employ the strategy of occupying a less central position, to become an 'I, sharing the stage' (Perl & Schwartz, 2006, p. 62) to reduce the possibility of the human story overbearing the story of the fig-parrot and to encourage the reader to transfer their affective response — to consider the story of the fig-parrot as their own, as expressed through the micrometaphor of doubling, demonstrated here in the expository mode:

> The connection feels evident, visceral, as ropy and real as the cord that once joined my daughter to me. It makes me wonder if this is how we save a bird. Do we all need to feel her, to know her patterns as the story of ourselves? To understand her call as proxy for our own?

The revisions I made to *Double eyed* came after I'd written *Kissing disease*, where I'd aimed to write a piece that increased the proximity and oscillation between the 'I, centre stage' (for my story) and the 'I, sharing the stage/offstage' (for the island's story), using micrometaphors indicating rupture and repair to support (and eventually redefine) the megametaphor THE SELF IS AN ISLAND by revealing how it was and wasn't, which is foreshadowed when I write:

> The tide comes in.
> I begin to think I have become an island.
> The tide goes out.
> Or something like what I think an island might be.

Both Inga Simpson's *In ironbark country* and Caitlin Maling's *A vernacular landscape* were instructive in how micrometaphors could contribute to maintaining narrative cohesion across an oscillating stance and multiple modes. The publication of *Kissing disease* with only one minor word-level change by *Westerly* indicated that the strategy could work for a readership when organising strategies such as parallelism and accumulation packed the transactional and memoir modes together in a tight conglomeration. The guest editor and the two peer reviewers for *Unlikely*, in which *Double eyed* will soon be published, also provided positive feedback about their high engagement with that piece and pronounced affective response to it.

Across all pieces, one of the great challenges of this project was developing a text (and identity) that was both cohesive and open to testing the megametaphor (and cognitions) underpinning it. The heterogeneity of the creative nonfiction genre both complicated and enhanced my opportunities to assemble multiple modes to interrogate the megametaphor while simultaneously developing it. I took solace in Peter Minter's (2021) words, which I quote in *Pioneer species*, that 'the project of decoloniality is always unfinished and open-ended' (p. 197). It was, however, in the writing of *Pilgrimage to Frog Hollow* and in the subsequent process of refining it with editorial feedback from *Island Online*, where it was published, that I began to understand the significance of how micrometaphors could interact with the megametaphor to explicitly modify the target domain.

The megametaphor in *Pilgrimage to Frog Hollow* is set up as A PILGRIMAGE TO THE PAST IS A PILGRIMAGE TO THE PRESENT and extends both source and target domain to suggest that *passing through a place without acknowledging or remembering the past compromises our connection to the present*. Framed by childhood memories of my past on Yuggera Country, the story follows a segmented scenic journey interlaced with reflection through present and past and incorporates some quoted local Yuggera history into what is a chiefly a memoir-driven piece. Within this piece, I had already established micrometaphors about disorientation, becoming lost (while also drawing attention to this as a traditional settler/coloniser trope), passing through and changing landscapes, but there was also a recurring mention of illness. It wasn't until the editor of *Island Online* pointed out that I could develop this motif to find out its significance that I realised the potential for micrometaphor to modify the megametaphor and, in so doing, reach for the moment of ecocultural transformation. A pilgrimage needed a purpose, I realised, and mine had been

the search for wellbeing. The development of illness into a micrometaphor (the illness in this story is identified as memory loss) improved the text's overall cohesion. In this, I perceived how a text could function ecologically, as put forward by Zapf (2020) in his statement that 'literature uses the resources of language and imagination for the creation of long-term, self-reflexive models of ecosemiotic complexity' (p. 53). For this piece, the editorial exchange mirrored ecological processes in which a state change is triggered.

While *Pilgrimage* follows a meandering path to transformation, which could be more granularly described as a 'whorl of reflection' (Bascom, 2013) enclosed within a pattern of return, I found the patterning of other megametaphors forming around more hybridised structures. As mentioned, *Pioneer species* relies on the accumulation of juxtaposition and parallelism to weave a segmented story arc through an etymological exploration. The associative jumping off points in the story connect with the transactional modes, suggestive of the way footnote entries function to support new understanding at pivotal points in the story. This constant interruption undermines any assumed authority in the text in the same way the story itself hopes to undermine the authority of the language associated with landownership. In creating this pattern, I hope to support the megametaphor of LANGUAGE IS POWER while exposing the roots of the power structures at play. This creative work has been accepted for publication in the August issue of Giramondo Publishing's *HEAT*, with the editor providing feedback to revise some sentences for tone towards the end of the story; this indicated some slippage in register across the modes, which was not in keeping with the rest of the piece.

Wherever this problem of modal slippage has occurred in other works, I've needed to either reinforce the cohesiveness and/or coherence with micrometaphor or to draw a connection to or modify a mode that is missing. For example, in *Double eyed*, maintaining parallelism — between human and fig-parrot, proxies and proxies, protocol and protocol, transactional mode and memoir mode — was a useful way to form a pattern that supported the megametaphor (HUMAN IS DOUBLE-EYED FIG-PARROT). The pattern of *The mends* was more forgiving: the megametaphor THE SETTLER RELATIONSHIP WITH ENVIRONMENT IS A BROKEN CUP was held together by the instructions for kintsugi, which facilitated some messier connections within this 'hermit crab essay' scaffolding (Miller & Paola, 2019, p. 127). However, it was important to maintain cohesion in other ways: in such an associative text, a reader relies on clear cues from micrometaphors and requires a strategic interlacing of modes (within segments and to segments) so that the burden of cognitive

transformation does not become so cumbersome that they abandon the project — 'unfinished and open-ended' (Minter, 2021, p. 197) as it may be.

6.3 Diffractive learning

So, while I might not yet know how to write about Cunnamulla, a place with which I have not formed an attachment that I can question the terms of, I have learnt much about the process required to situate myself in my environment so that I may learn to recognise myself as part of it and understand the ways in which I know and do not know this.

In asking in what ways can Australian writers of creative nonfiction from settler backgrounds cohesively convey ecocultural identities that are open to or demonstrate transformation, I have found that an ecocultural framework has opened up opportunities for me to acknowledge the underlying cognitive structures that influence my environmental interactions and to understand the cultural, structural and ecological interdependencies that are implicated. Importantly, through this framework and experimentation with creative nonfiction strategies, I've discovered that cohesiveness — of identity and of text — does not depend on employing strategies to simply reinforce or develop a metaphor. Cohesiveness requires the writer to allow an internal exchange within the text to take place, whereby the unrecognisable is mediated by the recognisable (stance, modal patterning and micrometaphor). Through these recognisable aspects, the heterogeneous possibilities offered by the interactions between modes in this genre have the potential to provoke an internal process of reconfiguration that provisionally orients as it disorients. Through this process of discursively representing the reconfiguration of cognitive structures, patterns of thinking and being — the self as environment (ecocultural identity) — are transformed or open up to transformation and shared as part of the ongoing ecological conversation.

Two of the pieces I've written for this project (*Pioneer species* and *The mends*) end at a beginning, at a place in the narrative that matches the place I find myself in now: living in a new place connected to other places I've formed place attachments with. It seems fitting, then, that this project ends in a place where I can transfer this learning, to participate in a process of naturalcultural co-creation (Are, 2018) and open myself up to ecocultural transformation as I learn the patterns of this place, listening to all that has come before.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Over time, through the recursive dynamic between research and practice, between place and self, text and text, I have developed a working understanding of how an ecocultural framework, informed by ecocriticism and environmental psychology, can offer insight into the origins and implications of the patterns that arise in my thinking and interactions with my environment and how I express and enact these.

It seems fitting that the process of exchange has seemed so fundamental to producing creative nonfiction works that cohesively convey ecocultural identities that are open to or demonstrate transformation. Specifically, through the interplay between stance, metaphor and modal patterning as well as the interplay between transdisciplinary research and practice, and experience and knowledge, nature and culture, this project has produced new patterns in a genre that is, itself, constantly transforming. Therefore, my hope is that the texts I've produced will engage in an exchange with other new texts to reinforce what we might call a transcultural megametaphor of CULTURE IS NATURE.

There is much opportunity to apply an ecocultural framework to both research and practice in Australian literature. In addition, more detailed ecosemiotic analyses of creative texts would widen the field even further, as would focused studies of the function of metaphor in an ecocultural context. A continued commitment to unsettling and 'walking back out of Country' (Minter, 2021, p. 196) should form part of any such ecocultural or ecosemiotic project. As the creative nonfiction genre continues to emerge as an exciting participant in the ecoculture of literature, I look forward to the proliferation of transformative texts yet to be developed and analysed.

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Chapter 9: Creative work

Publications

Four of the five creative nonfiction works developed for the creative practice component of this research have been or will be published in *Island Magazine Online*, *Westerly*, *Unlikely Journal* and *HEAT*.

- Pilgrimage to Frog Hollow. *Island Magazine Online*. July 2021.
- The kissing disease. *Westerly*, *66*(2). 2021.
- Double eyed: Finding and feeding the patterns that sustain us. *Unlikely Journal*, (8). December 2022 (forthcoming).
- Pioneer species. *HEAT, 3(4)*. August 2022.

Order of presentation

The five creative nonfiction works that follow are set out in the order in which I first drafted them — except for *The Mends*, which formed over time through the drafting of the other pieces and from my journaling of the creative practice process. Therefore, as I have followed a recursive process of practice-led research, described as an 'iterative cyclic web' by Hazel Smith and Roger Dean (2009, p. 2) to undertake revisions and refinements (with learning from some pieces informing others), the chronology does not reflect the order in which I produced final versions. This is explained in more detail in Chapter 3: Methodology and Chapter 6: Diffraction — creative practice case study.

9.1 Creative work 1 — *Double eyed: Finding and feeding the patterns that sustain us*

She was smaller than a rainbow lorikeet. Her feathers smoother. Her voice sweeter. Eyes more like beacons than warning flares. Beak more like a smile than a hazard, beaming out of the tree hollow at me. It's her face that comes to me as I stroke the reedy arm entwined in tubes upon the blanket.

My daughter, V, has stopped eating, just like the fig-parrot's sister. The one I've read about in books but never seen. The one who flits through my thoughts, asking me to save her. Like some believe we might still do, if only we can find her.

Coxen's double-eyed fig-parrot: 'Possibly extinct,' is how my field guide[2] puts it.

'I didn't think I was that bad,' is how my daughter puts it before a nasogastric feeding tube plugs up the promise-heavy torrent.

'Have you heard about the Minnesota Starvation Experiment?' Maryanne, the hospital psychiatrist, asks us.

We shake our heads and she hands us some stapled paper with words that slide in wobbly greys across it.

'In 1944,' she tells us, '"thirty-six men participated in an experiment that reduced their nutritional intake by half.'

Maryanne pauses to make sure we're following. V nods to avoid the rasping of tube against throat when she speaks.

'The men in the study lost 25 per cent of their body weight in less than six months,' Maryanne continues.

'That's fast,' I say, meeting her eyes to let her know we're with her.

Maryanne has eyes that hang under their hoods like the eyes of a tawny frogmouth in a torpor, having learnt to blend entirely with its surroundings. Maryanne does not belong in this ward; she is visiting from the in-patient eating disorders program in the adult psychiatric ward we have been warned to avoid, even if we were able to endure the one-

[2] This view is not the official conservation status at state or federal level; however, it is a commonly debated view offered by one field guide on my shelf: Dolby, T, & Clarke, R. (2014). *Finding Australian birds: A field guide to birding locations.* CSIRO Publishing. p. 538.

month wait for V, who is only sixteen, to get a bed in it. Here in the gastroenterology ward, doctors monitor V's artificial renourishment and nurses — according to the strictures of *The protocol* — monitor her heartbeat, her electrolytes, her limited movement and the precise reasons for her toilet use.

