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SPECIAL SECTION

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Beyond the frame, beyond critique: Reframing place through more-than visual participant-photography

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There is an abundance of critique in tourism studies, human geography, and the social sciences that takes tourism-driven depictions of place as its object. Indeed, the problematics of touristic imaginaries tend to fix, obscure, and exclude object-subjects that more-or-less sit familiarly within/out frames of representation. Beyond the frame, beyond critique, there are practices that are less observed – practices that radically challenge the potency of ubiquitous "good life" narratives. This paper draws on visual ethnographic research methods in a frequently photographed but narrowly experienced place. Broome, in the remote Kimberley region of Australia, is an idyllic small urban town with a large tourism economy and operates as a service hub for extractive resource industries inland and offshore. Through the use of picture postcards and participant-driven photography, this paper presents a narrative of "the beach" that demonstrates the fragility of normative "good life" tropes. By amplifying practices of inhabiting the beach that exceed representational critique and stimulate other ways of authoring place, this paper looks for an activism that resists settling on colonial ways of knowing place.

KEYWORDS
good life, Indigenous, more-than visual, participant-photography, place, the beach

1 | INTRODUCTION

There is a strong research tradition within the social sciences and human geography that focuses on the "tourist gaze" (Crang, 1997; Lee, 2001; Urry & Larsen, 2011) and the mediating role that popular images such as postcards have on perceptions of place (Waitt & Head, 2002; Yüksel & Akgül, 2007). Following Jackson's (1989) influential *Maps of meaning*, human geographers understand that images are not merely pictorial representations of scenes but imbue cultural assumptions (Rose, 2008) and understandings that go beyond what representational analysis can account for (Latham & McCormack, 2009). Images also carry with them colonial assumptions about the places they represent (Cox & Kerr, 2018) and intensities which modulate anticipations and experiences. Geographical research in feminist and postcolonial-inspired participatory methods has demonstrated the transformative potentials of participant-authorship of images and visual narratives (Coombes et al., 2014; Dickens & Butcher, 2016; Kindon et al., 2007; Kindon, 2003; McLean et al., 2016; Pain, 2004). Yet, despite this acknowledgement, there has been less focus on the actual moment of reframing the images that marginalised people seek to challenge and disrupt (Zurba et al., 2018). A focus on the "moments" (Alam et al., 2018) in which representations come under scrutiny through the conduct of participatory research methods that are more-than visual, I argue, illuminates how narrowly contrived conceptions of place can be reframed as dynamic, unbounded, and open to reimagining.

Broome (population about 15,000) is a small remote urban town and the administrative centre of the Kimberley region in Western Australia (WA). It is also a site of recent large-scale activism against mining practices on Indigenous land. This paper, derived from my doctoral research focus on activism in Broome, situates itself within a recent controversy that crystallised early in 2015 in response to a government proposal to close up to 150 remote Aboriginal communities in WA. Led by seasoned Indigenous activists in the Kimberley who participated in large-scale anti-gas activism from 2009 to 2013, and supported by a group of local non-Aboriginal supporters, the "stop the forced closures" campaign emerged not only in response to the proposal, but as part of a network of diverse activisms that imagine alternatives to colonised futures. Central to local expressions of dissent is the corralling of affirmative configurations of life that entangle non-human and more-than visual aspects of lived experiences of place. Particular places figure as spaces of contestation, where large and small-scale activisms are staged with the effect of disrupting settler-normativity through Indigenous visibility and more-than visual dwellings.

