I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third part is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

Signed ________________________________ Date __________________________

Danielle Wyatt
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ABSTRACT

The effects of neoliberal modernity are perceived as unanchoring the relationships between people, culture and their social and material surrounds. Within this context, place and place-making have assumed a new currency as a motivation for governmental intervention in the lived social world. ‘Place’ is revalued as a way of restoring continuities lost through ‘liquid modernity’ for reconfiguring ways of being in, belonging to, and knowing the nation, the community, the self, within the flux of this unsettled present. In Australia, invoking place also invokes more enduring dissonances between the settler-colonial national imaginary, the territory it occupies and the history of settling and unsettling this territory. Settler-colonial belonging in the nation is secured through repeated forms of destruction and mis-inhabitation of place, and through the excising of unruly places from symbolic inclusion in the nation. For Deborah Bird Rose and Ross Gibson, these are the frontiers and badlands to settlement; they are both material places and symbolic projections of everything that disturbs colonial imaginings of place.

This thesis extends Rose’s and Gibson’s theoretical perspectives on place into unusual locations for thinking about settler colonialism: three community art projects, each located in suburban ‘badlands’ of urban settlement. The West Welcomes Refugees is a public mural incorporating the stories of recent and past migrants who have settled in Footscray, an old industrial centre in Melbourne’s inner west. The Weaving Lands is a cross-cultural weaving project conducted in Broadmeadows, in north-western Melbourne. Refill is a multi-media project conducted over three years with Arabic-speaking and Indigenous students at a school in Miller, western Sydney. Each of these projects is government-sponsored and located in socially diverse, disadvantaged, formerly mis-governed neighbourhoods to the ‘west’ of Australia’s largest two metropolitan centres. They are attempts to restore inhospitable places to a kind of normative social order, at once a nurturing of people in place and a more liberal
form of emplacement, a putting people in their place, the right place for sustaining the national community.

But circumscribed as they are by instrumental rationalities, these art projects are also material practices of place, literally, assemblages of people and objects into new and unlikely relationships. Such assemblages exceed the rationalities that legitimate community art as a technique of governance. In this thesis, a rich description of the material practices of these projects and the places they address offers a glimpse of more complex forms of living together than have been imagined either within settler-colonial mythologies of the good nation or within liberal paradigms of multiculturalism.
INTRODUCTION

We live in a confusing world, a world of crisscrossed economies, intersecting systems of meaning, and fragmented identities. Suddenly, the comforting modern imagery of nation-states and national languages, of coherent communities and consistent subjectivities, of dominant centers and distant margins no longer seems adequate. (Roger Rouse, 2002, 157)

In the last three decades, a burgeoning awareness of the effects of globalisation, transnational capitalism, neoliberalism, diaspora and postcoloniality have changed the way the humanities and social sciences theorise the relationship between people, culture and place. Observations like the one above by Roger Rouse are unexceptional and have been echoed by such luminaries as Frederic Jameson, Arjun Appadurai, Zygmunt Bauman, Saskia Sassen, Doreen Massey, Homi Bhabha and many others. In the disciplines of anthropology, cultural studies, cultural geography and sociology, culture, people and place have been reframed. They are no longer (and perhaps never were) isomorphic and discrete but must be reconfigured as plural and disjunctive, and retheorised in other terms. Appadurai reframes these relationships in terms of ‘global cultural flows’ (Appadurai, 1996, 33). Homi Bhabha considers the intrinsic hybridities produced from the global inter-relationships emerging out of colonialism and diaspora (Bhabha, 1997, 112). Doreen Massey emphasises the spatialisation of globalised modernity, arguing that the ‘coevalness’ of a shared space and time enables productive encounters and possibilities (Massey, 2005, 69).

The conditions of what Zygmunt Bauman has called ‘liquid modernity’ have been forged in the convergence of the fragmentation of formerly stable political polarities, the deregulation of capital, the weakening of traditional structures like the family, and an overwhelming feeling of the transience and mutability of everyday life – from the formation of subjectivity to the plastic surfaces and structures of the material world (Bauman, 1997, 2). Theorists have related these conditions to transformations in the very grounds where communities and
cultures take root. The permeation of ideologies, images, commodities and the cultures they engender across national and regional borders; the rhizomatic wiring of the local to the global through advancing communication technologies; the transit of migrants and refugees from Africa, Asia and the Middle East to affluent Western nations; the transformation of landscapes, especially the urban environment, through urban development and renewal projects, land degradation and the relocation of industrial, leisure and habitation zones in cities; all have contributed to a perceived unanchoring of people from their social and physical environment, and a defamiliarisation of the cultural forms that mediate their relationships.

In a settler-colonial country like Australia the effects of neoliberal modernity are accompanied by the unsettling claims of an undead colonial past. Rewritings of colonial history and the legal, political and representational claims of Indigenous subjects are perceived to threaten the White nation’s sovereignty and disrupt the dominant narratives that legitimise its entitlement to territory and its symbolic ordering of people and place. These challenges have assumed various forms. The High Court’s landmark Mabo decision of 1992 overturned the 200-year-old legal state of terra nullius, which formed the basis of British colonial claims to Australian territory (Nicoll, 2002; Irene Watson, 2009). The decision paved the way for native title legislation that recognised Aboriginal custodianship of land persisting alongside settler-colonial occupancy. While native title is considered by many Indigenous commentators to be an insufficient and weak form of land entitlement (Irene Watson, 2009, 2), it nevertheless caused a ‘white panic’ about national sovereignty, precipitating a flurry of legislation to limit native title wherever it threatened the nation’s economic interests (Nicoll, 2002, np). In a different legal context, Ken Gelder and Jane Jacobs have examined the way official recognition of the ‘Aboriginal sacred’ profoundly unsettled the nation’s ‘sense of itself’. In its unboundedness, the Aboriginal sacred has made modern Australia ‘become an ambivalent thing, required ceaselessly to engage with structures it may have imagined as, at best, anachronistic’ (Gelder & Jacobs, 1998, 135). In 2008, the then Australian Prime Minister’s Apology to the Stolen Generation recognised the racist
attitudes that informed the social policy of removing Aboriginal children from their families and making them wards of state. In making the apology, Kevin Rudd rejected claims by former Prime Minister John Howard that Australians of the present ‘should not be required to accept guilt and blame for past actions and policies’ made, at the time, in the national interest or for greater the social good (Manderson, 2008, 9). John Howard’s prevailing view that accepting historians’ claims of state racism, colonial violence and exploitation of Indigenous people amounted to a ‘black armband’ view of history, only emphasises the precarity of the narratives sustaining Australian nationalism and national identity.

From a postcolonial vantage of Australian history and culture, these contests over the past, and over the past’s capacity to influence the present – whether they are in the legal, political or cultural arena – are struggles over attempts to wrest Australia’s ‘sense of itself’ from a particular colonial narrative of benevolent progress and white hegemony (Gibson, 2002; Rose, 2004; Healy, 2008; Irene Watson 2009). That is, these contests emerge out of some of the fundamental and enduring dissonances of colonial settlement, dissonances that manifest themselves in many different contexts and shape many of the different struggles defining the nation over time. Irene Watson (2009, 2) expresses the struggle this way: ‘Can we have justice or the possibility of de-colonising the past injustices of colonialism when the state is committed to a one dimensional, universal world order, one which disallows for the diversity of peoples and cultures?’ Watson’s question is in the context of discussing the assimilationist ideals underpinning Australian sovereignty. But her question cuts to the core of what other Australian postcolonial literature has identified as the enduring problem of Australia’s settler-colonial condition. In the absence of other narratives to support Australian national identity and its inhabitation of territory and place, efforts to recognise ‘the diversity of peoples’, their cultures and histories, render the nation’s sense of its modernity, destiny and legitimacy, profoundly unstable (Hage, 2000; Rutherford, 2000; Gibson, 2002; Rose, 2004).

Within the context of this ‘confusing world’ – the global and the postcolonial – place and place-making have assumed a new currency as a motivation for governmental intervention in
the ways people inhabit the everyday. ‘Place’ is revalued as a way of restoring continuities lost through ‘liquid modernity’ and for re-investing people in the human and non-human structures supporting collective life. While the humanities and social sciences have made detailed and varied accounts of the effects of unanchoring processes at different scales of social collectivity, it is only relatively recently that academic attention has turned towards the material and narrative work – like place-making – employed to reconfigure ways of being in, belonging to and knowing the nation, the community, the neighbourhood, the self, within the flux of this unsettled present.

Such work forms the basis of this thesis. Here, I examine Australian place and place-making through the work of community arts,¹ a contradictory field of cultural production in which the arts are claimed both for the recovery of a more holistic and authentic way of life, and as an instrument in the service of particular governmental rationales. Community arts discourses themselves consider art as a vehicle for building more authentic forms of being in the world, for connecting people more deeply with their community, for building social narratives of belonging, and for developing peoples’ attachments to place (Hawkes, 2004; Mills & Brown, 2004; Mills, 2005; Goldbard, 2006; Mulligan et al., 2006; Mulligan & Smith, 2010). Community arts involve more than place-making, but place features strongly in this work. Place is not only the thing being addressed or transformed through art; community art also distinguishes itself from other forms of cultural production because of its insistence on being ‘placed’ (Lippard, 1997; Kwon, 2002; Goldbard, 2006; Mulligan et al., 2006; Mulligan & Smith, 2010). This art, Lucy Lippard says in her epic survey of local and located art across the United States, ‘is of place – made by artists within their own places or with the people who live in the scrutinised place, connecting with the history and environment’ (Lippard, 1997, 263). Within the literature on community arts ‘place’ designates the irredeemable particularity of this work and infuses it with an authenticity and virtue denied to other more mainstream forms of cultural production.

¹ Community art is known by many different terms: collaborative art, dialogic art, participatory art, new genre public art, to name a few. Most common in Australia are ‘community art’ and ‘community cultural development’. I use the former throughout this thesis because it is the name given to the field when formalised by the Australia Council in 1973, and because ‘art’ better describes the cultural practices of my case studies.
It is curious that, although being placed and making place constitute an important rationale for much of the community arts practice in Australia, there has been little attempt to consider this practical place-making in the context of postcolonial theorisations of Australia’s settler colonialism. That is, there is little scholarly work on the way that community arts in Australia has responded to conditions emanating from the colonial past and present as well as from the global neoliberal present and future. The failure to truly place this work, to consider the ways in which it might be implicated in a postcolonial politics of place, constitutes a gap in the literature on community arts in Australia – a gap that I address in this thesis. Place constitutes a framing device for me. I consider the place-making work of community arts not only within the context of an Australian ‘sense of place’, but also, as it manifests itself in practice in particular places in the nation. My work is more tightly framed around marginal places, places classified as disadvantaged or isolated. These places attract community arts projects because they are perceived by governments to be most in need of intervention; these are the places where the tensions of neoliberal modernity, globalisation and postcolonialism are often intensified and most visible. In the governmental context through which the projects take shape, ‘place’ is figured as both problematised by the forces of neoliberal modernity, and as an antidote to their unanchoring impact. This placed work cannot be understood outside these governmental regimes of social intervention. In this work, art is mobilised in the service of various social ideals and as a solution to a range of social problems. Art functions as a technique of governance, legitimated through claiming to affect the social in measurable ways. And yet, while situating community arts in this governmental context is important and something I address in this thesis, this work does more than simply implement a governmental rationality in a particularly maligned or stigmatised place.

My research examines the way governmentalised community art contributes to making place in a multicultural settler-colonial nation. Looking at three government-sponsored community art projects, each from the maligned western suburbs of Melbourne and Sydney,
I am interested in what is invoked when the making of place becomes a motivation for governmental intervention in these complex and rapidly changing social worlds. This research draws on a Foucauldian theory of governmentality to understand the instrumental rationalities shaping efforts to govern place through art. But I am also interested in these projects as material practices of place – literally, assemblages of people and objects into new and unlikely relationships. In the layered, multifaceted and at times unruly nature of this place-making work, these art projects exceed the governmental rationalities that gave rise to them.