In a tired voice, Maryanne recites an unchanging menu of historical experiment, going on to tell us about the conscientious objectors who signed up to be starved rather than fight in the Second World War. How the study hoped to find the best treatment for famine suffered by allies at the end of the fighting. She explains how rapidly the men's behaviour changed. How they each became obsessed with food in different ways. How they all became severely psychologically unstable.[3] That one man, who couldn't explain why, had removed several fingers with an axe. This explains the growing list of fear foods Blu-tacked to our kitchen wall, the rule that food must be intact to be considered edible at all, the single rice paper roll that had not ripped out my daughter's heart as she sobbed alone in a corner of the kitchen but simply ripped slightly in her fingers. How this had rendered it poison. How, when you got down to it, nothing was actually *intact* at all.

'The men in the study,' Maryanne says, 'turned out to be a proxy for understanding how anorexia nervosa works.'

I nod enthusiastically. The missing fig-parrot's sister, the one I've actually seen, pokes her face out of the hollow in my mind and smiles. There she is, in the smooth grey belly of a dead tree beside a Daintree waterhole, before my camera, before we visited the dying reef, before V joined the student climate marches, before the fires, before the plague — before, before, before all of this — Macleay's double-eyed fig-parrot. The one that scientists are using as a proxy for understanding how missing fig-parrots work.

As Maryanne speaks, I watch the fig -parrot push her feet against the hollow and launch herself across the flat blue sky. I think about how my daughter is an identical twin, as small as her sister but somehow always the smallest. Bonded eternally to the superlative, she is the twin who always seemed to court danger, suspend my breath, yet always quietly coped, complained little. Kept up her guard so that I could never be sure how well I

[3] The original sheet provided was discarded before this essay was written. A similar resource offers the same information: *Starvation Syndrome* in Works cited.

actually knew her. The way the afternoon sunlight blinds you to half the world. The way an upturned beak looks like a smile set within a colourful mosaic to the eye of another beast.

'Double trouble,' strangers would say to the pram, to the shopping trolley, to their pigtails at the school gate. Double eyed, double bodied, double minded. Double the joy. Double the chance to thrive or not. Double the chance to wonder why one stopped eating when the other did not.

I think about doubles and proxies. I think about how the fig-parrot's sister *coxeni* once foraged in the rare vine forest that once fringed the river where we live in inner-city Meanjin.

And I think about how this daughter might be the *coxeni* of the pair.

Maryanne slides her eyelids shut then slowly opens them as she recites the words I will hear over and over again until they turn grey and wobbly:

To heal the mind, you must first give the body what it needs.

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In Queensland's Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) *Coxen's fig-parrot recovery plan* (2001), there are many small reasons that *coxeni* is hard to find. Small until they accumulate: she forages and flits noiselessly, high in the crowns of voluminous trees like the Moreton Bay Fig. She is stocky but small, the colour of leaves with hints of red, yellow and blue. The splash of blue on her brow that distinguishes her from the other fig-parrots has been painted on so thin it is hard to decipher. She nests in a tree hollow that she tears to the size of a Monte Carlo biscuit with her beak. There are not many places left for her to go. Not as much for her to eat (EPA, 2001, pp. 7–12).

Listening for her, ecologists argue, might be the only way to prove that she has not disappeared entirely. In the recovery plan, finding her is their first objective (EPA, 2001, p. 21). To find her, scientists have recorded her sister subspecies *C.d. macleayana* (aka the red-browed fig-parrot or Macleay's) as a proxy to develop a call ID. They leave recorders in the places that Coxen's was last seen and wait. Once collected, the recordings are converted to a grey-scale spectrogram, a visual representation of the soundscape, and then to the same red-green-blue false colour used in satellite imagery that highlights the frequency, intensity, duration and pattern of the birds' calls within it, rendering the birds' presence visible. As a tool for pattern detection, the spectrogram values are picked up in

the algorithms of call recognisers, which search the hues as they dip and flicker for a pattern that closely matches Macleay's. According to that protocol, this searching is the first thing that must be done.

According to the books that Maryanne has recommended and the treatment protocol we are following, you must also search for the child you are saving from starvation. You must not search for someone or something to blame. You must not feel helpless. *You must be the dolphin guiding your child*, one book tells me. *Not the jellyfish, swept away by currents of emotion*.[4] You must have the response of a firefighter, another book urges. You must take calm control in a way that reassures your child that the problem is contained, that she is safe and that the problem will be eliminated.[5] You must *act now and make this your number one priority*.[6]

Maryanne explains that the gold standard in recovery requires that the family focuses on urgent refeeding, the re-establishment of routine, exposure to fear foods and the restoration of nutritional health.

This is how we must attend to the fire that is ravaging V.

Like a firefighter. Like a dolphin.

Like a scientist listening for what they cannot see.

Looking for what they cannot hear.

+++

In the weeks after hospital, V spends some weeks learning from home. In the weeks after that, I meet her outside school on a bench at morning tea and lunchtime, asking her to notice the silvery-green leaves of the weeping paperbark spinning olive in the breeze, the tonal range of not-quite whites in the underbellies of clouds, her syncopated breath slowing to make the dive for her diaphragm. It rarely works and it never goes smoothly. More often than not, she comes home with me, having been unable to put a morsel to her mouth. But somehow, over the difficult weeks in which her nutritional intake increases, she progresses to eating with her friends within the school grounds. Most of the time.

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[4] See: Treasure et al. in Works cited.
[5] See: Ganci in Works cited.
[6] See: Lock & Le Grange in Works cited.

‘It’s hard to eat in front of people when they’ve already eaten,’ V offers, not meeting my eyes. ‘Or on my own.’

I am lifting her lunchbox, the insulated pack that mimics a battered old paper bag, out of her school bag and feeling the heft of its uneaten weight in my heart as well as my hands.

‘I know you find it hard. Was there anything else?’ I ask, using sentences the new psychologist and the books have taught me to use.

The second objective of *Coxen’s fig-parrot recovery plan* is to recognise the threats that a loss of habitat have produced because these have triggered a change in the parrot’s behaviour (EPA, 2001, p. 21).

A change in environment can trigger a response that, at first, might seem bent on preservation but will turn out to be ultimately self-destructive. For instance, narrowing opportunities to forage creates more opportunities for prey to attack the fig-parrot in open spaces where it now needs to flit between feeding zones. This has restricted the fig-parrot’s movements, limiting food supply and narrowing the genetic pool (EPA, 2001, p. 16).

For a teenage girl, an equivalent response might arise when, in the space of a year, the world that she is told is growing more connected might seem to be contracting around her. And this might trigger a need for control — the kind of control easiest to access, control that seems to reward you and keep you feeling safe — control of the environment you live in: your body.

Just as current research is revealing a genetic basis for whether or not someone might develop an eating disorder, like most living things, the means for our own demise is wired into us, waiting to meet with the requisite conditions in our environment to summon its powers (Bulik, 2005, pp. 335–339). When you think about it, choking seems like a perfectly natural reaction to an environment that has become hostile to your needs. When you think about it, hiding yourself away from your food to stay safe isn’t all that strange: it makes it harder to find you and to know where to look and listen. It makes it harder to identify your call.

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Because the call of Coxen’s fig-parrot still hasn’t been identified, no one knows for sure exactly what to listen for. There is no one to say, ‘That’s definitely her.’

My daughter has left more clues.

In the second phase of recovery from anorexia, the protocol we are following tells us that we must begin to look for the pattern of a healthy self-sustaining identity to emerge and ask what barriers there might be to finding it. We push along a zigzagging road to bump V into the BMI zone that the therapy team has identified as healthy with a buffer and keep watch for signs of her to appear. Each day, V responds to the six alarms that call her to eat and begins to prepare some of her own meals, with supervision. She comes on walks and starts to lift modest weights. She makes plans to see friends. But on the weeks she has lost weight, the therapy session will not address anything else.

To heal the mind, you must first give the body what it needs.

'I know it's you, not anorexia, who doesn't like nuts,' says the psychologist, cocking her head like a curious crow at V. 'But could you try almond meal in a smoothie?'

V scrunches her nose. 'I guess so.'

A fierce look, a toddler's ire of years gone by, enters her eyes.

'That's definitely me,' she tells us. 'Not anorexia.'

We, the room, all laugh at this small but hopeful sign of a remembered self — the point from which she might contemplate a future pattern to pursue. But in the search for the fig-parrot we have no such memory to call upon. None, at least, that's officially documented. None the scientists can draw on.

It's believed that Coxen's fig-parrot used to follow the ripple of fruiting trees, from the higher altitudes in the warmer months down to the lowlands in the cooler, but it is still not known whether this was a consequence of the lowlands rainforest disappearing. Nobody knows for sure the true or new pattern of their movement, or if there is any (EPA, 2001, p. 14). Back in 2001, the EPA estimated that the cryptic nature of the animal would attract $30 000 for a single bird to an illegal wildlife trader (p. 28).

Developing a call ID to find birds for a captive breeding program is the key to being able to meet the third objective of *Coxen's fig-parrot recovery plan* (DES, 2021, pp. 4–8). But to find the parrot, you need to understand the pattern of her feeding habits. It's a case of fig-parrot and egg. The protocol for the captive breeding program has been rolled out with Macleay's fig-parrot, again, as a proxy (DES, 2021, pp. 4, 19). Now, it is just waiting for a captive Coxen's to protect. It has been waiting 20 years.

Meanwhile, in captivity, the Macleay's fig-parrots' already territorial and aggressive behaviour is proving to be amplified. They are known to chew their neighbours' feet to stumps (in lieu of fingers and an axe) and devour their young, sometimes not leaving a trace (Romer, 2000, pp. 6, 15). Australian parrots' high-sugar diet is renowned for making them argumentative, but what else, I wonder, might a contracting environment do to a parrot's behaviour? Is it these responses that have hindered the Coxen's fig-parrot's ability to survive in their contracting habitat? And if we can't find a way to expand their habitat and return them to healthy patterns, how can we ensure their survival?

In the protocol, I read that 'Young Double-eyed Fig Parrots reach independence at approximately 2–4 weeks post fledging, although it is recommended to leave young with parents for a period of at least 10 weeks (from hatching), to ensure birds are feeding sufficiently to survive on there [sic] own.'

And then I read this: 'The young should be monitored closely when removed to ensure they don't stop eating' (Romer, 2001, p. 14).[7]

In the first year of the pandemic, in which all our environments contracted and our patterns were disrupted, the Butterfly Foundation received 57 per cent more contacts about eating disorders in August than it did in January. The foundation's research also indicates that '27 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults have an eating disorder, compared with 16 per cent of non-Indigenous adults, also higher for school students' (Dale, 2020).

In the Indigenous-led health model for eating disorders, I read that the self is experienced and expressed through connections to country, culture, ancestors and spirituality, body, mind and emotions, kinship and community (Dale, 2020). And as I read, I begin to think that we might all be coming to understand how extractive colonising cultures diminish an environment of self for us all. And I think I might finally be starting to understand what people mean when they say that we are collectively grieving.

For so long it felt that to grieve was to give in. To stop fighting, to stop putting out the fires. Yet, here I find myself: at a point of acceptance, understanding that the grieving

[7] The Protocol referred to here is one compiled by Liz Romer for Currumbin Bird Sanctuary. At the time of writing, the Recovery Team was drawing on this and other protocols to develop a standard. See: Romer in Works cited.

began long ago. The connection feels evident, visceral, as ropy and real as the cord that once joined my daughter to me. It makes me wonder if this is how we save a bird. Do we all need to feel her, to know her patterns as the story of ourselves? To understand her call as proxy for our own? And if it is, then what I'm asking is this: how do we heal our environment and share the story, recognise ourselves in the pattern of it, rather than trying to own it?