Through a reframing of one particular place, the beach, I present a critique that is grounded in an ontological tradition that apprehends felt knowledge alongside the visual. I built on a local bodily feeling – referred to as one's Liyan – that snaps into place when with Country[1] (see Kelly, 2019). Described as something "you cannot ignore," one participant said that Liyan is "something I don't have to think about. It just happens naturally. Your body does let you know." Liyan is a way of knowing place that is culturally conditioned and bodily centred, a feeling that one gets that can be either good or bad; it tells one's body how to dwell. This felt concept was used in the research to map out a utopian spacetime that draws on personalised experiences of places where activists seek out rejuvenation and sanctuary in the moments between surges. Throughout this paper I enrol experiential felt states of the present into a visual repertoire of reframing practices. As critique takes shape in excess of representational images, ethics is engaged as an embodiment shaped through experience. In following Edensor, experience is almost always "culturally conditioned and subject to more-than-human agencies all at the same time. It is also always more-than-visual" (2018, p. 3). This is a critique that challenges representations through an ocular grammar that often subjugates the existence of other modes of inhabiting space to the background of what can be known.

This felt critique performs a politics of being that might be better thought of as a radical uprooting of what I term settler-normativity. Such a mode of inquiry is informed by an Indigenous-feminist articulation of "felt theory" offered by Million (2009), who argues that in directly experiencing the gaze and violence of colonial-imperialism, Indigenous people are best positioned to then articulate a felt theory of how things might be otherwise. For Million, a felt theory of knowledge draws our attention to emotional registers in content forms and creation, a form of knowledge that often resits intellectualisation and theoretical canons, challenging "settler truths" (2009, p. 64). This follows geographical work with knowledge traditions that often sit uncomfortably alongside each other, at times creating incommensurability between western concepts and Indigenous contexts (Dorries & Ruddick, 2018). This is a tension that this paper seeks to hold. In deploying felt theories as emotional embodied memory, Guthrie argues that felt scholarship refuses the performance of the detached and disinterested researcher, arguing that emotion and affect in knowledge is a "truth … read as a transgressive act" (2016, p. 428). By attending to the performance of these transgressions, where felt knowledges are present yet often unread as such, I demonstrate how more-than visual research that seeks out the *felt* "can reveal the norms and power structures that make certain knowledges difficult" (Guthrie, 2016, p. 428). I approach felt knowledges through grounding a conversation in the empirics that reference long-held local ontological frameworks for knowing, Liyan, withholding the temptation to progress a felt theory within a literature detached from these frameworks and knowledges.

The data presented in this paper focus on a small gathering of Indigenous activists and their supporters (friends and family) at Cable Beach, billed by protest organisers as a "family day." Advertised on Facebook and through word of mouth, the event was proposed as a substitute to a street rally two days' prior that failed to draw a crowd. Fourteen participants who identify as Indigenous took part in photographing this event, producing 417 photographs. Twenty-nine interviews made up the core of the research data and were conducted prior to the event. A total of three interviewees also participated in generating photographs at the beach. The photos used in this paper are representative of photos taken at the event and were selected by the author to highlight overt messages related to the political campaign. A method of self-directed photography was encouraged so that participants could capture scenes and objects of critique according to their own styles and tendencies, with no direction given by the researcher during the event. Participants were informed by the campaign organiser, who was present at the event and distributed the cameras, to take photos of things that they felt were related to the "good life" and the "stop the forced closures" campaign. No post-photography interviews were conducted with participants. Photographs are analysed by the author through the lens of the theoretical and empirical evidence presented throughout.

2 | SETTLER-NORMATIVITY OF THE BEACH

The beach is a site where the colonial gaze takes shape as a particularly racialised and gendered intensity (Moreton-Robinson, 2011), and where the boundaries that separate *us* from *them* are reproduced. Rights, sovereignty, and access can be demanded, negotiated, extinguished, or in cases where those rights are not granted, it becomes a space wherein the hypocrisy and incoherency of "us" is laid out on full display. In postcolonial Australia – an island territory invaded and colonised by sea, and a place where 85% of the population live within 50 km of the coast (Clark & Johnston, 2017) – the beach figures as a site of denial and desire. The denial of not only Indigenous ownership and sovereignty of the beach but also the denial of asylum-seeker arrivals by boat exercises a particular settler possession of the beach and nation. Today, Moreton-Robinson states, "the beach is a key site where racialized and gendered transgressions, fantasies, and desires are played out" and "that these cultural practices reiteratively signify that the nation is a white possession" (2015, p. 34).