Unlike much recent scholarship on community arts, my study is not from the perspective of an arts practitioner, nor from the perspective of cultural policy, but from the vantage of cultural studies. Overlapping as it does with cultural policy and governance, cultural representation and the ‘everyday’, I think community art has much to contribute to cultural studies as a complex location of culture – a term I borrow from Homi Bhabha – from which to re-examine familiar theoretical domains. Conversely, the critical and reflexive techniques of cultural studies, its concern with the politics of culture – the way ‘people’s everyday lives are articulated by and with culture’ (Grossberg, 2010, 8) – can broaden the purview of community arts discourses beyond the practical and aesthetic concerns of arts practitioners, and beyond the instrumental concerns of cultural policy. My work here does not critique community arts discourses for the purposes of contributing to community arts as a field of practice. Nor does my work explicitly address and contribute to the policy regimes shaping this field of practice. I am interested in this location of culture because of what it reveals about the broader social conditions of living in modern multicultural Australia. Homi Bhabha thinks of culture as a site from which identities and social narratives are made and negotiated, ‘performatively’ (Bhabha, 1997, 2). Framing community arts as a location of culture is to consider the way this cultural form – at once regulating and ‘empowering’ – contributes to social narratives of belonging. In this sense, this research assumes a broader significance for community arts then has been customarily employed by the critical discourses surrounding it. My intended address for this work includes those within the field
of community arts, but is more directed at a broader community of cultural researchers. I explore the ways in which community arts practices might be the grounds for considering theoretical domains usually anchored in other more mainstream, or more familiar cultural locations. The theoretical domains which interest me here include settler colonialism, governance, place and multiculturalism. While all of these theoretical domains contribute to a richer understanding of community arts and its place-making work, this work also challenges the familiar terms of these domains. It is within the fray of this exchange that this research makes a productive contribution to understanding the politics of culture.

My argument is anchored in three community arts projects located in marginal suburban sites to the ‘west’ of Australia’s largest two metropolitan centres. *The West Welcomes Refugees* is a public mural incorporating the stories of recent and past immigrants who settled in Footscray, an old industrial centre in Melbourne’s inner west. *The Weaving Lands* is a cross-cultural weaving project involving migrant weavers in and around Broadmeadows on the suburban fringes to the north-west of Melbourne. And *Refill* is a multimedia project conducted over three years with Arabic-speaking and Indigenous students at a school in Miller, western Sydney. Each of these projects is a government initiative located in areas defined by their cultural and linguistic diversity, by their economic and social disadvantage and by a history of governmental mismanagement and neglect. Each of these projects could be discursively situated within Australia’s multicultural policy. They are enactments of the ‘(d)iverse cultural expression’ that ‘enriches all Australians and makes our multicultural nation more vibrant and creative’ (Australian Federal Government, 2011, 5).

What is fascinating about these projects and the cultural expressions they solicit is the way they reveal a tension between this official discourse of multiculturalism and the everyday conditions of living with diversity. In their attempts to restore inhospitable places to a kind of normative social order, these projects are at once a nurturing of people in place and a more liberal form of emplacement, a putting people in their place, the right place for sustaining the national community. Theoretical critiques of multiculturalism would seem to
provide an obvious lens through which to examine these projects. Such critiques would construe them as examples of how Australia’s official celebration of its multiculturalism masks a deeper monoculturalist agenda. This is the view so succinctly expressed by Irene Watson (2009, 2) – that this manifestly multicultural nation also and in various ways ‘disallows for the diversity of peoples and cultures’. Ghassan Hage, Sarah Ahmed, and to a lesser extent, Jennifer Rutherford have all argued that Australian multiculturalism restricts the very cultural diversity is proclaims to enfranchise (Ahmed, 2000; Hage, 2000; Rutherford, 2000). But I am interested in these projects precisely because they embody the conundrum of a co-existence of rationalities, not because they straightforwardly reveal the ‘reality’ of Australian racism beneath the official layer of its multiculturalism.

Multicultural critiques tend to depend upon a placeless or abstracted vantage from which to identify the true rationality of multiculturalism at work. It is from this vantage that Hage can recognise ‘white national hegemony’ persisting through a discourse of multicultural tolerance (Hage, 2000, 89). I address these critiques in my final chapter. But before I get to them, I use my case studies to build up a sense of the placed terrain grounding my argument. While I accept the validity of Hage’s multicultural critique, my research works against its abstraction and placelessness. Framing community arts as a location of culture is to engage with its literal emplacement in a variety of discursive and physical settings. It is to emphasise the performative nature of culture and to attribute some kind of significance to the intricate and minor negotiations and exchanges, tensions and frustrations, characteristic of community arts practices. Hage’s abstracted critique of multiculturalism elides the complexity of this terrain. His critique cannot accommodate the ways in which community arts practitioners – many of whom define themselves through the ‘multiculture’ as an Indigenous or Arabic-speaking or Maori artist – navigate between a critical arts practice and governmental programs of social regulation. Employed in the service of government, these practitioners are themselves instruments of governance, and contribute to the way multiculturalism is taken up, embodied and lived at the frayed edge between governing and ‘the people’.
An emergent discourse of ‘everyday multiculturalism’ reinscribes multiculturalism within the ‘rich array of interpretive possibility’ present in the ‘mundane’ or lived everyday (Wise & Velayutham, 2009, 2). Studies of everyday multiculturalism are often grounded in similar kinds of places to my case studies: hyper-diverse, complex social worlds shaped by ‘competing logics of interaction’ from assimilation to intercultural hybridity (Noble, 2011, 827). The theorisation of these encounters, their contradictions, complexity, performativity, and creativity, suggests a model for thinking about community arts and the social terrain in which it both intervenes and through which it manifests. In my final chapter, I explore the way theorisations of everyday multiculturalism might inform the significance accorded the place-making work of community art.

The places that form the backbone of this study can be cast as badlands of urban settlement. They have bad reputations and attract bad press. These negative connotations are conferred on them by mainstream populist, governmental and elite discourses that reinforce the values and authority of a national centre. A badland, Ross Gibson says, is ‘a narrative thing set in a natural location. A place you can actually visit, it is also laid out eerily by your mind before you get there’ (Gibson, 2002, 15). What he means is that the badland sustains the singular narrative of European colonialism by containing the violence and unruliness of settlement in a cordoned off, demonised no-go zone (Gibson, 2002, 173). As a repository for the excesses of settlement, the badland does not mark the limits of the colonial project to civilise the territory. Rather, these places and the ways in which they are problematised – narrated as ‘bad’ – are intimately related to the progress and maintenance of settler colonialism itself. They are a necessary by-product for sustaining the colonial narrative of the settled place. That such places are familiar to us in our quotidian experience suggests for Gibson that the precariousness and ambivalence of colonisation persists into the present moment (Gibson, 2002, 173). This view is shared by Deborah Bird Rose, for whom understanding settlement as a ‘continuous process’ is the beginning of finding a more ethical way of relating to place (Rose, 2004, 6). I make much use of Rose’s and Gibson’s perspectives in my reading of the contemporary badlands where my case studies are located. Despite their disciplinary distance
from community arts, their theorisation of Australia’s dissonant relationship to place brings a more expansive historical and narrative context to the kind of place-making practices that concern me here. I am interested in the way *placing* community arts in its geopolitical and historical context – as well as in its immediate and cultural context – inflects interpretation of this work. My perspective on the place-making projects in these contemporary badlands is about understanding this work beyond its local and governmental purview, and about seeing it as implicated in broader narratives of being in and belonging to the nation. These include settler-colonial mythologies of the good nation and liberal paradigms of multicultural harmony. Attending to the way community arts *make* place and *invoke* place is, in many ways, also an attempt to examine the role of place and place-making in a settler-colonial, multicultural nation like Australia. It is an attempt to examine how this nation is inhabited, heterogeneously, *as place*.

**Research Methodology and Chapter Outline**

Thinking about community arts as a location of culture invites a methodology for the conduct of this research. It invites a situating of the arts projects in the places they were made, the places they address. The experiential terms of phenomenology loosely inform my approach to place. However, drawing from the critical materialist perspectives of Doreen Massey and Val Plumwood, and the poetic materiality of Paul Carter, place is also understood in more contradictory and fractious terms as an interlocking and overlaying of discursive, material, poetic and structural registers – as well being an embodied experience. As argued above, invoking place also invokes a settler-colonial politics and this politics suffuses the badland mythologies surrounding my case study locations. Including a settler-colonial politics within a framing of place is to accommodate a multi-registered sense of place – more enduring and less tangible than the physical site of ‘the local’ privileged by community arts discourses (Lippard, 1997; Goldbard, 2006).

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2 Ross Gibson has a contemporary arts background and Deborah Bird Rose is an anthropologist. Both tend to focus on literary and historical texts or remote places associated with a distinctly Indigenous past or present.
Conceiving of the places of my case studies as suburban badlands, I am adopting some of the literary techniques Gibson employs in his _Seven Versions of an Australian Badland_. Like Gibson, I am concerned with how this ‘narrative thing’ filters through a disparate array of materials and registers – newspaper articles, folklore, vernacular language, popular culture, the visible landscape. I am concerned with how this ‘narrative thing’ gets expressed through the physical landscape and through the aura of place. I have borrowed Gibson’s technique of making connections between these different materials and registers, reading the ‘being there’ in place as continuous with the layered representations of place from which this ‘narrative thing’ is composed.

To this end, I build up a sense of place by assembling an assortment of incommensurate resources and perspectives: local histories, critical sociologies of place, newspaper articles, interviews with locals, statistical data, policy documents, reports, the websites of institutions and local government, ephemera including pamphlets, community notice-boards, advertisements, and touristic information together compose a disjointed composite of place. In re-visioning the stigmatised landscapes of western Sydney, Helen Grace and her co-writers remind the reader of how the scholarly gaze of the researcher can be complicit with the discourses of marginalisation that perpetuate the stigma of place. They ‘undermine’ the authority of this scholarly perspective by juxtaposing their ‘five very different viewpoints’ on western Sydney (Grace et al., 1997, 14). I have tried similarly to avoid a totalising or diagnostic perspective on place by assembling a diverse and incomplete set of materials, and by narrativising my limited viewpoint on the places within my scope. I made several site visits to the locations I write about over a period of four years. Was there a palpable menace here? How did the built landscape – its design, its scale, signage, advertising, public art and architecture – mediate a relating to place? In what ways did this landscape reveal narratives of how to belong here? And what remained opaque and invisible to the visitor?

For the arts projects themselves, as well as engaging with the artefacts, performances and displays resulting from the work, I have made much use of interviews conducted for other
research purposes by researchers at the Globalism Research Centre at RMIT University.\(^3\) Interviews pertaining to *The Weaving Lands* project were conducted in 2006 as part of a much broader study for VicHealth on the relationship between cultural activities and wellbeing (Mulligan *et al.*, 2006). This study examined a number of different arts projects and activities in locations all over Victoria and collected data using an array of quantitative and qualitative methods including local profiles of the areas where the arts activities occurred, large-scale surveys with participants, photonarratives and collected stories from practitioners, and long semi-structured interviews with arts practitioners, community participants and government workers (Mulligan *et al.*, 2006, 12-15). The few interviews I draw from this larger study comprise only a fragment of the material informing that research. Interviews pertaining to *Refill* were conducted between 2007 and 2009 as part of the Generations Project, similarly, a much larger project examining how local government engages with community arts. The Generations Project involved case studies in Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland, of which the *Refill* project in Miller, western Sydney, was one (Mulligan & Smith, 2010). Like the VicHealth study, the Generations research comprised several different research methods and different tiers of data collection including local community profiles, surveys, and long and short interviews (Mulligan & Smith, 2010, 21).

The rationale for re-using interview material from these two projects is twofold. Firstly, the transcripts of the lengthy (30-60 minute) semi-structured conversations with arts practitioners, local government workers and participants are extremely rich. They document the emergence of the projects, the perspectives of the participants, their backgrounds, their aspirations for the work and their negotiations of problems and unexpected occurrences. They provide valuable insights into the qualities of place which the projects address. But the broad questions and expansive scope of the larger projects for which this material was generated means that much of the richness of these accounts has been unexamined. More than this, the instrumental basis for the larger projects – compiling evidence to inform policy development – mitigates a deep exploration of the ambiguity and ambivalence in these

\(^3\) Ethics approval has been granted for use of this material for other research purposes for researchers at RMIT University.
accounts. The narrower focus of this thesis provides a vehicle for these complex accounts. More than this, focusing in on this material reveals the plurality of rationalities running through community arts projects and suggests their ambivalent enactments of the policy agendas they are designed to address.

The second rationale for re-using this interview material relates to community art as a cultural form. Community art has a notoriously elusive textuality. Often defined through ‘process’, this work is transient and diffuse; it has very limited presence in galleries or museums, or any formal catalogues for the maintenance and display of ‘culture’. Data collected for more instrumental purposes, usually for evaluation or policy development (like the larger studies from which my interview material is drawn), constitutes a limited archive of this work. Re-using this material, returning to it, examining it, is about textualising community art as a cultural form. I regard such material not as a supplement to the actual work as it existed at the time it was performed or exhibited. I see these interview transcripts as part of the complex textuality of the art itself. Like other more tangible cultural forms, repeated examination, analysis and theorisation, invests this work with meaning. These interpretive practices, over time, build value.