Is this what it means to give the body what it needs?

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The dietician taps out a revised meal plan, smiling with genuine pleasure at our questions, maintaining focus on both us and her task with the mental acuity of a forest kingfisher.

'Keep following the pattern of your alarms and your hunger cues will return,' she reassures V.

In the third phase of recovery, she tells us, with hunger cues restored, V should be able to respond to those instead of her alarms. When that happens, my daughter must learn to trust herself again, to follow her own signals and allow them to nourish her. This will free her up to explore more of herself and her world than anorexia has allowed — to leave the tree hollow and know that she can return when she needs to, thrilled at both the predictability and discovery she encounters.

'I felt a bit hungry last night when dinner was late,' V offers.

'That's a really good sign,' the dietician replies, smiling anew as she taps. 'Keep paying attention to that.'

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I know that no matter how much attention we pay to listening for her signals, Coxen's fig-parrot, if she can be found, will never return to inner-city Meanjin. But there are people who still hold out hope for the Sunshine Coast hinterland, where the fig-parrot was last spotted spilling figs on the floors of remnant rainforest.

There, the community has laboured to germinate a network of corridors between habitats, persevering through plantings delayed by scorching droughts and searing heatwaves — pushing through the extreme UV that has blighted seed production, through the weeds that have thrived in the resulting greenhouse and strangled the understory to

pose an even greater fire risk amid rising temperatures. These challenges, along with CO2 levels, are changing the pattern of rainforest fruiting and seeding seasons. And to top it off, the unwelcome European brown hare *Lepus europaeus* has found the tender young fig trees the community has planted quite to its taste.

Both money and time have been too short to establish the groundwork needed to outpace the newly emerging climate patterns. It is as if the community has asked what they could actually control and found out it was much less than they thought. But, still, the recovery plan doesn't let the bird go: 'recovery will take some time even after threatening processes are mitigated,' it promises. The possibly extinct bird must be 'resilient', it argues, for there to be 'sightings' of it (DES, 2021, p. 21). This hopeful wording subtly suggests that perhaps we are simply unable to detect the new cues it is following.

As a proxy for saving their environment and themselves, it seems to be this community's hope, its refusal to stop listening, that remains most resilient. And perhaps, in their way, they are hearing her even if she is gone. Just as that small girl with the avian arms I loved is gone. Like the healthy child she was before that. Sometimes, I think I hear her too, in the young woman she is becoming: in the young woman I find in the kitchen with her sister, preparing a two-egg salad to eat with a leftover slice of pizza. Or in the words of the Neil Young song *Only love can break your heart* that she listens to just as I did at her age, back when I instinctively understood that it could feel okay to admit that love — for a place, a person, a species, for all that you are part of — could break your heart.

And when I listen, what I hear is the pattern of a young woman searching for herself in an environment she is grieving for and has accepted is changing, but one she's still part of.

She is stumbling and tripping and falling through the tangle of the disappearing vine forest and getting back up again, with her sister beside her, and a small bird with eyes more like beacons than warning flares to guide her.

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9.2 Creative work 2 — *The kissing disease*

I am ten when my mother leaves me on the island with my great-aunt, her mother's sister, to recover from the kissing disease — though I do not remember being kissed.

I remember the tremble that lurched through my mother's fingers so that she could not thread a machine. The tears she could not seem to stop. She had left me that time with her own sister.

I remember the hunch that crept across my father's back as he launched a full-shouldered hurl. The crashing of furnishings. The warning too true to be funny: 'Don't clean it up. I'll only do it again.' That's when she had left me to board a jet for her mother country, to recover from telling my father to leave. To see her still-English son.

But I do not remember the kiss that puts me on a barge to the island. Only the groan of steel meeting timber as the waves narrow down to a shark-netted pool. The sideways stares of the curlews; the thrill of their full-throated call. The neat arc of the hoop-pined hill up to the small fibro house festooned with fish floats, with its lawn like a loose net strewn across sand. The green vinyl settee, where I lie slack-limbed and lazy, immune for the moment from my great-aunt's barking: at the horse that drops manure on the grass she calls a green, at my great-uncle who is home late from the pub for his chops, at the boys I call cousins — her grandchildren — whose bare weekend feet pedal fine white particles between their grandma's house and their nan's.

'Inside. Or outside,' she barks in a voice that belongs to the Yorkshire dales. 'But I'll not have you in and out all day.'

I am ten when my mother leaves me on the island with my great-aunt, her mother's sister, to recover from a kiss I cannot recall.

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The island itself is three hundred million years old and it too has known upheaval. Consider what memories the island's headlands contain — in the rhyolites of hardened lava to the north and the gravel-and-sandstone layer cake to the west. Imagine the cataclysms captured in its sands.

Tumbled and separated into quartz, rutile, ilmenite, zircon and other glistening minerals, the windblown dunes that blanket the island's bedrock are swept here by rivers and ocean currents; they are bits and drifts of granite and sedimentary rock that once

climbed the sky as mountains in New South Wales. They are smashed souvenirs of the fissures where Antarctica and Australia joined as ancient Gondwana. Across the island, their gathered profiles silhouette the air that danced here between three hundred thousand and six thousand years ago (Barram & Carew, 2016, p. 15). They dip and rise and undulate, spawning hardy heath with toothy blooms that are the first to thrive in their folds.

I am not of the island, not Goenpul or Noonukul or even Ngugi of Mulgumpin, nor of Quandamooka Country, but my cousins are — my cousins and their mother and those before her. They belong to this island, its waters, its skies, porpoises, visiting whales; they belong in a way my great-aunt and the rest of our family cannot, and not just because my great-uncle heads out to the mines each day after bacon and eggs to bulldoze the island's sands into places they should not be.

I am ten when my cousin tries to explain this, when he downs his bike and furrows his brows, which are owlish like my great-aunt's, his nan's.

'You know,' he says. 'This island isn't yours, don't you?'

Bright spears of sunlight freckle my nose through the paperbark canopy. The heat of a retort stirs in my lungs. The triangular brace of my girlish fists press into my still-boyish hips.

But words will not form because I cannot quite grasp what he's asking.

The island's stories are as unknown to me as my own.

I do not know the island itself is one hundred thousand years old or thereabouts when, down below the bedrock, it begins to catch its cascading rains. Or that cupped in the palms of open dunes, freshwater lakes float upward, pushing the sea and salt that creeps in beneath back out. That these perched bodies of freshwater are fed filtered rainwater through settled strata of sand and soil and the life that has come before, now hardened with age. That the springs, streams, lakes, lagoons and mangroves that bejewel the dunes are strung together where an aquifer feeds them, syphoning ancient strife back into thriving habitats. That scientists will call this 'a unique assemblage' of interconnections (Barram & Carew, 2016, p. 17) long after Quandamooka people have sung the tracks of Kabul the Carpet Snake and understood how he moves here (Delaney, 2013, p. 17).

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I am ten when my mother leaves me on the island with the great-aunt she will not allow me to call ‘Nanna’ like my great-aunt wants me to, like all my cousins here do because for them it is true. Because they are, more precisely, my second cousins on their father’s side. But I am a child of a partial family migration who does not know how to count degrees.

I am cosied up on the sleep-out’s green vinyl settee, staring up at the louvres set at half-mast to act as shelves for conches, and starfish, and bottles enveloping letters flung from Fijian cruise ships, and wallaby skulls, and jettisoned pieces of coral reefs. The air is sea-rinsed, the light as clear as the four o’clock rockpools we stare into in search of starfish and soldier crabs and whatever will let us glimpse it. I am fresh from the bath that is tiled with purple poodles, my hair soft with bore water, watching my grandmother’s sister scoop up my cousin, my agemate, to bat the length of his lashes against the fuzz on her cheek. And I am turning over his question, my mind a tumbling wave, as my great-aunt sing-songs us made-up names to chuckle at when we complain.

Little do I know, she is taping us to play back to the family later on. Little does she know, I am taping everything myself to play back in my mind just for me: the lurid blue rings of the octopus she has told us never to touch; the sweeping wave of a mine-cut dune, clenched like a fist behind her head — her curls pushed flat against the sand-pricked wind. My cousins’ backs glistening in the tea-coloured waters of a sedge-lined lagoon. And that question, that is tumbling and turning, gathering sediment as it tries to form itself into an answer.

When I stumble off the barge on the mainland, my dress is crinkled with a lemonade farewell, and I am almost well again.

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I am ten when I learn that it is my mother’s way when things go awry to set them alight and smoke them by the sea.

We hitch a caravan to her Kingswood and move away to live in a bayside park where there are late-night drinks and interstate men and endless cigarettes.

In exchange for the life we have left behind, I choose cherry-red knobs for the cupboards above the caravan’s bed. I comb the sands lit orange by picolytes, scanning bits of broken glass for moon snails and the cast-off claws of ghost crabs.

Across the bay, the island's sand mines glisten like newly formed scars upon the ocean's skin.

The tide comes in.

'I have a surprise,' my mother tells me.

The tide goes out.

Back on the outskirts of the city, she buys a house and reinstalls my father.

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The island is two hundred and ninety-nine million nine hundred and ninety-two thousand five hundred years old when sands settle over a dip where the dunes meet the water table and Karboora, the sacred blue-watered lake, opens like a window above the aquifer. For seven thousand five hundred years Karboora's purity, stability and unique biodiversity — its acid frogs, its broad-shelled river turtle, the ornate rainbowfish that live here among the endemic spike rush — settle into a balance so finely tuned, so exquisitely unperturbed that it will make headlines the whole world over (Barram & Carew, 2016, p. 71).

Karboora is three thousand five hundred years old when the Earth's great drying starts. All around it, bodies of water shrink and change, but Karboora remains suspended in its balanced state. Flushed by filtered rainwater and purified by sunlight that reaches right down to the lakebed's floor, Karboora sleeps undisturbed (Barram & Carew, 2016, p. 71).

But not for want of disturbance.

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I am eleven when the trembling returns, when my father resumes hurling the furnishings. When, again, my mother cannot thread a machine.

The tide comes in.

I help my mother pack the car for another seaside town.

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I am fourteen when my great-aunt touches my fingers to the mysterious ridge of shingles on her shoulder blade and gives me a case of the pox. Fifteen when my great-aunt is told she must part with her breasts.

My great-aunt bears this new indignance like the former, with no secrets to be guessed at, no description left unfelt. Soon after, she will bear the pert handiwork of a cosmetic surgeon for all to see, unaware of the treachery her body is plotting against her.

‘You don’t need to go to her funeral,’ my mother tells me.

But I am sixteen now and cannot be stopped.

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The tide goes out.

I am months away from seventeen when my mother marries a Californian with one working hand and a failing heart who drinks vodka until expletives form sentences. She reinstalls us back on the outskirts of the city and goes alone to smoke by the sea.

‘Do you know where your mother is?’ he asks me one night, wall-eyed, waiting for an answer that will not be right.

In his back, a hunch I’ve seen somewhere before is forming.

At my best friend’s house, her dressing-gowned father checks the locks behind me. At home, with his one good hand, my mother’s new husband hurls the furnishings through my window into the night.

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The island is three hundred million years old when the ocean begins to trickle into the aquifers, when its edges change faster than the creeks can follow (SIMO, 2019). In a pinprick, in a space of two hundred years, the balance begins to tremble. That’s seventy years of dredging, of moving dunes, of pushing through the protective humus, of habitats losing their unique assemblages. That’s two hundred years of European clearing, of introducing species, of attempted erasure, of overfishing, and for some of that time, keeping watch for warships, keeping the Goenpul and Noonukul peoples on the mission, and keeping the sick and destitute hidden away from the mainland.