The coast has always been a site of convergence, yet its contemporary condition is characterised by its performative capacity to not only make but also to avoid encounters with those "others" beyond the beach. This extends to non-human others, where policy makers seek to prevent encounters with non-human others such as sharks, crocodiles, and jellyfish (Gibbs, 2018). Encounters with those human "others" who sit beyond the frame of place, who don't quite fit the image of the white settler colony, are mediated through narratives and representations of the beach. The beach here demarks a thin invisible line that determines what and who are deemed to be in-, of- and out-of-place. In discussing the racialised Cronulla Riots of 2005, Wise (2017) demonstrates that through white possession and policing of the beach, cultural and racial boundaries are drawn to re-establish who has the authority to dwell and who becomes the subjective cast-away. Through the violent assault and expulsion of non-white men from the beach, a masculinist and white parochial order reclaims space for itself.

Kelly and Lobo argue that the ordinary Australian beach "registers as the archetypal White space in the national imaginary" (2017, p. 366) where modes of settler normativity enhance their capacity to author a frame of belonging. Privileged groups are endowed with capacities to attain objects of, and proximities to, the good life through the exclusion of others. In their cultural analysis of settler affluence, Cefai (2018) argues that the normative "good life" in settler-colonial Australia is best thought of as a "structure of whiteness." As an aspirational objective, it is an "affective structure" (p. 127), what Williams (1977) might refer to as a "structure of feeling," that mediates proximity to an indiscernible refrain of settler normativity. The good life targets and pulls white subjectivities to what Berlant (2011, p. 23) calls a "cluster of promises" that circulate around objects such as the beach and repels a non-white otherness that is not easily appropriated as part of the scene. This paper shares this observation, arguing that a normative "good life" depicted in the national imaginary structures "an allusion to the phantasmatic pleasures of colonial *arrival*" (Cefai, 2018, p. 131). Representations of the beach which denote a specific good life as a structure of whiteness, especially those that also obscure Indigeneity, elicit an affective call to place that promises a proximity to the fantasy of *terra nullius*: a myth of nobody's land that foregrounded British invasion.

3 | SETTLER-NORMATIVITY OF THE GOOD LIFE

The good life is a normative scene that promises proximity to objects of desire, what Ahmed calls "happy objects" (2010, p. 38). These objects are imbued with tacit assurances that their social reproduction nets positive affect the more they circulate and the more we seek out proximity to them. For Berlant, this is a fantasy economy that represents a cruel optimism in which "something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing" (2011, p. 1). Good life fantasies are unattainable when structured in this way. They are always at the horizon of immediate experience, a utopian imaginary of progress driven by unquenchable desires. Good life objects can never be apprehended in the same tense or authenticity to which they have been represented. It is therefore the affective properties, which Ahmed and Berlant both point to, that become the "object-target" (Anderson, 2014) of good life fantasies, not the scene, image, or three-dimensional object itself. This paper simply defines the normative good life by drawing on Berlant's (2011, p. 2) formulation that it is a "moral-intimate-economic thing" which structures our fantasies of an "enduring reciprocity" in our relationship to convivial wellbeing. Big objectives such as Indigenous–settler reconciliation, I argue, fit this description and are often unattainable when the normative fantasy of the good life is structured to exclude and abandon particular Aboriginal livelihoods (Povinelli, 2011).