Jane Jacobs, in her portrait of the urban forms of empire, argues for a ‘cultural politics of place as opposed to a reading of the textualised landscape’ (Jacobs, 1996, 9). She is more interested in ‘the complicated politics of the production of urban space, than the object produced’ (Jacobs, 1996, 9). In my research, I am interested in the objects produced in these highly negotiated and collaborative sites of cultural production. But like Jacobs, I am also concerned with the various struggles, contests, decision-making processes, philosophies, knowledges and reasonings underlying the production of these objects and performances. The rich material of the interview transcripts reveals the ‘power’ of community arts processes (Jorgensen, 2007). But this is not ‘process’ understood as an ethics of engagement. Rather, the power of community arts processes is realised more as a material and poetic labour, a method of connecting ideas, memories, individuals, community groups, institutions,
government services, objects and objectives into relationships that had not been brokered before.

My interpretation of these projects as forms of governmentalised place-making situates my work within a Foucauldian theory of governmentality. Tracing out how the projects materialise through the discursive framing of a social problem, and the conscription of various techniques, expert knowledges, policy discourses and social groups in addressing this problem, corresponds with what Mitchell Dean and Nikolas Rose have called an ‘analytics’ of government (Dean, 1999, 18; Rose, 1999, 20). An ‘analytics’ says Dean, ‘seeks to identify the emergence’ of a field of practices, a ‘regime’ for acting upon conduct (Dean, 1999, 21). An analytics of government is concerned with:

the diverse processes and relations by which these elements are assembled into relatively stable forms of organisation and institutional practices. It examines how such a regime gives rise to and depends upon particular forms of knowledge and how, as a consequence of this, it becomes the target of various programmes of reform and change. (Dean, 1999, 21)

While vital to my interpretation of community arts practices, this governmentality perspective does not fully circumscribe my interest in the place-making work of community art. Such a perspective confines a reading of these projects and the places they address to the instrumental domain of public policy and an empirical analysis of their material and procedural manifestations. Such a perspective does not make an account of the ‘inheritances’ (Jacobs, 1996, 2) and hauntings (Gibson, 2002, 2) of colonialism that seem to be both everywhere and nowhere in this work.

Conceiving of these projects in the context of a settler-colonial politics of place means I am also interested in the poetics invoked through their place-making practices. This poetics comes across in the semiotic material of the art projects and attending to this requires a descriptive rather than analytical mode of writing. The lyrics to a song, the memories evoked
by an image, the associations invoked in the naming of a mural – this scattered array of textual allusions suggest the other places and presences active in place. Community arts practitioners often ascribe the ‘power’ of community arts to its processes rather than the art produced (Jorgensen, 2007). But some kind of power does reside in these objects, these ‘words and a picture’ as Paula Jorgensen has called them (Jorgensen, 2007, np). In Emily Potter’s terms (drawing from her work with Paul Carter), such designs on place mark ‘the materialisation of a particular imaginary that is world-shaping’ (Potter, 2010, 20). This poetics is not unrelated to the instrumental work of governance. The making of place through art involves conjuring the imagined arena in which the life of the nation and the life of ‘the people’ plays out. And this imagined arena gives meaning to the governmental programs of civic intervention which are my object of study here. It is in making these connections that the instrumental politics of targeted governmental programs can be contextualised within the broader politics of living with settlement. I see the mixed methods of my methodology as appropriate to the layered, multifaceted and contested terrain of place I am trying to characterise. Moreover, I see such a methodology as consistent with the impure inter-disciplinarity of cultural studies (Anderson & Schlunke, 2008, xxiii). Working in this way, I depart from the evaluative style characterising much of the critical literature on community arts, and suggest the ways in which this work might itself be the location from which to reflect upon other theoretical domains.

In the following chapter, A Location of Culture, I survey the literature on community arts. I then consider the way in which community arts discourses mobilise place and the theoretical assumptions underlying this. The second half of this chapter considers the critical debates surrounding community arts and the ways in which this cultural form unsettles the conventional terms for cultural criticism. This problematising of the conceptual frames required for cultural critique leads me to my own framing of this work through Homi Bhabha and his notion of a ‘location of culture’. Bhabha’s understanding of the politics of culture informs my understanding of the significance of community arts practices. Through
Bhabha, I understand these practices as locations from which the terms for settler-colonial belonging are both extended and contested.

In the next two chapters, Governing Through Art and The Frontier, The Badland, I use my first case study, *The West Welcomes Refugees*, to introduce the dominant theoretical paradigms informing my approach to the place-making work of community arts. Governing Through Art explicates the ways in which the arts can be understood as a technique of governance. This chapter extends this understanding into an account of the emergence of community arts in Australia. This brief history reveals that while the field has always been circumscribed by government and has always served an instrumental rationality, this structural context is at odds with the liberatory values and principles espoused by the field itself. In this sense community arts discourse and practice reflects a contradictory relationship to power; its key advocates promote their practice as resisting the alienating and deracinating effects of modernity, while the practice itself represents a further refinement of forms of social regulation and ordering which are the hallmarks of a modern exercise of power. The final part of this chapter considers the way contemporary practices of community arts further complicate the governmentality paradigm which informs most of the critical literature on this work.

The Frontier, The Badland returns to *The West Welcomes Refugees* to consider the ways community arts practices might be implicated in a settler-colonial politics of place. Departing from the governmentality literature, this chapter seeks to understand how this project animates a poetics of place, a poetics connected with the ambivalence of settler-colonial belonging. Expanding upon Deborah Bird Rose's conception of the colonial frontier, and Ross Gibson’s notion of the badland, this chapter establishes the settler-colonial politics of place which informs my reading of the suburban badlands of my following two case studies.
Chapter Four and Five are each dominated by their respective case studies. *The Weaving Lands* concentrates on understanding how the badland is made and lived, and how governments rehabilitate a place rendered inhospitable through governmental neglect. As a governmental attempt at re-narrating place, *The Weaving Lands* suggests the role a poetics of place plays in animating different ways of relating to an inhospitable environment. This project suggests a kind of governmentality that ranges beyond its instrumental boundaries and aspires to building feeling and connection at the same time that it endeavours to shape conduct.

The *Refill* chapter is less concerned with place in a physical sense and concentrates more on western Sydney as a social and discursive landscape. This monstrous ‘narrative thing’ of western Sydney has significant impacts on the identities and experiences of the young subjects of *Refill*. This chapter returns to debates outlined in Chapter One about the contradictory politics of community arts practices. How can it be both a site for ‘resisting imposed cultural values’ and a technique of governance, instrumentalised for maintaining a particular social order? In this chapter, through close attention to the participants and practitioners in *Refill*, I illustrate the ways in which the project complicates understandings of what happens in the *processes* of governing through art. These processes correspond neither with a politics of conformity to mainstream norms nor with a politics of resistance.

Throughout the case study based chapters I am not proposing one theoretical paradigm over another. My intention is to explicate the richness of community arts practices and to suggest the ways in which they exceed and confound dominant, taken-for-granted ways of interpreting culture. The concluding chapter, Living Together, represents the trajectory of my thinking. Living Together returns to thinking about what is unique about the ‘location of culture’ of community arts and how this location might contribute to other theoretical domains. It considers critical discourses of multiculturalism, but explicitly concentrates on the various *locations* from which these discourses encounter or situate ‘the multicultural’. In this chapter, I am concerned with mounting an argument for thinking about community arts
as a useful location from which to theorise multiculturalism – more grounded than official discursive understandings, and more mediated than theorisations of ‘everyday multiculturalism’. This chapter suggests the role community arts might play as a critical point of departure from which to understand and reformulate how belonging in the nation is sustained.
A Location of Culture

I want to take my stand on the shifting margins of cultural displacement – that confounds any profound or ‘authentic’ sense of a ‘national’ culture or an ‘organic’ intellectual – and ask what the function of a committed theoretical perspective might be, once the cultural and historical hybridity of the postcolonial world is taken as the paradigmatic place of departure. (Homi Bhabha, 1997, 21)

In the first half of this chapter I survey the community arts literature, both the literature within the field from practitioners and advocates, and the critical literature surrounding this work. I then examine the ways in which community arts discourses draw on and invoke an idea of place. I argue that community arts discourses are invested in a phenomenological conception of place, where place is understood as bounded, embodied and static. I account for the ways in which this ‘almost intuitive’ (Massey, 25, 8) ‘sense of place’ has been contested by writers like Val Plumwood, Doreen Massey and Paul Carter. These writers consider the way place is implicated in the very unanchoring forces of neoliberal globalisation, for which place and being placed are considered an antidote. Moreover, for Massey and Carter in particular, a European conception of place has legitimised colonial conquest, and thus is implicated in the rationalisations of place that occur in Australian settler colonialism. This literature explicates the contradictory forces invoked by place. In later chapters, I expand on how these contradictory forces play out in the place-making work of community art, where place is both celebrated as an authentic site of belonging and instrumentalised by forms of governance as a means of solving particular social problems.
In the second half of this chapter I make an account of the debates around how to categorise and interpret community arts. This critical literature foregrounds the many ways in which community arts practices unsettle conventional cultural criticism. Notions of ‘text’, ‘art’, ‘aesthetics’ and ‘the political’ – terms that anchor cultural criticism – are all destabilised by the ‘process’-oriented, governmentised, collaborative and often consensual politics of community arts. I argue that community arts can be more productively understood through its status as a marginal cultural form. Invoking Homi Bhabha’s phrase, I argue that thinking of this work as a ‘location of culture’ draws this local and minor cultural practice – usually theorised in terms of cultural policy or arts discourses on aesthetics – into proximity with theorisations of the nation and narratives of belonging. As instruments of governance, the projects that anchor my research extend the normalising discourse of nation and national belonging to marginal places in the nation. But in Bhabha’s words, they are also ‘enactive, enunciatory’ sites that open up ‘possibilities for other “times” of cultural meaning…and other narrative spaces’ (Bhabha, 1997, 178) beyond the monological narrative of settler colonialism (Rose, 2004, 28) and beyond liberal narratives of multiculturalism (Hage, 2000). This profound ambivalence, born out of the structural, governmental, geographic and historical contexts of these community arts projects is what makes them such fertile locations of culture.

**Community Arts Literature**

For several decades, now both in Australia and internationally, practitioners of an evolving participatory public art have responded to social dislocation using creative or ‘artistic’ media. Informed by both the practical and the philosophical dimensions of myriad different art forms, practitioners have found that an involvement in the processes of representation helps people negotiate the minute and epic transformations brought about through late capitalist, postcolonial, postliberal, globalised modernity. Commentators place their work in the ‘new kind of social space’ (Rouse, 2002, 157) manifesting through the intersecting scapes of these transformations.
Out of a diverse, diffuse and located array of practices and projects, Arlene Goldbard’s *New Creative Community: The Art of Cultural Development* attempts to consolidate this artistic practice as a distinctive and coherent international field. Published in 2006, this book mines the historical precedents of participatory or community-based arts work and presents a set of underlying principles and methods framing its politics and consolidating its practice. Goldbard suggests that community-based arts practices are intuitive, creative responses to the kinds of expansive socio-cultural transformations alluded to by people like Zygmunt Bauman and Roger Rouse. She identifies these as the proliferation of globalised mass media; increased human movement across the globe in response to conflict or poverty, but also migration within the nation-state as a result of urban renewal and urbanisation; the commodification of the environment and environmental degradation; the recognition of cultural minorities and their increasing claims for expression within the nation; the polarisation of cultural values revolving mostly around religious and racial differences; the expansion of development schemes from the exploitation of colonised countries for labour and resources, to their exploitation as new markets for the West where Western standards of living become the benchmark for large-scale social and economic development. Finally, Goldbard (2006) describes the increasing globalisation and privatisation of resources and services whereby private companies and non-government organisations have responded to the social needs formally undertaken by the state. Goldbard orients her account of the contemporary social world around transformations overwhelmingly emanating from the West. Her perception of community-based art and its function therefore largely considers this work as a Western response to the chronic ailments of late modern Western culture, namely, the unanchoring forces of neoliberal globalisation:

…considering contemporary Western culture as a whole exposes two overarching and countervailing truths addressed by community cultural development. The more complex and commercial the society, the more people experience a loss of agency, a decline in spontaneous connection, a tendency for consumer activities to supplant other social relationships and a strong pull to isolated pursuits. Yet as these tendencies have come to light, the will to resist them has grown stronger, expressed in countless ways, such as the locally based ‘slow
food’ movement, remarkable growth in the popularity of do-it-yourself approaches, burgeoning interest in craft and other traditional cultural practices and a great awakening of the impulse to seek spiritual meaning. The feelings that animate this growing refusal to succumb to corporate values also enspirit those who work for community cultural development. (Goldbard, 2006, 23)

Goldbard’s observations, derived from a very broad overview of community arts (which she calls community cultural development), resonate strongly with the grounded, localised case studies undertaken by Martin Mulligan and his co-writers (2006) in their detailed report on the role of this kind of work in local communities across Victoria. Mulligan and his team refer to Richard Sennett’s account of the way communities and individuals have responded to the chronic fragmentation of late modern life:

… people are not passively accepting the dissolution of community or individual connection. They are vigorously attempting to ‘make their experiences cohere’ by creating a sense of ‘narrative movement’ in their lives (Sennett, 2006, 183-88). In retelling and reorganising their lived experiences people seek to get ‘beneath the surface’ and capture a sense of ‘narrative agency’ by actively interpreting their own experiences. In other words, the process of making one’s life is vexed, active and ambiguous, and this has deep consequences for questions of wellbeing. The fact that people are active in remaking their worlds has both positive and negative dimensions. (Mulligan et al., 2006, 7)

For both Mulligan and his co-writers and Goldbard, community art responds to a deep need for people to experience their lives as authentic, as a process that unfolds in context and with continuity. These are the conditions in which the vicissitudes of a transient, unstable social world, with its seemingly random, shifting signs of pleasure, promise, familiarity and danger, its codes of entry, mobility, stability and exclusion, assume meaning and coherence. These are the conditions under which people find a place to interpolate themselves into a narrative of their own making, where a continuity of purpose extends through one’s labour, values and material surrounds. Even in its inexhaustible variety, community-based arts projects are most often directed towards generating different kinds of connectivity, drawing individuals and collectivities into a context or across a temporal, spatial or social continuity through
which they find the capacity to shape an experience. Goldbard expresses this yearning for connectivity as a return to the ‘human-scale’:

In our Information Age, with its default tone of exaggerated self-importance – colossal, revolutionary, humongous! – human-scale phenomena are often dwarfed by energetically marketed trivialities. So it is with community cultural development practice, a powerful, ground-level approach to community and culture that struggles for visibility in a market-driven world. (Goldbard, 2006, 19)

More provocatively, for Goldbard in particular, such work is not a neutral site for the reinvigoration of social meaning, but is also ‘a powerful means of awakening and mobilising resistance to imposed cultural values’ (Adams & Goldbard, 2001, 2; Goldbard, 2006, 23). Adams and Goldbard equate these imposed values most explicitly with the ‘energetically marketed trivialities’ of consumer capitalism with its imperatives to buy, to enhance and improve the self, to value appearance and surface over essence and substance (Goldbard 2006, 19). They posit community art as resisting the broader ‘market-driven’ culture of neoliberal modernity, where market values have permeated most facets of modern life (Goldbard, 2006, 19). In this sense they situate community arts on one side of a familiar dialectic: the humanist, ‘human-scale’, radical and communitarian values of community art against the capitalist, neoliberal, individualist and abstract values predominant in modern Western culture.

Much of the literature on community arts in Australia and in the UK and USA echoes this philosophy. Usually, this literature is by practitioners or those working within and between the field of governmental and institutional structures that support community arts practitioners and projects. Until recently, much of this literature has been on the edges of academic discourse, appearing mostly in government-funded reports and documents, conference proceedings, arts institutions or independent practitioner network websites and publications. Like Goldbard, this work is concerned with advocating for and celebrating the democratic social values of community arts and the way it unleashes the innate creative
potential of ordinary people (Binns, 1991; Lippard, 1997; Adams & Goldbard, 2001; Hawkes, 2004; Goldbard, 2006). Most of this writing is by people with a deep personal and professional investment in the promotion of the field and often, a profound commitment to the social changes they believe it can engender (Hawkes, 2004; Mills, 2005; Goldbard 2006; Jorgensen, 2007). Oriented by this practitioner agenda, often within the fray of government and corporate funding priorities, this literature assumes a practical and celebratory tone, without the critical and theoretical qualities of more academic literature. This practitioner vantage has meant that there is little interrogation of the assumptions that inform community arts practices; nor does this literature question the nostalgic and humanist principles that underlie this work’s vision of the social good. This literature is further problematised in that it does not interrogate the governmental structures and policy discourse in which this work is deeply enmeshed. A cabal of Foucauldian scholars have described the ways in which neoliberal logics have permeated contemporary regimes of government and shaped the ideals of self, community and society these regimes aim to engender (Rose, 1993, 1996 and 1999; Bennett, 1998; Dean, 1999). As a consequence of their failure to critically situate themselves within these structures of power, community arts discourses are often implicated in the very neoliberal logics they aim to ‘resist’. For someone like Goldbard, this would mean recognising the way that the ‘market driven’ logics to which she is so opposed also inflect the forms of self-actualisation promoted by community arts. I explore this tension further in Chapter Two.

But despite the limitations of this practitioner literature, I draw on it here for the way it demarcates a place in culture, a place from which to respond to the deracinating forces of the present. From such a vantage, even though the unanchoring effects of modernity are ubiquitous, in this literature community arts finds its truest expression located explicitly around the marginal, the divergent, the isolated, liminal, oppressed or minor experiences of the social order, those experiences most vulnerable to far-reaching and erratic structural change, largely defined by the world-view of others (Lippard, 1997; Goldbard, 2006). Place, especially the marginal place, is implicitly a generative site for this work. Art of this kind,
made in and of a particular context, is a vehicle for questioning the values and perspectives of the wider social order, and also for exposing the social and cultural location of the processes of domination themselves. The creativity and challenge of this work derives from the search for social meaning from within these sites of greatest social discontinuity and complexity, not despite the erosion of established, located ways of being and knowing but rather through the disparities between culture, community and place, and within the proliferation of knowledges, experiences, perceptions and truths that modernity presents. As Goldbard articulates it, this work is about ‘making democratic counter-forces of many of the same arts and media tools elsewhere used to promote global saturation of commercial culture’ (Goldbard, 2006, 42). In this sense, this literature articulates more than a social critique. It is directed towards advancing alternative ways of relating to and knowing the world to those presented as inevitable and unstoppable by the prevailing discourses of neoliberal modernity.

Other community arts literature is concerned with making a case for the impact of the arts on the wider social domain. This literature, usually in the form of government or industry-funded reports, documents real case studies in which the community arts are deployed in efforts to address a range of social problems. In this literature, community arts contributes to building more resilient communities, fostering individual and community wellbeing, promoting economic activity, increasing civic participation and decreasing isolation and social tension (Mills & Brown, 2004; Mulligan et al. 2006; Mulligan & Smith, 2010; Markusen & Gadwa, 2010). Commonly, this literature strongly advocates increased deployment of the arts for addressing such social problems. However, grounded as it is in sociological fieldwork and specific case studies, this literature also paints a detailed picture of how the community arts projects evolve in practice, often intimating the ways in which this work has effects beyond the narrow governmental problem it has been deployed to solve. A critical discourse has grown around this ‘impact’ literature. A cascade of articles by the UK Cultural Policy Researchers Eleonora Belfiore and Oliver Bennett question the terms for measuring the ‘impact’ of the arts, the instruments of measurement employed to determine this impact, and the transformative capacities of the arts themselves (Belfiore & Bennett, 2007, 2009 and
This literature argues for a shift away from the empirical methods currently favoured by policy researchers and advocates for a broader ‘humanities-based’ approach to measuring the impacts of the arts (Belfiore & Bennett, 2010, 121). At the same time, Belfiore and Bennett (2010, 137) concede that the relationship between evidence of impact and the making of culture policy is itself an indirect and opaque one and that other, deeper associations and values may be more important in determining how the arts are funded and the uses to which they are put.

The few critical Australian studies on community arts also situate their critiques largely from the vantage of cultural policy studies. This work is less instrumental than the Belfiore and Bennett literature; it considers the policy programs through which community arts consolidates as a field and examines the discursive constructions that shape its objectives, objects and practices (Hawkins, 1993; Gibson, 2001; Khan, 2011). The most influential and still relevant critical work in community arts in Australia is Gay Hawkins’s book From Nimbin to Mardi Gras: Constructing Community Arts. Although written almost twenty years ago, this book remains the most comprehensive history of community arts in Australia and the most rigorous situating of this work in the evolving policy discourses of its time (Hawkins, 1993; Khan, 2011). Rimi Khan’s recent thesis extends Hawkins’s policy analysis, attending to the varied uses to which the community arts have been put in the last two decades (Khan, 2011). While I draw from these cultural policy approaches – especially in my understanding of how community arts manifests itself as a technique of governance – my own interest in community arts as placed and as it manifests itself in place requires a departure from the clinical distance of this literature – both the ‘impact’ critique of Belfiore and Bennett and the policy discourse analysis of Hawkins, Gibson and Khan. What I find limiting in this critical literature for my study is a lack of emphasis on the material labour of community arts projects as they manifest themselves in practice, in place, across a myriad of sites, practitioners and participants. My more expository approach, textually based and ethnographic, draws out the ambivalence at the heart of this work, both as a discourse and as

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4 Lachlan McDowall has also discussed this in personal conversation with the author.
a practice. Framing community arts as a unique and fertile ‘location of culture’ I consider it in involved proximity rather than through the disinterested lens of ‘critical distance’. The ‘toolkit’ approach of Belfiore and Bennett and the policy analysis of Hawkins, Gibson and Khan bring a range of theoretical techniques to reading community arts. I employ a critically proximate vantage to this work because I am less interested in interpreting and evaluating community arts as an effect of various discourses; rather, I posit this work as a generative cultural location in its own right, a location that itself unsettles the theoretical domains through which it is so readily interpreted.

**Invoking Place**

While community arts literature does not often address the relationship between art and place directly, place features (usually obliquely) as the latter term in this dialectic of consumer/community values. Implicitly in this literature, place is the ‘human-scale’, concrete and communitarian antidote to the abstracting and consumerist culture of neoliberal modernity. In several wide-ranging reports on the social impacts of community arts, place appears in this context; it is both the background to and target of community arts work. In a report on *Creative Placemaking* it is the thing that has been unanchored in its struggle ‘with structural change and residential uprooting’ (Markusen & Gadwa, 2010, 3); or in the context of a report on art and local governance, there is a risk of a ‘rise in social tension and conflict’ if governments fail to foster an inclusive ‘sense of belonging’ to place (Mulligan & Smith, 2010, 9); or in a report on *Art and Wellbeing*, place is an object of governmental programs of ‘community renewal’ and social ‘management’ (Mills & Brown, 2004, 48). There is a tension here between place as self-evident and replete, the site for social anchorage and security; and place as deficient and mediated, the object of various forms of social intervention and (re)construction. This duality in appeals to place mimics the duality identified by many sociologists in appeals to ‘community’. So, for Delanty (2003), community continues to be relevant today ‘because, on the one side, the fragmentation of society has provoked a worldwide search for community, and on the other…cultural developments and global forms of communication have facilitated the construction of community’ (Delanty, 2003, 193). Like
place, appeals to community in community arts invoke both its repleteness and its malleability to various forms of intervention. Community arts discourses appeal to the anchoring and socially sustaining powers of an already coherent and cohesive sense of community while also being a highly refined instrument for mobilising, modifying and creating community – making them ‘stronger, more cohesive, and more resilient’ (Mulligan & Smith, 2010, 33). But while there is some commentary in community arts literature on the contradictions and tensions in the ‘turn to community’ (Mulligan & Smith, 2010) this literature rarely questions the assumptions underlying similar appeals to place. Nor does it critically examine the way place is implicated in broader discourses of modernity, coloniality and subjectivity. In this section below, I briefly introduce two works that do address the relationship between arts and place directly. I then consider what is invoked in community art’s appeal to place and the ways in which this understanding of place has been contested.

Of the small body of literature directly addressing the relationship between the arts and place, Lucy Lippard’s *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentred Society* makes a significant contribution. Lippard chronicles the diverse arts practices across the United States grounded in locality – art that is ‘of’ place rather than ‘about’ place (Lippard, 1997, 263).