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I am twenty-three when I next see my cousins at a family wedding. I am wearing clothes still creased with buyer’s folds, so stoned I can hardly speak.

‘Are you avoiding us?’ my cousin asks me.

Avoiding his eyes, I tell him ‘no.’

What we know of each other has become second-hand. A decade has blown in between us, shaped by winds that cross upon the compass. We are family, sharing blood brought here on boats, but we know each other's lives likes maps where others have scrawled their warnings.

For close to a decade, I hold my headlands together, let them come apart. I crash in and out of courses, bluff my way into jobs and leave them in a bluster. I move houses, units, exchange housemates for new ones. I circle the city the way I circle relationships, like a sea eagle too wary to land. There are times when I do land, and a stillness wells up, soothing for as long as it holds. That question, tumbled and turned, lies buried, covered in sediment at the bottom of my mind.

The tide comes in.

I begin to think I have become an island.

The tide goes out.

Or something like what I think an island might be.

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The island is three hundred million minus one hundred years old when a storm brings the turbulence of the Jumpinin Channel to the slim isthmus that linked the island to its other southerly half. Here, where the island dips beneath the ocean, an estuary forms, mingling salt with the waters of an aquifer-fed creek that has travelled from beyond the high dunes, waved on its journey by cabbage tree palms and enveloped in vine forest, to merge with the mudflats and saltmarshes where so much ocean life begins (Barram & Carew, 2016, p. 70). It is where whimbrels wade on spindly legs, through the seagrass to the samphire and beneath the mangrove ferns to pluck minyulan (MMEIC, 2011, p. 51) from shells painted with pink-grey rainbows, before pushing themselves up into a tailwind that will nudge them northward to Siberia.

The island is a drowned island, part of the mainland where the sea rushed in and left high places for the dunes to rise and fall. What is left, all that lies within, lies within a sanctuary that is connected to the skies, the seas — by its own life — to the life of other islands, to the mainland. Its isolation, its connection make it vulnerable, make it strong. When biogeographers talk about the island, they use words like 'matrix', 'connectance' and 'dynamic'; it makes them think about how full of islands the mainland must be.

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I am thirty-two when I take my three children to build sandcastles out of quartz, rutile, ilmenite and zircon beside Caspian terns. To comb the beach; to see my children's backs glistening in the tea-coloured waters of a sedge-lined lagoon. To see my cousin again. To hear my cousin say that he will teach my children the island, to know its history, to understand its ways.

My cousins are of the island. I am ten when I first try to understand this; I am thirty-two when my cousin next lets it bubble up from his chest.

We part again and I send him a message. When he does not reply I do not try again. I don't know what holds me back from asking if he can help me answer the question. But something does. Perhaps it's the constant circling. Or the constant threat of the tide.

Or could it be that a question given away is the not the asker's question to answer.

Another decade blows in and about between us.

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The island is three hundred million years old and I am thirty-six when the Quandamooka people, the people who belong to the island, are officially recognised as its custodians (QYAC, n.d.). When eighty per cent of the island is pledged to become Naree Budjong Dajara National Park; when forty-eight of the island's animals and thirteen of the island's plants have become hard to find, classed as either rare or threatened and when one — the overpicked Christmas bells, whose bobbing heads have prettied far too many vases — has become extinct on the island (DESQ, 2013).

I am thirty-six when Jandai, one of the island's three languages, finds its way back onto the tongues of its speakers after being discouraged for 200 years (MMEIC, 2011, p. i), when only two of eighty-five ancient shell middens on the island remain (Barram & Carew, 2016, pp. 33, 67).

I am forty when yulingbila, the humpback whales, who visit the Quandamooka people each winter, begin to recover from 120 years of turning the waters red. When scientists warn that the waters off Antarctica are warming and the whales' diet of krill might be elsewhere and lower in numbers when they arrive (Lloyd, 2019).

I am forty-three when the sandmining finally ends and the companies are told they must cover their tracks. Leftover sand, scraped into uniform humps, replaces the snaking

climbs and lilting falls that formed from mountains and breeze over ages. Nutrients drain from these approximations too quickly and lonely stands of black she-oaks take hold, their snare-brush needles whispering where the chorus of a eucalypt forest once sang (Barram & Carew, 2016, 31).

I am forty-four when the country announces that it is on target to lower greenhouse gas emissions to 2005 levels within twelve years; when the world's carbon level reaches '409.8 parts per million — higher than at any point in at least the past 800,000 years' (Lindsey, 2000). When, over the island, a pattern of less than usual rainfall emerges. When the swamps and wetlands turn their peat to the sun and begin to burn, and when the fires burn longer and further than they've burnt before (SIMO, 2019).

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The island itself is three hundred million years old when I learn that water is drawn from the island's aquifers to pipe to the thirsty mainland.

For decades, I have made my way over to the island to drink down guilty gulps from that well of calm and bring it back away without visiting my cousins, without listening where I've had the chance. I think about the forces that shaped the island, the memories held in its headlands, the stories that move through its waters. What is the difference, I wonder, between dozing the sand, disturbing the water table and avoiding the hurt in the question?

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I am forty-four when my cousin calls the family to a picnic.

My cousin has been learning his language, spending time with his elders, thinking about the past, the present and the future of the island. He gently explains why the nouns of his nanna's tongue, which is mine and his father's, collapse dunes, rock pools, melaleuca into arbitrary shapes. Why my description of thyme-honey myrtle, beach bean or pigface is like a beginner artist's drawing of one, of one seen somewhere else (in a book, on the TV, in the mind) conflated with this one here.

'I don't point to that tree and use the same noun for it as the tree on the mainland up a hill,' he tells me. 'Not, when that is the tree by that water.'

Juxtaposition, the linguists call it, when qualities cosy up to a noun without a verb or a tense (Dixon , 2019, p. 94). When those qualities are essential to understanding the

nature of this noun and the relationships that define it, linguists call this ‘inalienable possession’. This is when ‘the part cannot be physically separated from the whole’, in the same way that ‘you cannot give away your nose or your brother, or your father’s clavicle’ (VCAA, 2018).

Or your cousin.

My cousin doesn’t name the mistakes my great-aunt’s husband and son — his grandfather and father — have made, nor do I speak of the trembling tides and the hurling of furnishings. My cousin says simply: ‘We need to do better.’

The island is Minjerribah. The island in the sun. Minjerribah is three hundred million years old. Like an outstretched arm along the Quandamooka coast, Minjerribah cradles us where the sucked-in belly of the bay begins to exhale.

The island is my cousin’s family. My cousin is my family. Beneath the island, life rich in clarity flows through upheaval to meet the life it supports.

I am forty-five when my cousin’s father, my uncle, says: ‘The family that bought the old place found a photo of you and your cousin on the wall up behind a cupboard.’

I don’t belong to the island but somewhere inside me, I am ten and the island is three hundred million years old.

I can’t remember being kissed.

And yet I was.

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9.3 Creative work 3 — *Pilgrimage to Frog Hollow*

The man my mother and aunt call Honey Bear leaves my window wound up. Through it, I watch as my parents follow Honey Bear's ambling gait across the dual carriageway — from the bush-lined side he has parked me, over to the side with the modest blonde-brick house we will buy. The trees outside the car vibrate in greens, olives, greys, browns, whites — in shades I can't remember ever seeing before — alive with the electric energy of cicada chant. In the trapped heat of the car's maroon interior, my polyester polka-dot dress has begun to prickle under the armpits. Squinting at the house for a sign of my parents' return, I wonder woozily why this man has left me here without even a hint of honey.

This is my first memory of Australia: at the edge of peri-urban Algester, age three. I am parked on the southernmost margin of Brisbane where it joins the shire of Logan, where tiled roofs and pony clubs are beginning to push a pocket of brown into the surrounding green. We had lived in the early scratches of this suburb before, around the time of my birth, in what had been my mother's second attempt to adopt this country. But that had been before she became sick, packed us up for her homeland and made my first memories English.

Forty-three years later, standing with my family in the Karawatha Forest carpark not far from Algester, this sense of displaced confusion revisits me. It is the end of the first Brisbane lockdown. I have just come home from the hospital with a sick teenage daughter to find the whole world shuttered. I have watched the disintegration of knowns through screens of varying sizes, peering through pixelated portholes — when not fussing over my daughter, worrying about her twin or fretting for her older sister, who has found herself stuck behind closed borders unable to leave the country for her university exchange.

Now in the forest carpark, we watch fine-limbed children with heads made massive by globular helmets whiz along the concrete strip that helixes through the clipped grass of the picnic area; we dodge young adults in athleisurewear and pastel trainers crunching up and down the tracks, pushing small white dogs like obligatory mops along the forest floor. We are here in search of the same thing: some kind of restoration. A salve. Something increasingly referred to as green therapy. We are here because we do not know where else to go.

My daughter's illness means she is not allowed to walk far, but I have forgotten to bring a map and nothing conjured by phone is comprehensible. As if following the Zealous

Settler's Handbook of Coloniser Tropes, we lose our way somewhere between the Echidna Track and the Entolasia Trail and descend into sour looks and barely bitten tongues. The fresh air we've come for simmers in our lungs.

'Why didn't you bring your water?' I say, in response to murmured grumbling.

'Why didn't you bring a map?' comes the swift reply.

We walk on, in pairs or alone, kicking up the ochre dust of sandstone ridges before the distant canopies of dark ironbarks give way to stands of pale scribbly gums where hairy orange caterpillars hang from webs in conformist mobs. When paperbarks begin to appear, baring their soft cream bellies above the swaying sedges, we realise we have somehow managed to fluke the way to Frog Hollow.

I post a picture to Instagram of my daughters on a timber bridge. In it, the sick child's feet dangle in a clump of strappy dianella as she examines her brittle fingernails; the other two stare with glazed eyes, arms folded, towards a waterhole that has shrivelled to a crusty wet scab. Beneath this picture, I type a quote from Susan Sontag's *Pilgrimage* (1987):

'And I uttered nothing but tongue-tied simplicities, though I was full of complex feeling. We were neither of us at our best.'

'#teenengagement', a friend comments.

The crying face emoji doesn't seem up to the task of reply.

'#yuggeracountry', I offer weakly.

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When someone you are close to gets sick and you don't know when or if or how they will heal, everything changes. When a world gets sick you can multiply that by 7.9 billion.

Throughout my childhood, my mother was often sick. It was not the kind of sickness you gave a name, but the kind you learnt to watch for. The kind that announced you would soon be packing up for somewhere else. Staying a while. Passing through, before returning to Algester, or close by.

The Yuggera people who have always belonged to the country in and around Karawatha are no strangers to the concept of passing through. Melissa Lucashenko (2016), in consultation with Yuggera elders, writes:

> In Aboriginal culture, people other than traditional owners visit or pass through others' territory only with permission. Before white contact, many Aboriginal peoples travelling the ancient tracks which later became Logan Road would have passed close to the forest area, and probably camped within it as guests of the Yuggera … The 'carefully managed' Half Moon Lagoon system would have provided the Yuggera and their guests with 'wallaby, goanna, snake, fish, lobsters and possum … honey, yams, berries'.

What I can't help notice is how different this is from the 'passing through' that I knew. It is a way of connecting people and places together. It is a sharing of the stories of place.

When I think about my idea of Algester, the place where things had felt most right for me even when they weren't, it becomes apparent to me that I too was only ever passing through — without permission. That the familiarity I craved depended on the Yuggera people's despair at what may have seemed a rapidly spreading sickness.