The affective call of archetypical good life scenes, such as Cable Beach, is known to and felt by Indigenous people interviewed during this research. Lobo (2014) demonstrates how these frames of belonging manifest themselves in more-than-representational "energies" that come to inhibit the free movement of non-white others, especially Indigenous people. When presented with the postcard of Cable Beach (Figure 1), many Indigenous participants drew parallels between the

idyllic scenery it constructs and the erasure of Indigenous people in the colonial frontier imaginary. In asking Djugun man, Brian, if this image represents how he envisions Broome, he replied:

> No, no it doesn't. The camels. No, it doesn't represent Broome at all … There's, there's nothing there that actually represents Broome like there was before because it's been pulled down and never been put back up again … there's nothing there that I identify with as the sovereign of Broome.

Indigenous critique disrupts the ocular primacy of relating to place, which privileges settler normativity and limits the capacity of place to stage other sovereign claims. Understanding how pervasive popular conceptions of places associated with Indigeneity are in the national imaginary is crucial to experimentations of how those places get reframed. Underpinning this is a critique offered by many Indigenous participants in this research, and surmised concisely by Ebony, a young Djugun-Jabbir Jabbir woman who spends half of the year in Sydney. When I asked how those in Sydney envisage Broome when they find out that is where she is from, she stated:

> It depends; non-indigenous people 'Wow the camels on the beach, I've seen the colour of your dirt, I've always wanted to go there, is that in the NT [Northern Territory]?' Their perception is it's the Wild Wild West; it's the last frontier, it's the bush, the outback, somewhere out there in their imaginations … a lot of the time it's seen in as the model for their understanding of Aboriginality.

When Ebony refers to "the beach," she refers to Cable Beach, a hyper romanticised idyll of settler visibility. From the camels, which are Afghan imports, to the tourists not of-place, Cable Beach is an ironic presence in Broome, a town dependant on tourism. Images of pristine coastlines and Martian-like landscapes bursting with colour stock the postcard racks in almost every retail space in town. Sunsets and camel trains on the beach have become the ubiquitous symbol of contemporary Broome. Indeed, the production of these idyllic scenes depends on the touristic consumption of nature spaces mediated by template-like reproductions of "the local." These images and experiences that help to sell Broome inevitably structure expectations, rhythms, and patterns of dwelling.

Skinner and Theodossopoulos argue that consumer-driven reproductions of good life scenes "run from colonialism through to tourism, operating upon desire, a play of the imagination and, ultimately, conquest – visual and/or embodied" (2011, p. 1). Related to the image of an ideal place, they also structure a "collective mood" (Anderson, 2014) with a tangible texture. Given that settler imaginaries coalesce around objects of desire, framing belonging, they inhibit the capacity to display other ways of being seen and collective moods that relate to ontologically different visual practices. Presenting