The intersections of nature, culture, history, and ideology form the ground on which we stand – our land, our place, the local. The lure of the local is the pull of place that operates on each of us, exposing our politics and our spiritual legacies. It is the geographical component of the psychological need to belong somewhere, one antidote to a prevailing alienation. The lure of the local is that undertone to modern life that connects it to the past we know so little and the future we are aimlessly concocting. It is not universal (nothing is) and its character and affect differ greatly over time from person to person and from community to community. (Lippard, 1997, 7)

Just a brief survey of the chapter headings of this book indicate that Lippard conceives of place – or the local – in wide-ranging terms. Place is a site of emotional attachment, of desire, nostalgia and loss in contemporary modernity: ‘Sweet Home’, ‘Marking the Spot’, ‘Manipulating Memory’. Place is also the locus for survival in both an ecological and
sociological sense, it embeds the ecologies supporting diverse forms of life on the planet and sustains the cultural life of diverse communities: ‘Death by Geography’, ‘Down to Earth: Land and Use’, ‘Town and Country and the Cultures of Man’. These different dimensions of the local are woven together in artistic practice, where the emotional and psychological, the material and ecological, and the sociological and cultural – usually separated by different disciplinary categories – influence and inform each other in some way.

Miwon Kwon’s book, *One Place After Another: Site-specific Art and Locational Identity* also conceives of the place or ‘site specificity’ in broad terms. Kwon traces the emergence of site-specific art from the 1960s onwards as a critique of modernist forms of artistic display (the universalising modernist gallery) and against the increasing commodification of art. Site-specificity was driven by ‘pursuit of a more intense engagement with the outside world and everyday life’ (Kwon, 2002, 24). In this art, the site would generate the content of a work (Kwon, 2002, 26). This art realises a desire to (re)integrate art into the social realm; in effect, a reconciliation of modernism’s alienating severance between art and life. While *One Place After Another* does not address community arts explicitly, Kwon’s critical history traces the emergence of participatory public art (in the USA, new genre public art), through a shift in the conception of ‘the site’ and ‘the public’ in arts discourse and practice. Over the last 30 years the grounded nature of the site, its literalness, has been transformed into a ‘discursive vector’: the site can be a community, a concept, a discourse – that is, an abstract rather than material locality (Kwon, 2002, 29). Concurrently, ‘the public’ over this period have been redefined from the modernist conception of ‘the masses’ to become engaged members of a community. Kwon is rare in the literature on community arts in actively interrogating the self-evidence of the idea of community and ‘the site’ or place. For her, community (and by implication, the site) is the thing being realised through this art – often in highly specific and contested terms (Kwon, 2002, 96). She says at the beginning of her book that her intention is to critically examine ‘site specificity not exclusively as an artistic genre but as a problem-idea, as a peculiar cipher of art and spatial politics’ (Kwon, 2002, 2, my emphasis). And, in the course of various detailed examples, Kwon does illustrate the dynamic and unstable co-
makings between artists, community, place, and artistic practice. In this sense, she works against conceiving of place and community as immediate, authentic and replete, as Lippard and Goldbard do.

So what are the philosophical assumptions underpinning appeals to place that characterise most writing on community arts? More particularly, what is invoked by place in the context of efforts to govern place through art – especially in the context of a settler-colonial country like Australia with a historically ambivalent relationship to place? Interventions in place take many forms. They include the provision of social services and infrastructure, the regulation and stimulation of social and economic activity, the exploitation and development of resources and the protection of built and natural environments. These practices – building, designing, managing, developing, conserving, regenerating – affect how places function and how they are experienced. But they do not necessarily shape what places mean to people.

For Yi-Fu Tuan, one of the earliest and still seminal writers to consider the instinctive associations conjured by place, these interventions are not ‘directly concerned with the formation of attitudes and values’ (Tuan, 1974, 1). Tuan defines place as enculturated space: space imbued with meaning (Tuan, 1977, 6). ‘Place is security, space is freedom: we are attached to the one and long for the other. There is no place like home. What is home? It is the old homestead, the old neighborhood, hometown, or motherland’ (Tuan, 1977, 3). In his book *Topophilia*, Tuan transformed the tone of human geography by considering people’s relationship to place, their ‘sense of place’ as opposed to the physical, technological and sociological properties of ‘environments’ – both natural and ‘man-made’ (Tuan, 1974, 1 and 1977). ‘Diffuse as concept, vivid and concrete as personal experience’, Tuan defines topophilia as ‘the affective bond between people and place or setting.’ (Tuan, 1974, 4)

Significantly, Tuan reaches beyond the classificatory discourse of science and the historizing discourse of the humanities for a universal humanist language to articulate how people respond to and inhabit their environment. He draws from Heidegger’s phenomenological lexicon of experience, consciousness, perceptiveness, sensing, feeling to
describe the qualities of being in space, the ways in which spaces are known, remembered and communicated. For Tuan, place designates a form of knowing through the body. The senses are central to his conception of place because they ground perception within common human faculties. These faculties shape the way space is divided up and ordered; the way space is represented symbolically; the way the perception of space is scaled in correspondence with the human body. Place appeals because it draws us away from the world into ourselves. It is ‘a pause in movement’, where the wounded go to be nurtured, to recuperate (Tuan, 1977, 137-38).

In this lexicon of place or ‘sense of place’, the affective and imaginary dimensions of place are considered as important as physical and material properties. These subjective qualities fall outside of, or slip in between, what is tangible and visible. This makes ‘place’ difficult to define because it is more than material surrounds and more than individual familiarity. Place involves the ‘enfolded meanings’ (Cameron, 2003b, 3) of experience, feeling and representation. A sense of place emerges out of an entanglement of the intimate and personal with the collective and public. This layering of the psychological, the material and the cultural makes being in place, whether feeling ‘at home’ or nostalgic about the ‘old neighborhood’ or homesick for one’s country, mean more than occupying a particular postcode, or having access to a suite of local amenities. For Tuan and the writers who draw from his phenomenological and subjective ‘sense of place’ it is these qualities of feeling and attachment – people’s relationships to place – which both reflects and contributes to deeply felt narratives of being in the world, the anchorage for meaning and social identity (Tuan 1979 and 1974; Lippard, 1997; Cameron, 2003; Seamon & Sowers, 2008).

This interiorised, static sense of place makes it a counterpoint or antidote to the despatialising, unanchoring forces of modernity, neoliberal capitalism and globalisation. It is this ‘sense of ‘place’ that is mobilised by community arts discourses. And it is in this sense that community art’s appeal to place is aligned with the field’s primary philosophy to awaken and mobilise ‘resistance to imposed cultural values’ (Adams & Goldbard, 2001, 1). In
community arts discourse, forging attachment to place, through the body, through memory, through the enculturations of daily practice, ritual and symbolism, constitutes a more authentic way of being in the world. Lippard invokes this conception of place when she frames the local as a powerful site of desire, of longing for something lost: there is a ‘pull of place which operates on each of us, exposing our politics and our spiritual legacies’ (Lippard, 1997, 7).

We are living today on a threshold between a history of alienated displacement from and longing for home and the possibility of a multicentered society that understands the reciprocal relationship between the two. What Lawrence Grossberg calls ‘the very cornerstones of historical research’ could also be called the very cornerstones of a new kind of responsible perception of place and the art that emerges from it…And in the case of a restless, multitraditional people, even as the power of place is diminished and often lost, it continues – as an absence – to define culture and identity. It also continues – as a presence – to change the way we live. (Lippard, 1997, 20)

Lippard’s conception of place draws very strongly on the ahistorical, phenomenological understanding expressed by Tuan. Like Tuan, for Lippard, place is outside of the vicissitudes and dynamic forces of modernity. Evoked recurrently as ‘home’, place represents a return to a pre-modern, static and stable state of being where we are protected from the ‘bewilderments of the outside world’ (Tuan, 1974, 99). Honouring the ‘pull of place’ Lippard (1997) advocates a return to our origins – our ‘spiritual legacies’ and our most elemental politics. But other theorists have emphasised how this kind of subjective, centric and nostalgic understanding of place fails to identity its dynamics and contingency. Writers like Doreen Massey and Val Plumwood, for example, situate place more firmly within a political and postcolonial discourse of power and capital than in a recuperative, affective discourse of attachment and belonging. Plumwood in particular critiques the myopia of much ‘sense of place’ literature. Plumwood (2008) asks important questions about what attachment to place means within a globalised economy of industrial production and commodification, in which
our experience of place is physically disconnected from the material conditions that support our existence.

This culture creates a split between a singular, elevated, conscious ‘dwelling’ place, and the multiple disregarded places of economic and ecological support, a split between our idealised homeplace and the places delineated by our ecological footprint. In the context of the dominant global consciousness, ideals of dwelling compound this by encouraging us to direct our honouring of place towards an ‘official’ singular idealised place consciously identified with self, while disregarding the many unrecognised, shadow places that provide our material and ecological support, most of which, in a global market, are likely to elude our knowledge and responsibility. This is not an ecological form of consciousness. (Plumwood, 2008, np)

Plumwood injects a materialist reality into the ‘pull of place which operates on each of us’. In contrast to Lippard, Plumwood advocates a ‘pull of place’ that pulls us outside of the places to which we have developed an affective, sensorial bond. In a ‘global market’ the materials that literally sustain us are often resourced from places beyond our immediate knowledge. Drawing from an Indigenous notion of ‘country’ she argues that place, ‘your place’ should include ‘all those places that produce or are affected by the commodities you consume, places consumers don’t know about, don’t want to know about, and in a commodity regime don’t ever need to know about or take responsibility for’ (Plumwood, 2008, np). Framing a ‘sense of place’ in bodily, affective terms as Tuan does, limits place attachments to those places literally at arm’s length and ignores the diffuse, fragmented and discontinuous spatialities that support contemporary lives. More critically for Plumwood, the affective attachment to, or ‘honouring of place’ celebrated by Goldbard and Lippard as ‘resistance’ to a ‘market-driven world’, actually perpetuates the unsustainability of global capitalism. The honouring of ‘our land, our place, the local’ serves as extension to the devastation of the ‘disregarded’ shadow places to which we make no claim.

Doreen Massey is similarly critical of the assumptions that ground a phenomenological attachment to place. In For Space she takes aim at the static, bounded and concrete
understandings of place, implicitly framed against an unbounded, abstract and open notion of the ‘out there’ of space (Massey, 2005, 7).

In the context of a world which is, indeed, increasingly interconnected the notion of place (usually evoked as ‘local place’) has come to have totemic resonance. Its symbolic value is endlessly mobilised in political argument. For some it is the sphere of the everyday, of real and valued practices, the geographical source of meaning, vital to hold on to as ‘the global’ spins its ever more powerful and alienating webs. For others, a ‘retreat to place’ represents a protective pulling-up of drawbridges and a building of walls against the new invasions. Place, on this reading, is the local of denial, of attempted withdrawal from invasion/difference. (Massey, 2005, 5-6)

Massey’s critique of the privileging of place and the assumptions supporting this privilege is part of a far more ambitious attempt to redress some of the misconceptions about space and spatiality embedded in Western thought. Since Space, Place and Gender, Massey (1997) has tried to liberate the spatial from being tamed by Western philosophy, anthropology and sociology. In For Space she argues that space in Western metaphysics is associated with the image and with stasis. This almost ‘intuitive’ understanding of the spatial has denied its ‘multiplicities, its fractures and its dynamism. It is a stabilisation of the inherent instabilities and creativities of space; a way of coming to terms with the great “out there”’ (Massey, 2005, 65).