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On the morning that I decide that we — the family — must visit Karawatha, I drag the map's blue line straight through Algester towards it. Twenty minutes later, I find myself trying to navigate a route through the uncanny valley of my own mind. The sclerophyll forest that once surrounded Algester, defining it, is mostly gone. In its place is the well-manicured suburb of Stretton, which the protected forest touches. All around me, new lives have been erected from concrete slabs and cream guttering with fences to match. Everything is nice. New. The dreams are as wide as the drives needed to accommodate the SUVs. New dreams, paving over the barely old and those that endure here.

In my mind, this suburb is a new addition. In reality, it has existed for twenty-five years, blooming on the map like bacteria in a Petri dish ever since I left.

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We know that the suburbs are, by and large, places of impermanence, that they lend themselves to transience, to communities defined by ephemeral connection. Many of us who live in them see ourselves not as custodians but as distracted janitors waiting for our shift to end. We raise our children here in the hope that they will leave. To stay in a suburb forever might mean that you are not thriving, that you are stuck in the past. This thinking swerves me into frustration and fear: a pandemic is now stopping my children from

leaving. I am not equipped to teach them how to be in the one place, despite it being the place where half their stories have been set. But I am coming to understand that I must try. Adolescence is too often seen as a place like the suburbs: somewhere to pass through swiftly with its difficulties erased from our memories soon after. In shunning these memories, we lose the opportunity to share all that we have learnt in that place. We prune away the connections we believe will not help us bloom and spend our lives looking elsewhere for what we think we have lost.

If I were to give my mother's sickness a name, I might call it memory loss — acquired in England's rural midlands, where she first felt she could not thrive. It is a kind of cultural sickness, one that prunes away the understanding that we are in relationship with our environment and those we share it with, wherever that environment may be and whatever state it might be in. Its source is in the received thinking that divides city from country, human from more-than-human, nature from culture — the coding that assigns dominance, ownership, use and value to place and chooses who and what that excludes. It is heritable and highly transmissible. It manifests as a perceived loss of connection to place and keeps us settlers searching for one. It is what we seek green therapy to restore. But in seeking this restoration, we may transmit our sickness further, ignoring the actual loss that First Nations peoples have endured.

The truth is, we don't need to go looking for what we think we have lost to begin to heal. We need to remember and listen. We need to learn how to care for the place we are in as if it is someone we are close to, as if it is part of ourselves.

Collectively, we are beginning to understand that sickness cannot be isolated, forgotten, paved over. That we cannot keep passing through, erasing our histories: that we need to acknowledge the scars and the sicknesses we have shared.

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I don't remember Honey Bear and my parents returning to the car. Only the jar-bound coils of a snake after my father fished it out of our pool. Shaking my shoes to dislodge resident redbacks. The car parts my father and uncle scavenged from wrecks in the bush across the road.

I don't remember it as a perfect time — the threat of my mother's sickness was ever-present — but like honey, these are the memories that sustain me, give a buzzing energy to the idea of what made me: sweet enough to coexist with all the others in and of that place.

They make me hopeful that in our confused disorientation, like a family stumbling tongue-tied and full of complex feeling upon a waterhole, we can find a way to heal.

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9.4 Creative work 4 — *Pioneer species*

Dear resident,

This is how it begins — with a letter slipped under the door. With an architecturally inspired X for a logo, twisted into the shape of a house. With a brief black-and-white rectangle containing the words

all trees will be removed and the land will be levelled at No. 23.

I look up from the page to the neighbouring wall of trunks and fronds that spill over the chainwire fence, their bellies pressed against the chinks, rising and spreading, tall and riotous, so that our rented inner-city worker's cottage at No. 25 is hidden from passing cars and pedestrian eyes coming down the street.

It is true that the umbrella trees with leaves that fan like whirring clocks belong in Far North Queensland. That the cocos palms that fling their drupes across our roof have sailed across the South Pacific Ocean from Brazil and that their unripened pleasures will lock the jaws of flying foxes in nights to come. That the fence-line forests of Chinese elms will continue to spawn rapid thickets of selfish shade. That these towering frenemies will keep drawing the celtis leaf beetle south and away from central coastal Queensland where it should be feeding on *Celtis paniculate* and participating in its own authentic community instead. I know that all these trees, out of their own communities, are weeds. And despite this knowing, I know I'll miss them too.

My partner, D, on the other hand, refuses to mourn the intruding canopy that has stunted his own gardening ambitions here in Meanjin's concrete-heavy heart.

'What about the gigantic hoop pine?' I say, going straight for his Achilles heel. (You need to play dirty if you're going to argue about weeds with an ecologist.)

He's talked before about how he'd replant right through the neighbour's yard if he had his way. But the pine, which is endemic, gigantic, perennially festive, would be the only thing he'd keep.

Lying on the bed at the end of a long week in yet another long year, his fingers work at the tangled earbuds sprouting from his phone. 'The guy's a developer,' he says, pushing a bud firmly in one ear. 'He said *everything*.'

I offer words like *shade* and *privacy* but his ears are budded and, anyway, these words fall short of the darkness I'm trying to convey. It's not only about the shade. Or the

chlorophyll glow of afternoon in our lounge room. Or the lorikeets that spill drunkenly, like scattered shards of rainbow, into our yard as the sun slips its amber fingers around our sideboard ornaments. Or the glint of possums' moonlit eyes as they clamber along our roof and land with a whoosh in the leafy network of surrounding branches. Or that these will be replaced with stark walls and sharp light and battalions of mother-in-law's tongues in the months to come.

It's about the fact that, in the late summer of my life, I'm still a renter here. That I'm further away from belonging to the place than when I first moved to the suburb as a student over twenty years ago.

Dear resident,

That's me.

I'm not an architecturally inspired logo. And I'm not Dear owner.

And I will miss all the other life, like me, that increasingly doesn't belong here.

+++

It is fitting that the meaning of the word 'resident' resides insecurely within itself, subject to the nature of movement that it seeks to represent.

It has come from the ancient Latin *residere*, to 'sit down, settle; remain behind, rest, linger; be left', in which the 're' once suggested that straying and returning was part of the lingering (Harper, 'Resident') but has, in French and English usage since 1570, come to mean both 'to dwell permanently or [to] have one's abode for a time' (Macquarie, 2016, p. 987).

I have, indeed, had my abode for a time. Ten years, in fact. I have strayed to other suburbs and returned here where I had friends and work and habits of being. I have married once, young, failed and slipped down the rungs to home ownership in the years I spent afterwards as a single mother of three. And I have still not figured out what you do, as a resident, with your feelings, your needs, your memories, your morning coffee on the back patio crammed with guilty exotics. With your flock of chickens and ginger cat all buried in the soil where you reside. Or the life you still share the place with: The blue-tongue that sunbakes under the stoop. The striped marsh frogs that duel like plucked banjos in the plastic tubs you call a water garden while your head sinks into the pillow at night. Or the spangled drongo with its forked tail, flitting between the close-packed houses, taking you

by surprise. What do you do with the unexpected reach of all this familiarity in a place you cannot afford to call your own? What does a resident do with all this when it is threatened?

A resident googles X to see what kind of developer he is, to assess the level of threat.

Gated elegance in the heart of Brisbane, his website boasts of a Bauhaus bunker with a green wall.

Reading this, something inside a resident feels as if it is taking flight.

'The construction noise,' I say, grasping at this new concern.

But, again, noise falls short of the darkness I'm trying to convey. Again, it is not about this other thing.

Dear X, I write.

I go on to tell him all about us, his new neighbours. *The human face*, I call this. I mention exams. I mention work-from-home scenarios. The need to keep protruding eaves and air conditioners. I do not mention the spangled drongo. Or the beloved chicken bones beneath the Chinese elms. Or the hobby garden full of local species that D spends his early evenings watering, backlit by western sun, swarmed by motes that bite.

Later, when I do try to tell him about this, it will be too late.

+++

Landownership, writes Simon Winchester (2021), has its origins in a 'point of unconformity' (p. 46). From the moment a difference could be noted in the demarcation between here and there, then yours and mine, the settlers who first farmed Europe found a way to put a boundary to use. But it is how different cultures have interpreted and enacted the rules around these unconformities that would shape the resulting cultural view of how humans should relate to their environments, to each other, and all they share it with. As the myth of terra nullius tells us, if landowners don't conform to the rules of acceptable use, colonising cultures find ways not to recognise ownership at all.

Before X came along, the cottage next door was owned by a long-bearded man who had lived in it for over thirty years and who was known to throw rakes at children whose bike tyres bruised his hot-pink impatiens. He also called to have the footpath fixed when my aunt tripped on a minor tectonic rift that had, on impact, lifted a mountain range along her cheek. Over the years, the man had become known for his habit of saving things, too

many things, to the point of becoming the city's richest hoarders. It was he, with a twinkling zirconia nestled in his whiskers, who had nurtured the weeds that overtook three inner-city yards. It was he who reminded everyone that you can discard what you like but it will not just go away. Impervious to storm, flood, fire, rot, collapse or the council, the things he saved persisted while change churned all around him. Perhaps this is why it seems so unfair that, in the end, it was scarcity (of land like his) that got him.

Landownership might have given our old neighbour the 'right of exclusion', but it did not protect him from neighbours who believed it was he who should be excluded.

After they finished removing his things, they had the man removed as well, making room for the gated elegance that the neighbours agreed belonged there.

Landownership, it might be said, ends just where it begins: at a 'point of unconformity' (Winchester, 2021, p. 46).

+++

Hi C, it's X from next door. I noticed that the arborists left a huge mess in your front yard. Can clean it for you on Monday?? I hope this is okay.

Hi X — that's a lovely offer. D is happy to clean it up himself. He has a native garden out the front so he will do it, just to make sure nothing gets pulled out. But thanks for offering.

Hey C, I just wanted to let you know that the earthmovers are starting today. They will most certainly stir up some dust. I see you have some white shirts on your clothesline!! [close call smiley face]

Yikes. Thanks, X. Will get those in before I head out. Thanks for letting us know.

+++

Before our old neighbour went unwillingly into respite care, we'd already started to think about our near future as empty-nesters.

'We need to work out where we want to be in a couple of years when they bulldoze this place too,' I'd told D. 'We need a plan.'

We'd decided on the Sunshine Coast hinterland to help my cousin care for my aunt and to be close to D's family who live there. We'd plant our own garden, plan our own shade, nurture a community — make our own decisions about whether or not we wanted

curtains. It was somewhere we thought we could afford to actually buy. But then news of a novel virus spread, and many of those who could no longer travel decided they would spend their money on a treechange, on a place where they could work from home, taking advantage of the flood of cheap money in the form of cheap interest rates that the government freed up for those who already had plenty. We watched the news, eyes boggling at the hinterland prices as they soared right through the canopies.

And then, because the mind has a way of fooling you back into whatever it thinks you need, I refashioned the plan, leaving out the parts that suggested I had limited options: accept that you are already home, I told myself. Home ownership: the Australian dream. What is that, anyway? A bank. A taxation loophole. A superannuation fund. These things do not make a home. Accept that your home is here, where the currawongs who once visited from the mountains only in winter now fling pegs from your socks any time they like, where the brush turkeys run like startled dinosaurs through renovations funded by government grants. Accept that this place will not stop changing, but it is home.

The place in my mind, the home I'd been looking for, I told myself, fed only one story of myself — at the expense of all other stories. I suspected myself of writing what Emily Potter (2019) would call my own 'sorry novel', looking to the 'redemptive possibilities of non-modern environments', hoping 'to redeem [my] fraught belonging and reclaim a rightful place, even if this is mediated through violent and discomforting pasts' (pp. 46–48).