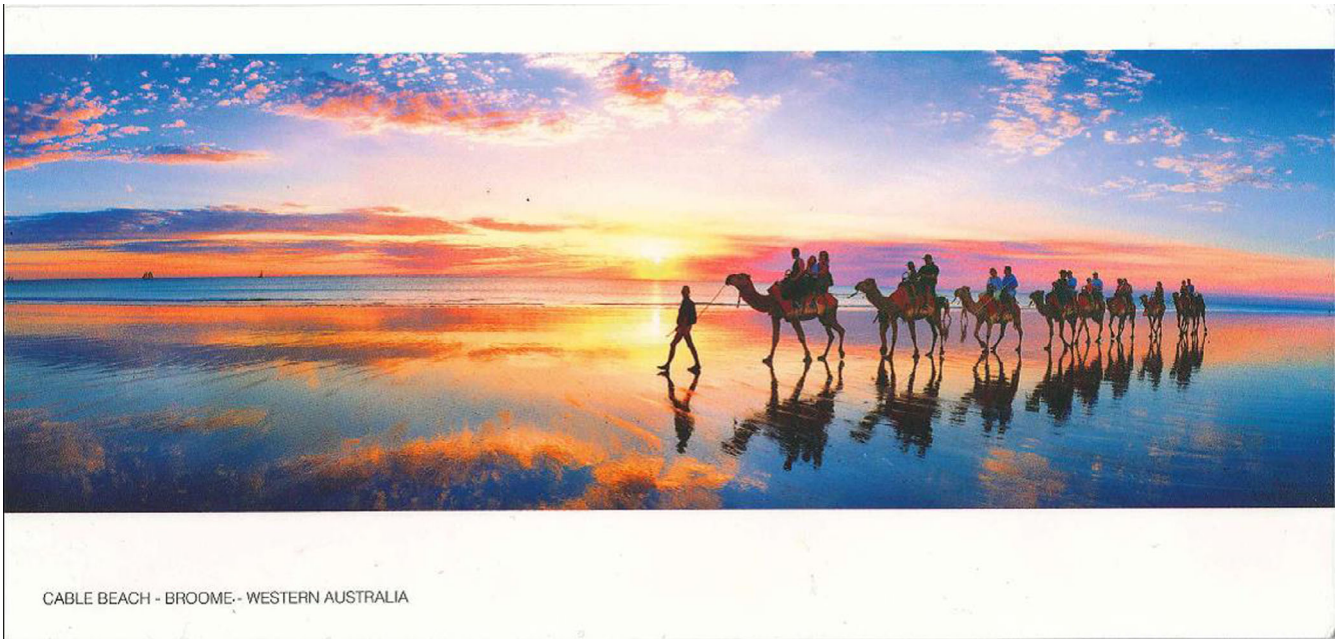

FIGURE 1 Cable Beach – Broome – Western Australia.
Source: Yane Sotiroski Photography

other ways of being seen must then do something to shift the frames of belonging to place, and in so doing, foreground other collective moods that express a more-than visual critique. The following section enacts these other ways of being seen through the production of participant-driven photography.

4 | ENACTING REFRAMES

When presented with the postcard, Anne, a Nykinya woman, says "it's an imaginative space, but for me when I look at it, I take my reality into it." This affirms the normative reading of the image, but also how one might inject their own reading into its performance. This requires an empathetic attunement to the image's situated context, its local attachments. I take Anne's reflection seriously and use it as the basis for a provocation in presenting the following images: if "the beach" as the object-image of a settler good life is an imaginative space, then its reimagining must unsettle settler normativity.

Figure 2 captures organisers Mitch and Ebony fixing the Aboriginal flag to the windscreen of a car, as a colourful banner reading "leave our communities alone" is sprawled across the bonnet. The message asserts a demand asking the audience to read the words and to view the significance of an Aboriginal flag on the beach. Yet its presence pierces the normative typology of dwelling. An Aboriginal flag among the assemblage of beach-going equipment such as portable gazebos, trailers, recreational things, and cookware. A yellow circle (the sun) set against a black (Indigenous people) and red background (the earth), the Aboriginal flag has come to be recognised as "an agent of activism" and a symbol of Indigenous sovereignty (Gallois, 2016). Its hyper-visible and easily recognisable presence on the beach has a disruptive effect, not just on the aesthetic homogeneity of the beach, but also in its capacity to make claims to – territorially as well as imaginatively – the beach and stage disagreements with settler orthodoxy. Participants playfully parade the flag up and down the beach, through parked cars and in view of others. Mitch captures (Figure 3) one participant dressed in the flag, while others make quieter, but visible, statements that carry with them activist intent.

Nadine (Figure 4) eternalises the interplay between Indigeneity, land, sea, and time, an expression of the popular protest chant "always was, always will be, Aboriginal land," which is shouted at large public events with intense fervour. These are modalities of becoming in which activists reclaim the Australian beach. Such renditions become political acts that defy or disavow the refrain that is white space: performed through European backpackers sunbathing, lifeguards scouting, baby-boomers fishing, and southern tourists snapping photographs. They are political precisely because they open up what Stewart calls "pockets" which give way to "the compelling but not necessarily explicit emergence of forms in the course of everyday scenes of living through things" (2012, p. 365). What becomes apparent through these events of ordinary political life is that *ordinariness* has the potential to "hold a nonspace without being meaningful" (Berlant, 2011, p. 34). That is, the

FIGURE 2 Mitch and Ebony fix the Aboriginal flag to a car. Taken by Craig.