For Massey, this tamed spatiality has had profound implications for the orderings and impulses underpinning Western modernity. Imagining the world as a unified and stable spatiality, Europe envisioned the ‘great “out there”’ as an already known entity, awaiting the coming of European Enlightenment in the fulfilment of Europe’s singular destiny. European imperialism and colonialism are legitimised in this inevitable ‘unfolding, internal story’ in which Europe is the central active subject (Massey, 2005, 62). This conception of spatiality enables the imagining of the counterpoint to the great ‘out there’. Complementing the open, vast, expansive space for conquest and heroism, is the interior, authentic and bounded space of retreat and safety:
It is this concept of space which provides the basis for the supposed coherence, stability and authenticity to which there is such frequent appeal in discourses of parochialism and nationalism….And it provides, (this tamed notion of space) too, the basis for much more ordinary notions – persistent and everyday – that ‘place’, or locality (or even ‘home’) provides a safe haven to which one can retreat. What was evolved within the project of modernity, in other words, was the establishment and (attempted) universalisation of a way of imagining space (and the space/society relation) which underpinned the material enforcement of certain ways of organising space and the relationship between society and space. And it is still with us today. (Massey, 2005, 65)

Tuan’s sense of place as a ‘pause in movement’ as ‘home’ or ‘the old neighbourhood, hometown, or motherland’ corresponds exactly with this ordering structure. For Massey, the nostalgic pull of these places is a projection of the modern imagining of space ‘out there’. The vast arena in which the European self is realised and actualised finds its compliment in the ‘home’ or ‘hometown’ or ‘motherland’ – these primal and primary sites are where the self returns for sanctuary and from which this self proceeds into the world and becomes modern. In this theoretical context, the phenomenological conception of place does not describe a neutral or benign kind of attachment. First, this attachment is implicated in the destructiveness of Europe’s territorialisations ‘out there’; and, second, the ‘retreat’ to place for protection, for nourishment and safety, corresponds, for Massey, to a more aggressive ‘retreat’ or ‘withdrawal’ from difference, from the inevitable pluralities produced by a globalised world. Australia’s discourse of ‘border protection’, sealing off the nation’s territory from unauthorised boat arrivals from the country’s north, corresponds with this ‘retreat’ to a protected and purified place. Also significant is the way such constructions of place divest it – ‘the home’, the ‘old neighbourhood’ – of political, dynamic and agentive capacities. In this spatiality, such places ‘pull’ on us in the guise of a pre or antimodern space that bears the effects of the processes of global modernity but which do not themselves contribute to these processes.
If Doreen Massey critiques the taming of the spatial in Western philosophy, then Paul Carter examines the Western techniques, knowledges and disciplinary conventions through which this tamed space becomes concrete and lived. In *Dark Writing* (2009) Carter makes a study of the material practices of place, beginning with scrutinising the ‘line’ in cartography, urban planning and writing:

A description of the world is accounted most authoritative when it contains no trace of the knower. Invention means to come across something, to fall in with it, but our inventions are presented as ruptures with the past. They spring out of nothing to offer us new choices – new landscapes to command. Maps do this with their alluringly complete coastlines and calligraphically consistent ranges and rivers. But so do the designed places of urban planning with their suddenly complete patterns of paths, squares, bridges and roads. Nothing moves in these ideal representations. They are theatres from which the possibility of anything happening has been removed. To walk in them is to be an actor in someone else’s dream. How remarkably silent our graphic descriptions of the world are: no breaking surf is heard in them, no animated conversation, no reports of gunfire or anguished whale song. (Carter, 2009, 5)

What Paul Carter seems to most want to unearth in *Dark Writing* are the restless origins of place. Where the phenomenologists appeal to place as the stable, immediate and bounded origin of the self, Carter appeals to the forgotten grounded and situated practices that secure and cement this ideal. Returning to the ‘spatial history’ of earlier work – *The Road to Botany Bay* and *The Lie of the Land* – and to the ‘material thinking’ of his book of that same name, *Dark Writing* mines the poetics of place-making. Carter is concerned with recovering the imaginative and material projections through which places come into being:

Our world is composed of traces of movement, but our representations conceal this. Our thinking is a movement of the mind, but our forms of thought are static. Whether it is the outside world or the inner world, we write about it and draw it as if it were motionless. Look at geography’s maps; you would never guess they were the cumulative trace of many journeys. (Carter, 2009, 5)
Carter critiques the positivist principles underlying Western techniques of rendering and making place. Reducing the multiplicities of place, the history of successive gesturings and journeying in the perception of place, to the singularity of a coastline, a city grid, a road, strips place of its possibilities. These ‘ideal representations’ remove the ‘possibility of anything happening’. Carter’s effort to bring the ‘cumulative trace of many journeys’ into the representational techniques of the design disciplines is an attempt to blur the clarity of the line in Western place-making. In doing so, he endeavours to expand the possible ways of being in place. So while *Dark Writing* is a critique of the design disciplines’ rendering of place, it is also a recovery of the faint traces, the tremors of movement, of hesitation, experimentation and progression still present, still perceptible in the designs we make on the world. These movements and traces, marks and buried associations constitute the dark writing of place.

Carter’s ‘grounding’ of Enlightenment forms of knowledge is literal. One of his most recurrent themes is to resituate the production of our designs on the world in the material conditions of their production. He returns to the multiple embodied events through which geographical knowledge is constituted – the moments between the step by step of linear progressions, the succession of encounters that fix a topographical point in memory. He argues that Enlightenment knowledge is implicated in the experiential, the embodied, the empirical, but that it removes these grounding traces from its designs, presenting itself as abstract and universal. There is some congruence here with Tuan’s phenomenological conception of place as always a *being in* place, place as experienced from a subjective and embodied vantage. But unlike Tuan, Carter does not separate the experience of place from the multiple forms of mediation – of representing, mapping, imagining, associating – through which being in place manifests itself as a coherent experience. ‘To recuperate the dark writing of the world is to go both above and below the line of disembodied reasoning that currently mediates our design on the world’ (Carter, 2009, 4). Experience and mediation are merged for Carter but for Tuan, subjective experience is the authentic counterpoint to the one-dimensional abstraction of our designs.
In resonance with Plumwood (2008) and Massey (2005), there are political and ethical implications to Carter’s project. He recovers the creative venturing in the constellating of place. The borders marking the city limits, the ‘complete patterns of paths, squares, bridges and roads’, in their precision and irrefutability, banish the natural from the human world. In Plumwood’s terms, these ideal places sever us from the knowledge of what sustains us. Similarly, the ‘complete coastlines’ of the colonised territory obliterate the memory of the contestations – pursued through violence or money or negotiation – through which this territory became the settled home. In this sense Carter can call these ideal representations technologies of collective amnesia: they are ‘cultural analgesics dulling history and geography’s pain’ (Carter, 2009, 19).

Like Massey, Carter argues that Western conceptions of place legitimised and enabled colonial conquest and settlement. He focuses in on the ways in which philosophies of space were rendered technical within the Enlightenment disciplines of cartography, geography and planning. ‘Coastlines’ he says, ‘were among the poetic foundations of empire. They were not only logically necessary places drawn on the map; when it came to encountering other people, they were places for drawing the line’ (Carter, 2009, 63). In an account of the coastal mapping of northern Australia, Carter makes a distinction between the coast – the natural rise of land above sea-level – and coastlines – the linear techniques for rendering the coast. ‘Conceptualised as places that maximised the chances of seeing something new, coastlines were a visualist paradise. They were telescopic, bringing things hidden beyond the horizon suddenly near’ (Carter, 2009, 60). These lines on a page transformed the no-man’s-land between water and earth into a clear division of territory. The visibility of the line solidified the claiming of the territory, but also marked out the expansion of the territorial claim – the passages into the interior through the marking of rivers and inlets; the prospects for occupying the land made visible from an elevated vantage (Carter, 2009, 61). Coastlines were among ‘the poetic foundations of empire’ to the extent that they were the imaginative
precursors to the act of territorial conquest and to the realisation of the vision of settlement that followed.

Carter’s thesis on place-making is practical as well as theoretical and historical. He advocates ways of making ‘designs on the world’ that ‘make room for things to happen’:

They should be scores that mediate between the abstract and the actual, encouraging improvisation. This is not only a technical challenge. It is a social and ethical one, for the people who come to dwell in these differently designed places will have to take responsibility for arriving and leaving. They will see the cost of the marks they make and leave. ‘They will live constitutionally ‘in flight.’ They will have to learn to live in hope and with disappointment. They will have to hope that nothing happens as planned, and learn how to plan for this. This is the serious play democracy might incubate, but to be players it is necessary first that the line be democratised. Learning to read dark writing is part of that process. (Carter, 2009, 15)

I see his work as opening up the possibility for a less nostalgic, less circumscribed understanding of the place-making work of community arts. Carter’s emphasis on the material properties of the line can be extended into the more complex, but equally material ways through which community arts practices make ‘designs on the world’. These designs are significant as practical realisations of the multiplicities of place. They mediate different forms of dwelling, they animate different pasts, different stories, contested presences and absences. These multiplicities of place may be too contested or too diverse to reflect any particular political ideology or to manifest any particular governmental regime. What I am more interested in here is not their ideological work but their material work. The projects I attend to in later chapters do encourage improvisation, often, in very practical ways. It is through expanding the possible ways of inhabiting place in a material sense that such projects enact a particular kind of politics.
**INTERPRETIVE FRAMINGS**

Within broader ‘arts’ discourses, community arts, and the many other terms this work goes by – ‘socially engaged art, community-based art, experimental communities, dialogic art, littoral art, participatory, interventionist, research-based, or collaborative art’ (Bishop, 2006 np) – have been claimed for the contemporary avant-garde. ‘This mixed panorama of socially collaborative work arguably forms what avant-garde we have today: artists using social situations to produce dematerialised, antimarket, politically engaged projects that carry on the modernist call to blur art and life’ (Bishop, 2006, np). Defining what she calls the ‘social turn’ in the arts, arts historian Claire Bishop draws on Nicolas Bourriaud’s influential theory of ‘relational aesthetics’ to articulate the principles and practices of this contemporary avant-garde. For Bourriaud (1998), the relational aesthetics that distinguish contemporary arts practices make the ‘realm of human interactions and its social context’ the grounds for artistic practice rather than the background against which the individual artist casts their work (Bourriaud in Belfiore & Bennett, 2010, 231). In this kind of aesthetics, art no longer functions as a ‘utopian’ projection separated from the messy array of social interactions that constitute its context. The art is itself a mode of living; it interjects in social actions or animates a network of collaborations within an already ‘existing real’ (Bourriaud in Belfiore & Bennett, 2010, 231). The desire to make this terrain the material or matter of the artwork constitutes the ‘social turn’ in the arts (Bishop, 2006).

Like Bourriaud, Nikos Papastergiadis sees articulating the ‘domain of the experiential’ as a recurrent drive in contemporary art. Art that seeks to be of the world, ‘part of the experience of being in the world’ (Papastergiadis, 2003, 14), explains the attraction for artists of working collaboratively, a desire to enter into the grounded experiences of others and into the networks and relationships defining social life. For Papastergiadis, the blurring of ‘art and life’ in this art does not make it an extension of the modernist avant-garde as Bishop sees it. Rather, he argues that this work makes a more complex intervention into modernity; it departs from modernity’s linear temporality, its confrontational ethos – the ‘shock of the new’ – in favour of a more modest, improvisatory and consensual mode:
Today the potency of art is not to be found in its claims of newness but in its attention to the politics of renewal. It is out of the ruins of modernity rather than the visions of yet another modern Utopia that the possibility of hope is explored in art. Artists increasingly use material that can be found in the scrap-heaps of everyday life, but also appropriate techniques and media forms which are part of popular culture. The disappearance of a distinctive visual edge between art and ordinary objects, or the artist’s work and domestic practices in storytelling points to a critical shift away from the spectacle and into the domain of the experiential. (Papastergiadis, 2003, 14)

Papastergiadis’s reading of contemporary art is explicitly inflected by a Southern perspective. He is interested in the ways in which modernity looks different from the position of the (post)colonial antipodes, continually anxious about its remoteness from the metropolis, dreading the ‘belated arrival of the contemporary’ (Papastergiadis, 2003, 6). ‘This dread’, he says, ‘blocks a deeper awareness that meaning is made in the waiting rooms of history’ (Papastergiadis, 2003, 6). Papastergiadis invites a placed understanding of modernity. He sees a role for art in drawing attention to other narratives, other temporalities and spatialities consigned to modernity’s ‘scrap-heap’.