Learn how to live here in this disturbed state, I told myself. Live with the edge dwellers — the ibis, the crows, the noisy miners — and refuse to sweep away the past. Accept that perhaps, somehow, you are part of this place now in some dubious way. *Naturalised*, as the ecologist calls it, pervasive and persistent like the umbrella tree or the cocos palm or the Chinese elm but part of a system in a functioning state of its own, damaged as it might be.

This is how I resolved to outrun the terms of my residence. And for a while it actually worked.

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It's a bright-blue winter's day when the arborists' chainsaws fall silent and the earth mover putters out of the neighbour's backyard. I look at what isn't left and I think about how hard an absence is to take in. How it's even harder to describe. You can start by

describing what is no longer there. Or you can try to look harder to see what remains. Out the back, at the farthermost end of a beige expanse, I see the dead end our neighbour backs onto. I count four houses, two shrubs, two compact trees and an apartment building that were previously hidden by palettes of green.

'It's pretty bare, isn't it,' I say apologetically, on behalf of my species, to the pied butcherbird perched on the Hills hoist beside me.

It glares back at me purposefully before retrieving a mouthful of legs from the dirt. Then, in a black-and-white flash, it's gone again, reminding me that life is everywhere, whether one particular species sees it or not. From the leopard tree three houses down, the bird's melodic chortling sounds suspiciously like gloating.

'Acclimatisation in action,' I mutter to whomever might still be there.

When the next morning unfolds empty of brawling lorikeets or the crystalline bell of magpie, I convince D to come for a drive out of the city to the native plant nursery in one of the suburbs more committed to leafiness. We are looking for macarangas with their sprays of broad, heart-shaped parasols that will shoot up fast and fill the space where the umbrella trees outside our loungeroom previously stood.

Macarangas are a tropical and subtropical pioneer species and, strictly speaking, don't appear in the government's documented list of rainforest plants that grew in pre-cleared Binkenba, but our old neighbour grew them and we have already allowed two to spring up spontaneously in our yard. As a pioneer species, they are programmed to grow rapidly in areas of disturbance, until they are succeeded by the plants destined to form higher canopies after them, having grown under the pioneer's opportunistic protection. Birds also love the macaranga's continuous fruiting, and so, in these extenuating circumstances, D is willing to turn a blind eye to the contextual ambiguity the list imbues them with.

We have crunched up and down the nursery aisles, criss-crossing and double-checking for some time before we come to accept that the nursery is out of stock and settle instead for other fast growers: leptospermum, which (with care) will shower us with multitudes of pollinator-loving blossoms in the spring and a wattle with determined, upward-pointing leaves whose sunshine fragrance I imagine wafting on the breeze and in through the living room window.

Afterwards at home, I skirt our parameters, digging up delicate cotyledons and holding them out to D in the hope that what I've found are the first embryonic signs of new macarangas. He confirms several, so I plant the strongest three between the seedlings we have bought and water them in along our side of the fence line, nestling rocks around them to ward off the brush turkeys who will indelicately taste test anything new. For a moment we content ourselves with the feeling that we have encouraged new life. We push away the thought that the day will soon come when the earth in this garden is moved and this life is ploughed into the ground.

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When British cultural theorist Raymond Williams wrote about earth moving, he described it as a tool of the 'improvers', a class of people concerned with producing a 'disposition of nature' to suit their own mediated point of view, to serve either their 'practical' or their 'aesthetic' use values (as quoted in Giblett, 2012, p. 927).

Williams, before his death in 1988, started a conversation that no one else has found a way to adequately finish. So, the conversation continues with some humans trying to figure out how to live in cities and square this with Williams' (as quoted in Giblett, 2012, p. 927) advice that we need to practise a sense of 'livelihood' which reconnects us to the entire web of life running through a place, to darn up the imaginary rift we've created between the concepts of city and country.

The ecological project D works on involves recording birds on rural landowners' properties, usually farmers', to help gain a clearer picture of an area's ecological state. A big science fiction fan, he's recently read Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Ministry for the Future* and become fascinated with applying its concepts to planet Earth. This means finding incentives for landowners to care for their 'property' in a way that creates steps to incremental, sustainable change and rekindles ecological connection. He trundles across farms in far western Queensland, listening for life, and when he comes home, he stands in the diminutive woodland he has cultivated on this inner-city land that another man owns and listens some more.

In our own small way, we have also moved earth. We have produced a garden that conforms to our own practical and aesthetic use values. It is an island of attempted restoration, floating disconnected from its surrounding context and the contexts it should join, defying any real opportunity to be of any combined natural and cultural benefit. In

our own good-intentioned way, we have created our own boundaries of what is acceptable. Our classification system, in its exclusion of First Nations ways of knowing this place, and in the centring of a specific set of human values, is still a 'codification of the land'. We have, as writer John Kinsella (2011) points out (p. 35), perpetuated the 'codes of occupation', participating in an ongoing form of colonisation. Of continued denial, forgetting, dispossession and erasure. Of continued insistence that one society — one species — has the right to decide who or what belongs and who or what does not.

We've forged our way through shallow gravelly soil, looking to fill anything like a gap, forgetting to listen to what the gap might tell us.

I am still grappling with this when I meet X at our own forced unconformity with his machinery gnashing behind him.

+++

'I'll put some turf down there for you,' X is shouting over the din.

He points at a bare patch the size of a grave that his earth mover has just torn along our front fence, past his boundary. I open my mouth then close it again. We have not agreed to this and an exclamation-marked text message has not arrived to warn me. The gravesite he points at is beside our front gate where, until minutes ago, frisky white tufts of cat's whiskers glowed violet in the sun. Where blue-banded bees drifted upward to orbit constellations of jasmine stars. Where flying foxes and honeyeaters plucked clutches of shiny black berries that spilt from twining spirals of kangaroo vine.

For three days now, our house has shuddered and groaned as his earth mover has bullied the ground into giving up crops of late Triassic rocks along the side of our house. Machines with flashing lights have buzzed and bleeped back and forth outside our windows, followed by men in hi-vis vests hollering, examining, measuring, excising, removing any chainwire in their way. I feel jangled, on edge — threatened — as if a giant mechanical hand might reach down and remove me at any moment. And then I notice the seedlings we've planted to replace the lost shade: the pioneer species on our side of the boundary, bent and buried beneath builders' rubble, rock and chain-sawed chunks of umbrella tree.

'This,' I shout, stabbing a finger at the debris, 'is just not good enough.'

X's eyes follow my finger. 'I'm doing my best,' he shouts back, sweeping his arm towards the machinery. 'But this thing weighs 12 tonnes,' he adds, as if it's an uncooperative bullock he's wrangling.

'But this is the boundary,' I shout, stabbing again.

It sounds petulant and both of us know it. I imagine his text message back to the office.

X shrugs and I glare and we stand there with the earth mover growling and champing — the only living thing left in our midst. I look at the fashionable moustache he is growing before I look him in the eye. For a moment we stand there like this, sizing each other up with the noise and the dust billowing around us.

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'The project of decoloniality is always unfinished and open-ended,' writes the transcultural ecopoet Peter Minter (2021).

I take this to mean that the common language we seek will always harbour our histories. And that some weedy words are more noxious than others. Words that leave what Minter calls 'ideological traces' wherever they've been. Like *pioneer* with its assumption that none have come before, how it celebrates 'progress' and seeks congratulation on its struggles. We need only look to its origins in eleventh-century French to know that it was the word used to describe footsoldiers who cleared a way for invading armies. These are the traces that are hidden when we use such words to describe life — like 'pioneer species', who in fact grow in relation, not isolation — to ward off the fear of displacement my kind transported here.

It's true that those of us who haven't learnt how to belong find other ways to proliferate and rearrange things to hide this fact. In so doing, we lose the chance to learn what we can about a livelihood that might truly connect us to our environments, to take the ethical path that reminds us to engage.

I want to tell X that this is about *weeds*. About *residents*. About *ownership*. That we are standing on a faultline where the eruptive potential of our words cleaves meaning apart just as it cleaves meaning to it. But these are not words that should be shouted. Nor are they all mine to speak.

So, instead, I turn back to my rented workers' cottage and I shut the door on his noise and his dust and his ridiculous fashionable moustache. And in the sunlit loungeroom I sit and I think about the story I'm telling as the ground convulses beneath me, wishing I could explain it to him as the poet Kate Fagan (2012) does:

> Here I dig
> for a different language,
> a new balm for the bruise
> of lost opportunities

But the words I am searching for do not come and I can do nothing but watch the gecko that is darting across the windows, leaving lines of tiny hieroglyphs in its wake.

Dear resident,

This is how it begins.

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9.5 Creative work 5 — *The mends*

My eldest daughter scrutinises the teacup in my hands. Her bright-blue eyes linger on the pools that are swelling like riparian swamps from the jagged river of gold I've drawn through the teacup's shattered landscape. Above this river, below the glaze, a painted pair of magpie geese have begun to look less like they are gliding through the sky towards their roost and more like they are fleeing some sparkly environmental disaster. Taking a fragment of the cup's devastated handle, I nudge it against the stump it's been severed from, feeling for a fit that may or may not depend on finding other scattered shards. When it slots together with only a slim void still exposed, I brush the severed ends with a spot of resin and press them to each other. Under the awkward vice of my thumb and pointer, resin streams out of the cracks, its texture too slippery for a firm hold.

I'm learning the Japanese art of kintsugi, if video can be considered a teacher. At the kitchen table amid fruit bowls and laptops, I've spent the morning clonking pieces of advice, tips and information together, sanding off their rough edges and tempering my profanities to make them fit. It's not lost on me that this crude collating is similar to the process unfolding in my hands, of pushing together pieces of ceramic sky for painted geese to fly through.

In the thin crevices where violence has ruptured the scene, I've formed rough joins and run a line of resin through. As the resin has dried, I've dipped a paintbrush into a tiny tub of Solar Gold and tapped it over the cup's hemispheric curve so that the particles have fallen like volcanic ash into its shimmering veins. This is not the traditional way, but in the video I'm watching, the serene kimono-clad Japanese–Australian lady assures me that this more modern way is perfectly acceptable. She goes on to assure me that the result will be beautiful no matter how it turns out. She also seems to have left some information out.

'It's hard to get the consistency of the resin right,' I say, addressing my daughter's polite silence.

'Uh huh,' she says, her voice muffled as she reaches inside the fridge behind me.

There is the clattering sound of bowls on the bench and the squelch of plastic lids being lifted and the rattle of drawers being opened and then the smell of something like cat's vomit before she appears back beside me, stirring her chopsticks through a sticky bowl of fermented soybeans.

'The handle keeps falling off too,' I say.

She glances at the cup and points a chopstick at it before digging it into the pungent breakfast ritual she's recently cultivated.

'Perhaps you should've tried it on something you don't love so much,' she suggests, through mouthfuls of stink. 'Just until you'd got more confident.'

I'm inclined to agree. Doing a ham-fisted job of anything doesn't sit well with me. But before I can reply, she is wafting down the hallway, trailing clouds of fermentation behind her. I turn the cup in my hand, taking in its scars and glittering crags and in a moment, I know that I will not be able to stop trying to find beauty in it regardless of my bumbled handling. I mightn't have mastered the skill of making things stick, but if I'm practised in the art of anything, it's knowing what kind of love can and can't be lost.

She, my daughter, is just learning this now for the first time. She is meant to be in Japan on a university scholarship but our national borders are closed and her returned Japanese boyfriend has dumped her on grounds of inconvenience. She's kept the job that waned with lockdowns. And she's retained her right to keep her own bedroom from her younger twin sisters' eager grasp. Even so, I know that right now, she would rather not be here.