FIGURE 3 Wearing the Aboriginal flag. Taken by Mitch.

world that subjugates alternative knowledge is interrupted in this moment. These enactments render normative notions of the good life insensible and unthinkable; they're backgrounded and imperceptible.

These enactments are integral ordinary acts that pre-condition the capacity to act in the event of noisy oppositional politics. Etchings of Indigeneity conjure alternative readings of diverse sensescapes and are performed not just through words, but also hands and feet. They are representational and transferrable, but also embodied and emplaced. Figure 5 depicts a meeting point between a crab that has left its diggings on the surface on the sand, the tracks of a dog that has passed through, and the feet of photographer. These etchings incorporate more explicit messages, such as the rallying call "SOS," shorthand for the movement's social media hashtag "SOSBlackAustralia" and a photograph of "help us save our communities" (Figure 6) written into the sand makes an explicit call to the controversy at hand. What is at stake in these ordinary enactments of life relates to their capacity to recall ubiquitous good life scenes and hold a space that impedes structures of whiteness from dominating.

FIGURE 4 Always was, always will be. Taken by Nadine.

FIGURE 5 SOS Black Australia. Taken by Reshinta.

FIGURE 6 Help us save our communities. Taken by Regina.

Reading this scene requires the body and a set of relational stimuli. In observing these photos one can feel the sensation of sand shifting beneath the feet; one knows what it is to have wet sand on the tip of a finger, and to wipe it off on the side of one's leg; to play with a dog at the water's edge. "Every practice is a mode of thought, already in the act" (Manning & Massumi, 2014, p. vii); these photos capture both thought and critique in-the-act. I suggest that these ordinary enactments of life not only stage disagreements with normative notions of the settler life, but that they precondition the capacity to act in further moments of critique. These images draw attention to the good life as a concept that dwells in the separation between a life that merely survives and a life that is liveable and able to be lived well. Liveable lives take home and community (Figure 6) as a returning and enduring place which enlarges a capacity to form attachments. It is sovereign articulations of attachments to home and community that activists struggle for in their continuing encounters with the settler-colonial state and an apparatus that distributes normative ideas and ideals of the good life. Butler argues that "we cannot struggle for a good life, a liveable life, without meeting the requirements that allow a body to persist" (2012, p. 14).

What makes bodies persist in the context of everyday life are the scenes and enactments that activists perform in the photographs here. These sites of connection become integral to the reframings that activists perform.

In grasping the importance of this event, the practice of self-directed participant-photography also draws our attention to the radicalness of the ordinary. Indigeneity is amplified here by a quiet spectacle that includes flags, etchings in the sand, and importantly, the presence of cameras (Zurba et al., 2018). The cameras used here are disposable. They lack digital memory and a screen for review. The usual opportunities for response and review through LCD screens and memory cards are common in reproductions of the beach, but not in these enactments presented here. Shoreline vistas, sunsets, and the absence of human others doing ordinary things sit neatly in the frame of the popular imaginary. But beyond this frame, in the backgrounded scenes of the Australian beach, are small acts of insurgency, where other worlds are performed and maintained in spite of settler-normativity.

Cameras are shared around, dumped on the wet sand, and used playfully by participants (Figure 8). They take photos of each other taking photos (Figure 7), of the ground and of cars. This decentring of the settler good life in their reproductions of the beach speaks to how agency is distributed, but also how research methods and innovative participatory techniques can conjure up new sensitivities to mundane worldings. Agency is re-placed in the *practice* of self-directed photography, and the practice itself becomes the critique. Affectivity in the representational content of hegemonic good life scenes – of say, a postcard – is interrupted for a moment in the practice of reframing (Yüksel & Akgül, 2007). If we dwell here in the ethics of the moment, in the splices of the event captured, we might appreciate what is at stake in these critical performances of everyday Indigeneity. Here, in the ordinariness of the beach-status-quo, other ontological formations and expressions of sovereignty are contesting and existing alongside settler orthodoxy. These worlds are robust, and their discursive practices are grounded in a more-than visual tradition that situates ethics, critique, and agency in the momentary immediateness of experience.