This perspective, that the specificities of location can foreground an alternate view of modernity, also extends to an interpretation of community arts. In this case, it is community arts’ location within a broader arena of cultural production and within a national spatiality – both material and imagined – that is important. The ‘belatedness’ of the South has some resonance with the cultural location of community art. Community art can be characterised as a belated practice, outside of the fast lane of the modernist arts establishment and the metropolitan centres in which this establishment physically resides. In her history of the community arts in Australia, Gay Hawkins suggests that community arts are best defined by their marginality, by being inconsequential to, or outside of, the dominant circuits of cultural production. Trying to gain some purchase on the field, Hawkins lists an extensive yet eclectic array of practices and cultural forms that would fall under the mantle of community arts: ‘murals, craft workshops in prisons, agitprop theatre, a migrant women’s embroidery
groups, regional arts centres, local government cultural officers, a photo exhibition of a miners’ strike, a mask-making project with children’ (Hawkins, 1993, xix). She eventually concedes that community arts is not so much a cultural form as a location within culture, a category defined by its relationship to other cultural categories (Hawkins, 1993, xix). A ‘vague boundary is established that distinguishes community arts from both ‘high’ culture and mass culture. Community arts are located out on the cultural fringes where marginal groups produce marginal art’ (Hawkins, 1993, xix). For Hawkins this marginality is pejorative and conveys the lack of value of this work and the social worlds it articulates. ‘While the amateur and the local may challenge the hegemony of the professional and the national in arts policy they are also invoked as terms of derision and dismissal, as signs of aesthetic fiascos and cultural lack’ (Hawkins, 1993, xix). Hawkins does not invest much in this cultural location for the making of meaning. But for Papastergiadis, these ‘waiting rooms of history’ might be the very place from which a vital commentary on the present day might emerge, a placed perspective that refuses a universal spatio-temporal arena – or the ‘hegemony of the professional and the national’ – and finds meaning in the articulation of an alternate ‘sense of place in the world’ (Papastergiadis, 2003, 14).

The discord in Hawkins’s view of community arts, that it both challenges dominant systems of value and is dismissed by them, reflects broader ambivalence about the significance of this unique form of cultural production ‘out on the cultural fringes’. Such ambivalence has been amplified by an insufficient critical language for judging and interpreting this work on its own terms. At the end of her history of community arts, Gay Hawkins cites the absence of a critical language as one of the key limitations of the community arts discourse. ‘The representation of community arts as a distinctive cultural practice produced an over-valorisation of contexts that obliterated any consideration of texts. This profound silence about texts is reflected in the absence of a critical language within the community arts complex’ (Hawkins, 1993, 163). Efforts to describe, value and interpret community arts, as ‘texts’, have largely concentrated into a fierce polarity framed around the aesthetics of community arts versus its social processes.
Practitioners of community arts distinguish their work from other forms of artistic production precisely because their practices resist capture within a textual metaphor. In a phrase that resonates strongly with the views of other practitioners, a community development worker, Paula Jorgensen, has warned of the dangers of taking community arts projects at face value. ‘(I)t’s important to say, although I’m sure you know, that words and a picture don’t do the energy and creativity justice. The power of these projects is in the process as well as the outcome,’ she says, ‘…what you’re seeing here is just a shadow of a memory compared to the real thing’ (Jorgensen, 2007, np). Jorgensen’s comment was made in the context of a project she was involved in, called Linking Glenroy. This was a complex project, but no more complex than many other community arts projects, typically diffuse in their breadth of participants yet focused in their social aims. Linking Glenroy aimed at better integrating young people from a disadvantaged locality into the services, institutions and social world of their community (Jorgensen, 2007). Jorgensen described it as a ‘story about innovative partnerships’ but she refined this further. ‘The reason this project is successful and the reason it is innovative is all about the relationships that grew out of working together and creating together’ (Jorgensen, 2007, np). It began with the local city council, mapping the locality to identify areas of disadvantage and developed into a participatory project funded by the state government, supported by and involving the local council and seven different youth agencies across the locality. A Christian youth service, a health service, a secondary college, an Indigenous education program, a neighbourhood learning centre and others, worked with young people, producing different arts and performance projects, exhibited over a week. The young people taking part in this project were keen to extend it and so, through the work of the local council, another multifaceted, participatory project emerged involving five of the seven participating organisations.

Over such a protracted length of time, and covering so many different participants and practitioners, it is difficult to say where the ‘process’ of this work begins and ends. Both the context of its production and the context of its reception are diffused across several
organisations and institutions, all loosely classed as the ‘local community’. It is difficult also to identify the ‘outcomes’ of the work – the ‘texts’ that Hawkins is concerned with. These would include the arts and performance projects exhibited by the young people, art that involved many different media and crossed over different artistic genres from performing to visual art: stencil art, performance, rap and beat box, film and public art (Jorgensen, 2007). But Jorgensen herself said that ‘the projects are not about the actual art, but the relationships that develop and the understandings and growth that come from the relationships’ (Jorgensen, 2007). So the ‘outcomes’ for her include the relationships between the young people and the different organisations and institutions with which they were involved; the relationships between arts practitioners and the different governmental agencies of Glenroy; the relationships between the different agencies, institutions and service providers themselves and their continuing collaboration; the development of the young people – their increased awareness of, and participation in, their local community and their enthusiasm for perpetuating many of the projects they began; and finally, the development of a sense of coherence and relationality across the diverse social, institutional and cultural structures constituting Glenroy; in short, the building of a sense of community in this place.

The intangible outcomes of a project like Linking Glenroy do not add up to anything as defined and solid as a ‘text’ and the texts themselves – stencil art, beat box, rap – are transient and highly contextual. And, more importantly, as Jorgensen emphasises, the material after-effects, ‘words and a picture’ are only the ‘shadow of a memory’ of the real thing. The meaning and significance of the project is dispersed between these objects and the many processes, procedures, intentions, feelings and relationships through which they were created and which they stimulated. These are transient and mostly go unrecorded. What is important for Jorgensen is the ways in which these practices and relationships are carried over and embodied in new practices, new relationships, new capabilities continually changing over time.
This diffuse textuality is challenging for the researcher trying to reconstruct an idea of the ‘real thing’ through the few remaining traces. It is more challenging still to develop a ‘critical language’ that can integrate the ‘text’ of this work with the context through which it emerged. What is clear from the project Jorgensen narrates is that appreciating the nuances of ‘process’ requires different methods of interpretation to those used by cultural critics for more orthodox forms of cultural criticism. Within the arts establishment, responding to this work has highlighted the need for a renewed critical language through which to judge it ‘on the level of art’ (Bishop, 2006, np). But, rather than seeking alternative modes of engaging with this work, debates about how to interpret community arts continue to be constrained by a dualistic struggle between text and process.

**Text v. Process**

In a now much cited article, ‘The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents’, Claire Bishop critiques the way collaborative arts practices have eroded the critical faculties of arts criticism:

> The social turn in contemporary art has prompted an ethical turn in art criticism. This is manifest in a heightened attention to how a given collaboration is undertaken. In other words, artists are increasingly judged by their working process – the degree to which they supply good or bad models of collaboration – and criticized for any hint of potential exploitation that fails to ‘fully’ represent their subjects, as if such a thing were possible. This emphasis on process over product (i.e., means over ends) is justified as oppositional to capitalism’s predilection for the contrary. (Bishop, 2006, np)

From Bishop’s arts history vantage, commitment to the activist principles of community arts, so important to someone like Arlene Goldbard, compromise its status as art. Like Hawkins, Bishop is critical of the way an overemphasis on ‘process’ has affected the critical literature surrounding this art. Attending to ‘how a given collaboration is undertaken’ rather than a critical judgement of aesthetics has encouraged, for Bishop, an arts discourse of ‘well-intentioned homilies’ where art is ‘valued for its truthfulness and educational efficacy rather
than for inviting us...to confront darker, more painfully complicated considerations of our predicament' (Bishop, 2006, np). For Bishop, the ethics of the process of the work, one of the strongest principles informing community arts practice, should be sacrificed for a rigorous assessment of its aesthetic qualities (Bishop, 2006, np). Bishop does not simply advocate a modernist notion of art for art’s sake. She concedes that good art actively addresses a tension between the autonomy of the artwork and its social context and social effects (Bishop, 2006, np). However, she associates aesthetic merit with a ‘critical’ art explicitly framed by an agonistic politics. Only art that is ‘disruptive’ or ‘painfully complicated’, ‘uncomfortable’ or ‘exploitative’ seems to meet her criteria for critical engagement (Bishop, 2006, np). Bishop echoes Gay Hawkins who is similarly hostile to the discourse of ‘worthiness’ which surrounds community arts. Hawkins critiques the ‘aesthetic uniformity’ within the community arts movement and ‘a reluctance to critically reflect on what constitutes “radical” art’ (Hawkins, 1993, 164). She laments that ‘(a) “good” community arts project is either harmlessly wholesome in its representation of unity, harmony and togetherness, or it is crudely rhetorical in its representations of us against them’ (Hawkins, 1993, 163). Implicitly, Hawkins, like Bishop, associates artistic merit with confrontational, edgy, divisive or opaque work without seeing these criteria as belonging to a particular aesthetic genre or a particular vision of ‘the political’. Such criticism reflects an almost unconscious investment in the modernist aesthetics and ‘radical’ politics privileged by the dominant arts establishment. More than this, both Hawkins and Bishop do not seem to have a vocabulary for articulating a different expression of the political, or an aesthetics outside the avant-garde, drawn, as Papastergiadis sees it, from ‘the waiting rooms of history’.

In his vigorous rebuttal of Bishop’s essay, Grant Kester is quick to identify the limited conception of ‘the political’ that undergirds critique and dismissal of this work:

For Bishop, art can become legitimately ‘political’ only indirectly by exposing the limits and contradictions of political discourse itself (the violent exclusions implicit in democratic consensus, for example) from the quasi-detached perspective of the artist. In this view, artists who choose to work in alliance with specific collectives, social movements,
or political struggles will inevitably be consigned to decorating floats for the annual May Day parade. (Kester, 2006, np)

Kester alludes to other modes of artistic practice that do not necessarily revolve around a ‘disruptive’ or confrontational politics. For those within the community arts, forging alliances, building social capacity, engaging marginalised social groups, are all forms of political practice because they subtly shift the social balance of power, or articulate a space for different forms of social value. Mulligan and his co-writers articulate this sense of the political in their account of how community arts relates to wellbeing. They describe the way that art mediates forms of communal or individual ‘connection’, the way it contributes to ‘creating a sense of “narrative movement” in peoples’ lives’ (Mulligan et al., 2006, 7). This is what Papastergiadis might call a politics of ‘renewal’, a politics built around consensus and cooperation rather than antagonism and confrontation. This kind of politics explicitly rejects an aesthetics of resistance and disruption, for something seemingly more benign. And yet, for Hawkins and Bishop, this benign or consensual politics is strangely threatening.

More threatening still is a coming to terms with the textured, compromised locations from which community arts emerges. The arts practices chronicled by Jorgensen (2007), Mulligan and his co-writers (2006), and others (Mills & Brown, 2005; Markusen & Gadwa, 2010) take place in highly governmentalised settings. These contexts set the tone for an artistic practice that must please diverse audiences with very different cultural literacies. This includes the governmental agencies through which this work is funded and implemented, and which are often themselves, as in Linking Glenroy, the subjects of the work. Moreover, as Jorgensen and Mulligan and his co-writers imply, this work takes place in contexts and amongst people for whom life is already disruptive, fragmented or opaque. The participants, audience and collaborators in this work are already well practised in the ‘painfully complicated considerations of our predicament’ simply in their attempts to navigate ordinary quotidian settings. This compromised context is an uncomfortable location for cultural criticism. I argue that this uncomfortable location puts a strain on the very foundations that anchor the political judgments of arts and cultural criticism. In its imbrications in forms of governance,
its alliance with community groups, its working through and across diverse constituents and stakeholders, and in its material complexity and dispersion, this work makes the very identification of a critical outside or ‘quasi-detached’ position difficult to identify and sustain. The terms for either a politics of ‘resistance’ championed by Goldbard or a politics of ‘disruption’ favoured by Bishop are disturbed by this work. Such a predicament requires invention rather than critique.

**Community Art as a Location of Culture**

More than any other framing device, I am thinking of this work, community arts, neither as a ‘text’ nor as a ‘process’ but, through Homi Bhabha’s phrase, as a ‘location of culture’ (Bhabha, 1997). This phase is not explicitly about cultural criticism; rather, it is related to a particular notion of the politics of culture. This phrase stems from Bhabha’s attempt to reframe the nation from a distinctly postcolonial vantage. He undertakes to ‘write of the Western nation as an obscure and ubiquitous form of living the *locality* of culture’ (Bhabha, 1997, 140), a splintering of the national totality into its living and performative moments of expression and cultural exchange. Bhabha insists upon understanding the nation as a ‘temporal process’ (Bhabha, 1997, 142), unfolding over time through a myriad cultural articulations. He refuses to subscribe to the mythologising of the nation as either evolving from antiquity or as a modern invention. Instead he remembers the nation elegaically and plurally, as a projection of other, multifarious affiliations, connections, traditions, feeling and aspirations, constantly denied or repressed in the service of this unstable totality: ‘The nation fills the void left in the uprooting of communities and kin, and turns that loss into the language of metaphor’ (Bhabha, 1997, 139). In this sense, the nation is performative; the ‘scraps, patches and rags of daily life must be repeatedly turned into the signs of a coherent national culture, while the very act of the narrative performance interpellates a growing circle of national subjects’ (Bhabha, 1997, 145). Bhabha presents the other side of Papastergiadis’ celebration of artists’ attraction to the ‘ruins of modernity’. For Bhabha, such ruins are not extant remnants outside the edifice of the nation-state; a coherent national culture is
constituted out of dissimulating the degree to which it is built on the ruins of other lost formations and connections.