I pull a laptop across the cluttered table and start to tap out the kintsugi instructions I've gleaned so far, as if it is a recipe or sewing pattern that I need to see laid out in front of me — some manageable form that might guide me through the unknown process of repair. I will find a way to fill the gaps the unshockable lady has left for me. She might only be a smoothly rendered collection of pixels, but she's already taught me that it is in the waiting spaces that most of the learning occurs.

When I next look up, my daughter's door is shut and her voice is chirruping in the chorus of other young voices in her online linguistics tutorial.

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STEP 1: ASSEMBLE the pieces flat in front of you like a jigsaw puzzle to see how they all fit together. If there are any pieces missing or unsalvageable, decide whether or not you will use a piece from another item.

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The philosophy at the heart of kintsugi — that broken things can be even more beautiful than they were before they were broken — does not aim to encourage rampant

destruction but allows us to work through the imperfection of existence at a more manageable scale. Even so, as I watch the serene lady carefully hammer herself another hobby piece, it's hard not to feel that it would be better if some things had not been broken in the first place.

I'm of course thinking of my eldest daughter's dreams as a lesser casualty along with the lives lost or shattered in this pandemic. But even more selfishly, I have lately been thinking about what to keep and what to discard because I've been thinking a lot about where to next. It's as though I'm sifting through the detritus of half a life to find what I must mend to take with me into the next without knowing what will be left of any of it.

These past few weeks, I've been getting rid of things. Purging, my partner, D, calls it. It's not like me. It's as if I've found a way to assuage the itch, as if I've found a way to convince myself that if I just keep purging, movement will come soon after — or perhaps this purging might stand in for movement itself so that I do not have to keep asking the question of when?

In some ways, I've never been more unable to move — to look for a definitive home — and in others I'm closer than ever before. My youngest two daughters, twins, are eight months away from finishing high school. Yet one has an illness we will need to monitor, and a movement-limiting plague still runs wild. Like my eldest daughter, like everyone else right now, the future I thought I might build lies in pieces.

At a less manageable existential scale, the idea of this movement is partly fuelled by a lingering solastalgia that I feel unable to shake, specifically for a place I returned to again and again to grow up: the suburb of Algester on the southernmost margin of Brisbane, where it joins with the shire of Logan. This was the place that, amid the constant geographical and emotional upheaval of my difficult upbringing, felt most like home. The place where things felt most right even when they weren't.

When I return there now and see the sprawl of suburban horizon that has replaced the frilly green edge that once held me snug in its pocket, I feel an overwhelming sense of loss. The sclerophyll forest that once surrounded the place, defining it, is gone. In its place, tacked onto the side of Algester, in the fuzzy zone where it once became Calamvale, is a suburb called Stretton that is bordered by the Karawatha Forest, a protected area that dedicated locals fought in 1991 to retain. In my mind, well-manicured Stretton is a new

addition. In reality, it has existed for twenty-five years, blooming on the map like algae in a Petrie dish in the years since I left.

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STEP 2: RUN your fingers along all the edges, seeking out any sharp or brittle parts. Use a small piece of the finest grade sandpaper to gently plane away the sharpness. See if the pieces join more smoothly now.

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I've been trying to write about my relationship with place, to try to understand it in terms of attachment, to grope at the palpable link between the fractures in my relationship with my primary attachment figure and my ambivalent sense of spatial belonging. In other words, the stories I tell of myself are invariably shaped by my own mother's inability to stay still.

This is why, when I try to tell the story from the start of the pandemic, of my mother returning from the tourist island of Bali where she lives when a pandemic isn't raging, the words fall from my mouth in a ramshackle clatter.

My half-brother, a retired English cop that she left behind for another continent, another man, another child, over four decades ago does not suffer from my affliction. For him, the police report is a ready-made form of self-expression in which the perpetrator performs a logical sequence of actions, no matter how illogical those actions might be. In my accounts, the choices that must be made in the telling are never so clear. I hesitate at whether to bring in one part of the story here or there, or at all; to coax together the interrelated events of the past; to release the cacophony of feeling, thought and image associated with each event, each new move to a new place and the return, or to simply plod on, stubbornly forcing the shards into a serviceable shape that might hold just enough water.

'She's living at a backpackers' in town,' I start, before the narrative falters.

I see her in my kitchen, the double shock of her bright-blue eyes within the electrostatic frame of her dyed-black hair. She is recounting with flared nostrils the construction noise that drove her to pillory the wooden gate of her Balinese landlord's property with a metal pole. She is talking loud and fast, stalling then restarting like a runaway lawn mower, about how the police were called in. About how they don't take

kindly to foreigners' breakdowns and how never coming back was, in the end, a condition of her leaving.

I don't know whether to add that my three teenage daughters have described the backpackers' she now lives in as rundown with a claustrophobic lift, or that she spends her evenings in its basement bar trading stories and tarnished dreams with stranded travellers over crumbed drumsticks and beer.

That, months since my mother told me she was moving on, my daughters still see her haunting the city's supermarket aisles for cheap cuts to simmer in her portable slow cooker.

What I'm getting to, in a novice potter's way, is that perhaps it is not only the not knowing 'where to next' that acts as a hammer on the past's connection to the future. Perhaps it is not acknowledging truthfully where you've been.

In the absence of knowing, we mine near-gone history for heirlooms we can polish and pass on as truths, and leave the rest hidden in the mess.

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STEP 3: MIX Part A and Part B of the resin in equal parts. This parity is important. Your mend will not hold if the resin does not comprise perfectly equal halves.

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In the mornings now, I lie in bed and scan the house for objects I can purge myself of. This impulse is new. I'm usually more of a collector. Having almost completed a first-round purge of acceptable items to discard, this second round hangs its hat on an uncomfortable rack: double-pronged with the high of temporary addiction and pending regret.

Lying in bed, I imagine myself purged to the point of no longer possessing a collection of objects denoting a self. Is it an insecure self that collects, I wonder? One that cannot be sure who it is without the external reminders, the reassurance of things? I have a generous friend who once told me that there are those who define themselves by what they keep and those by what they give away. I'd always thought the adage designed to flatter her status more than mine.

It's a given that each time you move, you must discard some of what you've collected. Perhaps this is why my mother moves so often. So much unacceptable self to

shake. Perhaps this is why I hold on to things: it is not so much the thing but the right to hold on to all it represents that feels important. Why I feel the need to keep those things that have been interrupted, discontinued, damaged or misshapen.

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STEP 4: WAIT one hour and thirty minutes for the well-mixed resin to become thick and sticky. Set a timer so that you remember to return to the task. If you attempt to use the resin before this time, it will not be the right consistency and will ooze too quickly to be of any use.

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There are stages in the kintsugi process that are hard to find beautiful. There are stages that are awkward and messy and, like any meditative activity, will require you to acknowledge and accept the discomfort of difficulty for what it is. The lesson in this is that you don't need to hold onto that feeling.

But what kind of privilege is this, I wonder? To acknowledge your own feelings, release them and be free? Is this purge the privilege of those who don't require the acknowledgement of the damager, of those who don't need the damager to stop damaging, of those who don't need to live with the damager's denial?

I'm reminded of the Marie-Kondo-mania that recently swept through the middle classes, releasing the guilty from the baggage of excess consumption, relinquishing all those unwanted feelings. Yet, when we release them, do they really go away? Or do they just get recirculated into the landfill of our own consciences, creating another problem we rush to fix, to bury and replant over in the guise of restoration?

In the words of Wiradjuri writer Jeanine Leane (2019):

> Restoration, in the settler lens, is atoning for other colonising damage. It further affirms dominion, that the past can be done away with by erasing the damage. If Aboriginal culture and people can't be restored, how can 'landscape'?
>
> Instead of restoration, instead, can we refer to mending? Repairing what was broken but not erasing history?

The first time I heard these words, I'd been sitting in the small audience of an ecological poetics symposium in a grand sandstone university.

As each word left the writer's mouth to join the one before it, an uncomfortable feeling swept through the room. Each word a hammer, revising into pieces previously complete vases of incomplete knowledge. Each word releasing neat, convenient constructions into rubble that could never be convincingly re-truthed.

Why, she added, did we need to need to write about the Countries we called a country at all?

The room had no answer. The poet beside me wasn't sure if she should stay. Silence infiltrated the intermission, not as an abstract noun but as a topic. I mishandled the sugar for my coffee, spilling it across the linoleum to join the muss of clumsy words I approached the writer with. By the second day, a committee to address the issue had been formed.

On the plane home I'd been unable to think about anything else. Restoration. Repair. Her eyes on all that sugar.

Mending with the marks showing.

Ask yourself, she'd said. Why do you want to write about it at all?

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STEP 5: APPLY the resin to the edges of the pieces and hold them together for a moment. Some pieces may need a piece of sticky tape to keep them in place. If you notice small chips where two joins meet, you can build up some of your resin mixture with flour to fill the chips with a thicker paste.

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I've resisted too much searching in my own history for the fear of becoming a white, middle-aged stereotype: the woman who unfurls the family tree at gatherings, scattering the young people back to their phones and attracting one other dogged enthusiast who has done some digging of their own. But one year into the pandemic some crownless escapee virus takes me down. In my weakness, I find myself mainlining genealogy shows that reveal the family secrets of the famous. Watching these stories unfold, I'm at first repelled at how the subject looks for traces of themselves in their ancestors where favourable and how they admonish or disown them where they do not. What becomes interesting, however, are patterns of behaviour they recognise whether they say so or not. Their eyes might only well, or their tongues might form the words, but either way, the recognition is

undeniable. I begin to think about this. About the origins of the patterns we find ourselves enacting, and I secretly become the stereotype digging for significance.

I learn that on my father's side, no accounts seem certain where his mother's line, the Hawthornes, really originated, although some speak of a rise and fall in Scottish fortunes. The family I've left there can't tell me more than two generations back and I'm left where I began: of no fixed heritage — of no singular, enduring connection to a place, despite the name Hawthorne purportedly indicating one who lives near such a tree. I'm left knowing only the recent past: that Coatbridge, Glasgow offered the desperate line of the family work in industry and the army offered work in the wars. At this point, the connection to 'the land' itself was officially severed and the family scattered. I begin to wonder if this is why one of my aunts has lived in the same Coatbridge street that she was born in for her entire life. Someone needed to stay somewhere.

On my mother's side the decisions seem, superficially at least, less mercantile. I know that my great-grandmother left all her children, seven of them, with their alcoholic father for another man with whom she had one more. That one of her first seven children was killed when cycling down a Yorkshire lane to visit her. That one of her daughters, my lively grandmother, took flight from Yorkshire for Derbyshire in a hurry to marry and stayed with the man, my gentle but perfectionistic grandfather, despite feeling unfulfilled, imperfect — just to interrupt the pattern.

This only solidifies my thinking: that a pattern might still be lived even if it is not repeated exactly as it is known. This explains why my mother, despite her own mother staying put, picked up the pattern as if it were her own and multiplied the emotional dislocation, playing it out in Taddington, Buxton, Buxton, Inala, Bundaberg, Buxton, Blackpool, Buxton, Acacia Ridge, Slacks Creek, Algester, Buxton, Buxton, Algester, Algester, Browns Plains, Clontarf, Algester, Algester, Cannon Hill, Algester, Algester, Tugun, Browns Plains, Browns Plains, Browns Plains, Browns Plains, Caloundra, the entire coastline of Australia, Bundaberg, Bundaberg, North Lakes, Scarborough, Bali, Bali, Perth, Melbourne, Perth, Bali, Bali, Timor, Bali, Brisbane CBD, Scarborough, Bali (?) …

What I know of the pattern of my mother's movement reads like a map of her mind: I will try, perhaps this will be better and I will try again, or perhaps this will be better? No, I can't, I can't. I'll go back. No. This hasn't worked. I will try again, I will try, perhaps this will be better …

I carry this pattern within me like the coding for a heritable disease, as if those of us who are subject to it have hit the recessive switch in ourselves — all the time knowing that it is there, lurking, ready for an environmental trigger to express its presence. Like my grandmother, we watch for it and wait with dread.