FIGURE 7 Pictures of taking pictures. Taken by Nicola.

FIGURE 8 Small crab and a discarded camera. Taken by Lily-Hannah.

5 | MOVING BEYOND CRITIQUE

Visual representations are important objects of critical cultural analysis. They have affective capacities that influence terms of reference, anticipations, and experiences of place. They also exclude/obfuscate other worlds that co-inhabit space. Central to this paper is an acknowledgement that dominant representations of place in a settler-colonial context lubricate the ease with which Indigenous out-of-placeness colonises the spatial imagination of the Australian nation-state. Simpson (2007, p. 69) argues that settler framings of Indigenous places lay bare the "terms of even being seen" for Indigenous people, that popular framings of places in settler-colonial contexts, especially places of settler desire, tend to fix the terms of Indigenous visibility. The unequal capacity to represent or frame the stratum of meanings, readings, and sensations in space, and about subjects, gives representational regimes their imperialist tendency. This tendency has major implications for emancipatory projects led by Indigenous people in Australia, and as such, this paper offered Indigenous reframings of settler spaces to experiment with what happens when Indigenous people frame and author the terms of their visibility.

By amplifying inhabitations of the beach that exceed representational critique and stimulate other ways of authoring place, this paper peers into more-than visual acts that resist the settling of colonial ways of knowing. In enacting alternatives to pervasive representations of place, participants stage confrontations with settler-normativity and its displacing logic – be that territorial, imaginative, or ontological. Such enactments foreground the liveliness of place embedded in Indigenous ontologies and its role in bringing forth felt knowledges. This speaks to the agentic quality of place, a sense of place that is always resisting imperial representations that obscure Indigeneity, and a call that is received through felt experiences of place such as one's Liyan. This call and feel for place "comes not in a singular, transcendental message, but instead through the manifold ontological styles of humans and nonhumans alike" (Larsen & Johnson, 2017, p. 200).

Participant-generated photographs in this research articulate a critique that extends the visual. When critique only speaks to a specific objection, staying within the confines of a bordered regime of meaning, it prevents other interpretations and world-forming imaginations from emerging. Participant photographs articulate an argument that critique can be imaginative through presenting possibilities that extend beyond the immediate context, to challenge imperial forces at work in the authority of the settler-colonial sovereignty. These styles of activism among participants set a stage where alternate frames and visibilities articulate concrete concerns that are aired as a critique that helps to form the emergence of new potential publics. The operation of critique here is not an unearthing technique. Critique is a mode of thinking that actively imagines other terms of reference that make the present feel different.

Throughout this paper, I have wrestled with interpretation. The reader may question the interpretations that I have made, and indeed, these interpretations are not participatory in method. These are one style of interrogation that can be arrived at through participant-generated reframings of place. I have resisted questioning *why* participants have captured the content that they have, and instead asked what the performance of capturing those images affords to the reader of them. Through these photographs I have argued that having a quiet day at the beach can be a radical act that involves challenging the sites

and forms of power in Broome and other spaces of settler *author*ity. Ordinary acts of critique become acts of imperceptible transformations through sequestering normative objects that usually inflict harm. These photographs are political reclamations of space that create openings to become-authority.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the author on reasonable request.

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ENDNOTE

[1] An Aboriginal-English word referring to Indigenous territories and homelands, but also a living being in and of itself where "everything exists in a state of emergence and relationality" (Bawaka et al., 2015, p. 456).

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