I think about how, days into the new millennium, I called my father from my aunt's tiny upstairs flat behind the rail line in Coatbridge, Scotland.

'Why did you leave?' I asked him foolishly, adding even more foolishly: 'I love it here.'

There was the silence I knew to expect. The memories he had never spoken of that I filled the spaces of with my cousins' descriptions — of pre-gentrification, when their feet had stepped on more chewing gum than concrete on their way to the chippie. The ships he'd painted with lead-based paint. The black-and-white pictures in his album of the children I'd been warned never to call sister, brother, brother. That my cousins had used the word 'wild' to describe.

'Because I wanted a better life,' he'd said, numbing himself, I knew, to the cliché and the truth that held him hostage.

Because I wanted the land to give me a better life, he might have said. Just as my mother might have said it every time she moved. Just as my grandmother said it when she fled Yorkshire. Just as my father's ancestors might have said it when they boarded a boat from Ireland or left that place in Scotland with the hawthorn tree.

The concept and culture of land ownership and the resulting displacements and movements through it has not served my people well, or the people that my people have tried to enforce it on.

Because I wanted to give the land a better life.

Perhaps we should try this out instead.

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STEP 6: WHEN the pieces feel as if they are holding, wipe off any excess resin. Carefully place the item on the table, keeping an eye on it to make sure all pieces are stable while you wait for it to dry.

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I know that far back in all our histories, the seasons once told us all when to move or not to and we listened, that the season we are in now should pull us towards what we need to do, to drop predicable clues to show us we are heading in the right direction at the right time — for ourselves and the land and all its more-than-human inhabitants.

When I try to remember what Algester taught me about the seasons, how life was pulled there towards what felt right, I see the shivering olive-grey tree snake that slipped through our bathroom window to hibernate in the pillow of a boarder in the bedroom next to mine. I hear the pairs of masked lapwings bugling their warnings at my bike in a pageantry that curled along the creek line as I raced the spring sun home. I smell the fusty scent of summer shoes tapped free of a redback's messy web; the tang of distant fire. I feel the dew that has slipped down the stalks of kangaroo grass seeping in through my canvas shoes, the flickering absence of blue tigers who have migrated north as the cool hand of autumn takes hold.

A suburb that touches the forest's edge will tell you a few things about the seasons. The rest is learnt through documentary, scientific explanation, and celebrated in Christmas decoration — like the painted Australiana I hang each year on a plastic tree in memory of the soft-pink galahs that once visited the grassy acres next door before that land became the shorn-clean playing fields of a Catholic school. I do not know each of those galahs' years as my own. Mine as theirs. Our years as shared. Our orbits painted in the sky as stars, on land and sea as seasons. Their stories as the stories of my ancestors. All I know is that I rarely see them anywhere but on my Christmas tree these days.

How am I to know what season I'm in now?

The truth is I've always half known. It's a cop-out to plead dislocation when we've had so long to learn, even if these signs are changing faster than we've ever seen.

It occurs to me that the place in my mind I'm looking for is something like another Algester just before I arrived there, before too much damage was done. And in this yearning, I'm keeping alive a story of myself — of the post-industrial romantic yearning for vanished connections — at the expense of all other stories, I'm writing what Emily Potter (2019) would call my own Sorry novel, that in looking to the 'redemptive possibilities of non-modern environments', I hope 'to redeem [my] fraught belonging and reclaim a rightful place, even if this is mediated through violent and discomforting pasts' (p. 44).

I begin to think that being stuck in an inner-city suburb is just what I need to keep doing, to learn how to pay attention to being in a place that cannot be forced back together in any way like it was. Where the currawongs, who once only visited in winter, fling the pegs from our wet socks any time they like and the scrub turkeys run like dumb dinosaurs through roadworks and clutches of renovations fertilised by government grants. Now that the rest of the city folk have bought up what is left of vacant arcadia in search of the idyls that pre-date the damage a pandemic has confirmed.

Accept that you are already home, I tell myself. Home ownership: the Australian dream. What is that? A bank. A taxation loophole. A superannuation fund. These things do not make a home.

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STEP 7: MIX another batch of Part A and Part B of the resin in equal parts. Wait half an hour until the resin is a little less runny and carefully paint the joins with it.

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I begin to write a story about a place that my family, in equal parts, has belonged to and protected or moved to and destroyed: the giant sand island of Minjerribah, which hugs the Quandamooka coastline east of Brisbane. It's where my mother's English-born cousin met his wife — on her Country — and produced my second cousins and where his father, my English-born great-uncle, lived with my great-aunt in the years he mined the island for its sands.

I jot down a skeleton I can hang my story on.

How the island:
Formed
Broke
Was repaired
How I/the family:
Formed (here)
Broke
Attempts here and there at repair?
(Later: visits to the island but not seeing family?)
(Restoration of the dunes but still piping water from aquifers to the mainland)
Ask if/how this can be mended?

My story takes the shape of a restless heaving and relies heavily on chronological geological time to try to express the magnitude of unknowing I bring to the telling. I try to find the balancing point between expressing the feelings I have for the place — how these have shaped me in a shallow-time way — and my role as the damager who must acknowledge, learn and mend with the mend marks showing.

Even so, I can't shake the feeling that I'm no closer to the place than a police report, collecting and collating a logical sequence of actions, no matter how illogical those actions might be.

It's as if I'm still grasping at the whole, not seeing the joins that run through all. As if I'm from people who cross oceans as if they are gulfs, not the resin that holds life together.

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STEP 8: DIP a small, pointed paintbrush into gold dust and tap it over the resin. Experiment with the firmness of your tapping for the amount of gold dust you need to release. When the resin is dry, brush the excess gold dust back into the tub before gently washing the piece.

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'You can't stop to think about it,' my aunt once told me, speaking of her emigration from England to Australia in the sixties. 'Or you just won't do it.'

Back then, she'd waved from the boat and put an ocean between her soon-to-be-dead parents, two brothers, and that red-and-charcoal loungeroom she'd skimmed the weekly housekeeping for.

Unlike my mother, she brought her nine-year-old son with her and retained her ability to stay in one place for long stretches of time.

If I'd dug a little deeper, perhaps my aunt might've told me what it was exactly she needed not to think. My suspicion is that, like my mother, she glimpsed signs of the patterns she wished to break.

Now, from the concrete patio of the house we've rented for exactly half my eldest daughter's life, I watch her out in the yard, stalking down her washing under a startlingly blue late-winter sky. She bends and stoops to pluck her underwear from beneath an upturned rack to pack it into the bag she is taking to her new inner-city student dorm. The westerlies have come early and enthusiastic this year, and with her hair clutching at her

face, she must now chase down the Hills hoist that is racing her t-shirts around in a flap of excited circles.

The ‘where to next’ has arrived early for us all.

I know that searching for a sign of it has yielded this movement. But I’ve stopped to think about it, despite the suddenness of the change that seems to be unspooling.

I know too that it hasn’t happened to me, even if find myself drawing on external forces — like winds and eddies — to explain it, trying to ignore that I might somehow be made of the stuff inclined to drift in a particular direction upon them.

In the dry, tingling, too-warm days before the chill of westerlies, we had come home to a developer’s notice slipped under our door. Then, within weeks, the canopy of trees that had dappled my daughters’ birthday parties and the gravestones of their beloved ginger moggy and painted hens was gone. We took it as the sign we decided it must be. I would need to leave my eldest daughter behind before she had a chance to skip across the ocean and leave us — or join us to another place.

In the evenings afterwards, I pulled my laptop onto the bed, each night widening the affordable circle of our search until it embraced the farthest outskirts of the city: north, north-east, west — then south to Algester.

Like a voyeur of a life I might have lived, I slipped through the kitchens and bedrooms of Algester homes, imagining myself back there, sliding my teeth over squat sticks of sugarcane from a neighbour’s yard, turning the TV up to drown out the drone of a freight train, standing at the bus stop with damp socks and worn-through volleys beside the flooded creek, watching wide-eyed hares scamper through headlit fields of barbed wire grass. And as I imagined it, I knew that in more ways than one, I could not afford to try again. To return. To say, ‘No. This hasn’t worked.’ And only in part because it was no longer there.

I widened the circle further again then, out to Tulmur — to my partner, D’s, hometown — further west than I’ve ever lived, to a place still fringed here and there by frilly green edges.

‘Could you go back there?’ I asked.

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STEP 10: BURNISH the gold with a soft rag. Remember that you can keep learning.

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My eldest daughter considers the teacup on the table.

I'd been under the house in the concrete-floored space I call a study when she'd first arrived to visit us here at the new house. It'd been late in the afternoon at that time when the light drops discernible clues about what's coming. I'd heard her footsteps heavy on the floorboards above, growing heavier, faster as she'd stalked the darkening rooms looking for signs of life.

'I just walked right in!' she exclaimed when I'd called out to her from my hideout below.

I'd hugged her then and felt her breath heavy with both her walk from train station and exasperation.

'You need to be more careful,' she'd reprimanded. 'This is Ipswich, you know!'

I'd been inclined to agree but, still, I wondered whether she'd stopped on her way to look up at the pink clouds painted with candescent orange edges, or the lorikeets streaming like arrows to the avenues of bulbous figs. Or the crows flying over in the opposite direction as the bats were alighting, swirling into streams. Or whether, in this filtered fairground light, she'd noticed each peak and valley of the encircling ranges — the shadow and texture of trees and terrain — each rise and fall, like seeing an animal breathe when you thought it had died.

'Did you have a nice trip over?' I'd said.

'My bag was heavy,' she'd sighed. 'But, yes, those mountains are very nice.'

I'd shown her around the garden then, whispering my disappointment at her stepfather's non-consensual removal of the rosemary bush but pointing out the consolation of the local woodland species we'd planted and talking up the surprising number of double-barred finches nesting behind the grevilleas.

And then she was sitting at the kitchen table, watching me cut rhubarb through with pears to steam for a crumble.

Recently recovered from the virus that caught her and her Japanese Club friends in its New Year net, she tells me all about her reduced working hours and remote learning and how archaic it used to seem to her when Japanese scholarship forms asked for lung

scans, but not so much now. And as she talks, her bright-blue eyes follow the jagged river of gold I've drawn through the shattered landscape of the mended teacup and linger on the pools that are swelling from them like riparian swamps.

'That teacup looks like it has seen some things,' she pauses to comment.

I look at it sitting next to the others. It's sturdy but no one could say that it's singularly beautiful or quite 'right'.

Beneath the magpie geese, in the thick gold scars, I see the amateur lobotomy my father performed on my childhood doll to permanently fix her blinky eye. I see his own head, blue at the temple with stitches after an argument with my mother had ended in a car crash. I see the dark road he'd been walking down illuminated with headlights in that moment before my mother hit him with the car that she'd wanted him back inside. And then I see the mountain road up to the hinterland cabin where he moved, without her, and where his ashes are now scattered.

In this highly imperfect teacup, it is a pattern that I see. It's a pattern of not knowing what the pattern is — only sensing it, knowing it's there (driving you?) but somehow unreachable, only barely discernible in just the right light.

I'm still getting my bearings here in my new 'where to'. Like my daughter. Like us all.

I'm not where I thought I might be next. But at dusk, when the masked lapwings are bugling and the galahs congregate on the powerlines, I remember that I need to try.

Because I want to give the land a better life.

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