Bhabha’s vantage as a theorist and cultural critic is in some ways difficult to reconcile with my project here. His cultural locations tend to be ‘high cultural’ literature and philosophy – Franz Fanon, Jacques Derrida, Edward Said, Toni Morrison; and his most recurrent postcolonial horizons are the Third World conflict zones of former imperial powers – India, Palestine, Algeria. His work is anchored in the textual and philosophical locations of postcolonial literary theory. He is not concerned with the materialities of place in a literal or ethnographic sense, as I am here. When he takes his ‘stand on the shifting margins of cultural displacement’ (Bhabha, 1997, 21) he does so, metaphorically, by addressing the discursive and narrative constructions that make some places (and the cultural expressions that come from them) more important, more powerful than others (Bhabha, 1997, 6). In his words, ‘Postcolonial criticism bears witness to the unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation involved in the contest for political and social authority within the modern world order’ (Bhabha, 1997, 171). Within such terms, culture’s location within a hierarchy of other cultural forms and representations designates the normative or disruptive potential of culture. That is, cultural representations acquire their politics depending on their social value and their degree of authority, transmissibility and legibility within a broader social context.

In drawing from Bhabha’s argument, it is not enough to argue that the nation is an ambiguous, fragmented and hybrid construct. Rather, it is to start to thematise where and how it is experienced, transmitted, made known. It is to start to engage with the nation, theoretically and practically, outside of the discourse of nationalism, and outside of the canonical sites, the national museum, war memorials, national monuments and ceremonial days which claim a national address. Bhabha locates this ‘living the locality of culture’ in different genres of literary narration. I am taking more literally the notion of the nation as a ‘living the locality of culture’ and have embedded my enquiry in the materialities of place mobilised in the place-making work of community art. As debates around the value and
Bhabha’s distinctive postcolonial perspective is germane here in the way that he insists that minor, or liminal experiences and expressions bring to light an alternative, critical (re)vision of the dominant discourses of modernity – especially discourses of nationalism and national identity surrounding the modern nation-state. Furthermore, these minor expressions reveal the crucial strategies through which these discourses and the concepts and structures they support – like nationalism and the nation – are constructed, normalised and sustained. In the ‘confusing world’ of the present, Bhabha sees minor cultural forms as locations from which old narratives of being and knowing might be disrupted and drawn off course, and new connections, new assemblages of identity and social collectivity might take shape. Taking on Bhabha’s perspective here means attending to the politics of the minor cultural form as a postcolonial politics. These cultural forms:
...intervene in those ideological discourses of modernity that attempt to give hegemonic ‘normality’ to the uneven development and differential, often disadvantage, histories of nations, races, communities, peoples. They formulate their critical revisions around ideas of cultural difference, social authority, and political discrimination in order to reveal the antagonistic and ambivalent moments within the ‘rationalizations’ of modernity. (Bhabha, 1997, 171)

As Hawkins indicated, community art is a minor cultural form, often undertaken with minimal funding, located in marginal sites of the nation. Community art rarely, if ever, rises to the level of national prominence, nor does it address national issues. And yet, this ‘minor’ cultural form, funded and implemented through multiple governing registers of the state, is intimately imbricated in discourses of governance, explicitly in this case, in the broad national policy of multiculturalism. In this sense, community art contributes, however obliquely, to an ordering of the nation; it enacts a subtle extension of the governmental technologies for the regulation of conduct and the narration of belonging at an intimate and, at times, personal social level. Employing Bhabha’s understanding of the locatedness of culture, I want to draw his postcolonial politics of cultural production into proximity with the literally placed and place-making work of community art. Amongst its more immediate and material placings, I see community art’s location within Australia’s settler-colonial context as crucial to the significance of this work. I see this kind of framing as broadening the purview of a perspective on community arts beyond celebratory advocacy and beyond critical analyses of its policy discourses or its aesthetics, to a more reflective examination of how this work is enmeshed within broader narratives of belonging. This location of culture offers a point of departure – fertile precisely because it is shifting and marginal – for thinking about the dominant paradigms of belonging shaping lived experience in contemporary Australia and the ways in which they are being unsettled.
Chapter Two

Governin through Art

The West Welcomes Refugees

In December 2004, a piece of graffiti in central Footscray caught the attention of the public when it was photographed for a Melbourne magazine. The West Welcomes Refugees appeared on the side of the Albert Street bridge which crosses the Footscray rail line. Early in 2006, The Maribyrnong City Council, the local government of Footscray, commissioned a public art project inspired by the graffiti. From the fifteen expressions of interest for the project, Maribyrnong Council’s Public Art and Advisory Panel chose a text based stencil proposal from Footscray gallery director and visual artist, Michael Brennan.

Using a textual collage of different narratives, Brennan stencilled the stories of eleven different migrants and refugees who had come to settle in Melbourne’s west. In their original languages and an English translation, the stories tell of the migrant experiences of different generations from different countries and communities whose settlement in Melbourne’s west has contributed so much to its contemporary character and reputation. They are overwhelmingly stories of disorientation, loss and persistence in the face of overwhelming political and social upheaval. They are also stories that attest to the open-endedness of the migration experience. Participants tell of their successive journeying from country to country, and of the fragile signs of hope, grasped tentatively, in the course of landing in this unfamiliar place.

There were no welcoming lights when we landed at Station Pier at Port Melbourne at 8pm 16 January 1964. It was a balmy night that would soon develop into a thunderstorm. The starkness and the gloom of the port and surroundings were ominous that echoed the
loss of our home, family and friends we left behind. Our journey from Egypt was long but one filled with hopes for a happier future in our new home, Australia.

Sometimes I look back at my life and remember how difficult it was when we first arrived in Australia. The problems that I encountered were communication, because English is the first language here.

My journey and impression of Australia is very long because before I came to Australia I passed in different countries such as Tanzania, Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. The aim of moving from one country to another was so I could find a better place to live so I could focus on my studies. But according to a bad situation in Tanzania, I stayed for only three months…

In a small boat containing over one hundred people we crossed Thailand to the Pula Bidong island of Malaysia. It was the most dangerous trip; I will never forget it in my life. We stayed at Pula Bidong Island for 18 months. There were about 8000 people with limited food and water supply for each person. People tried to go up to the mountain to dig a well to get more water. Children had school only two hours a day. After that we transferred to another camp that was in a small town called Sungai-Bisi and Kuala-Lumpur nearby. Life wasn’t that bad. A year later we met the Australian Delegation and we were finally accepted for re-settlement in Australia…The country was very quiet and cold but the people were very friendly.

I left my country of origin, Liberia, because of the civil war, which led to the death of my father. I left on March 10, 2000, and went into exile in Ghana, West Africa, along with my sister and three of her children who were from a refugee camp for three and a half years. In Ghana, nothing is free…

Behind the dense patchwork of text, the original graffiti has been preserved as a ghostly trace. ‘The West Welcomes Refugees’ is just perceptible below the textual layer of personal stories. Brennan intended it to be a question as well as a statement.

The aim of the work is to expand a space for dialogue to occur which relates back to the original graffitied statement on the side of the
bridge – *The West Welcomes Refugees*...It provides a platform for questions to be raised as to whether this statement is true, as to whether or not there is a ‘typical’ experience of refugees, and even what the term ‘refugee’ encompasses. (Low, 2006, np)

The artwork did generate dialogue but this was not the space for expanded discussion on community understandings of the refugee experience. Rather, *The West Welcomes Refugees* became a source of controversy for the council when some Footscray artists criticised the Art Panel’s commissioning process. Why was no-one from a refugee background represented on the panel? And why had the panel made no attempt to attract submissions from local artists of non-English speaking backgrounds (Low, 2006)?

‘For me that meant Council weren’t interested in welcoming refugees in the different ways that could be really engaging or positive, said Hoang Trang Nguyen, a Footscray artist who led the critical debate. They were only wanting to use the image of that graffiti in creating an image that suited their own kind of agenda which is to beautify Footscray.’ (Low, 2006, np)

Brennan’s artwork stretches more than 10 metres across the length of the Albert Street railway bridge. It is a subdued part of Footscray, a conduit to the more bustling centres near the market, mall and train station. The printed stories are long and the text is small – black letters on white panels against the predominant battleship grey of the bridge. They are difficult to read from the narrow footpath where pedestrians push past, hastily attending to their own business. A viewer would need to crouch in the path of regular foot traffic to read stories on the lower panels, an awkward gesture taking you outside the standard choreography of bodies navigating the footpath. Stoop to decipher the small print, following the long narratives from panel to panel across the bridge, you feel conspicuous in this familiar civic environment. There is not enough space to quietly contemplate the stories in your own time. Suddenly you realise you should stand up and move along; you are in the way and out of place. From across the road, you notice the sharp metal spikes lining the bridge wall – an attempt to deter pigeons? Jumpers? It is hard to reconcile this sober work and its dreary aesthetic with the kinds of cheerful murals usually associated with public art
projects intended to beautify a place. Difficulty and obstruction seem to be part of the artistic intention here as if viewers themselves, those dogged enough to make the attempt, are meant to enter into the frustrations of the refugee experience. As Brennan intended (Low, 2006), the stories and their visual presentation resist a celebratory mode of reception and provoke a more questioning and unsettling response.

Brennan’s work does contribute to beautifying Footscray in a less literal sense. In a ‘(re)Visioning’ of the city in 2030 Maribyrnong City Council’s (2011) Footscray Public Art Plan imagines that the Footscray of the future ‘will be creative and a home for artists. Footscray will encourage artistic talent, professional and amateur alike, and the “business” of arts and culture’ (Maribyrnong City Council, 2011, 8). Hoang Trang Nguyen (Low, 2006) sensed that the rationale behind *The West Welcomes Refugees* was more about signalling the ‘business’ of ‘arts and culture’ than an exploration of the refugee experience. The council’s art policy reflects an understanding that public art gives distinction to place; it is a way of attracting a cultural elite who will soften the contours of place, making it more hospitable, more legible, and easier to consume. But in the same policy document, Maribyrnong City Council also acknowledged that:

It is vitally important that public art and cultural programs achieve local ownership and are not perceived and dismissed as a public relations exercise for urban gentrification. The change and development which Maribyrnong will experience over the coming years has the potential to be felt and expressed as a creative, community effort. (Maribyrnong City Council, 2011, 4)

This document, written some years after *The West Welcomes Refugees* was completed, highlights the tensions within governmental rationales for funding public and community art. In the council’s vision of Footscray, art is a vehicle for projecting something distinctive and unique about place; and this quality, captured as it is ‘felt and expressed’ by those with ‘local ownership’ can be instrumentalised as a form of civic branding. For the council, art distils the qualities that make a place distinctive, but also subtly enhances and displaces them to
attract attention and investment. ‘Overall, the Footscray of 2030 is safe, artsy, edgy, affordable, regional, diverse/mixed and multicultural. These qualities of Footscray will have been polished and promoted more effectively’ (Maribyrnong City Council, 2011, 8).

For Nguyen, even though *The West Welcomes Refugees* showcases genuine refugee stories from locals in the Footscray community, it fails to rise above a ‘public relations exercise’ because this local involvement served an ulterior agenda (Low, 2006). His critique highlights the conflicting perspectives on what constitutes ‘local ownership’ of a project. It also highlights the fractures within the governmental rationales underpinning community art. For Maribyrnong City Council, there is a continuity of rationale between art that engages community and the mobilisation of this ‘creative, community effort’ for the promotion and branding of place. For Nguyen (Low, 2006), such art is inauthentic because the subject of the art is not the target of the art; the council used the experiences of refugees as a pretext for attracting the attentions of ‘artistic talent’ or a creative class who are the true targets of their address. Finally, Nguyen’s critique exemplifies the debate over ‘text’ v. ‘process’ canvassed in the previous chapter. For him, whatever dialogue or debate emerges from Brennan’s representation of refugees is of secondary importance to the manner in which refugees were involved in the production of the art.

Like Nguyen, the other artists critical of Maribyrnong City Council’s commissioning process were not necessarily critical of the aesthetic of the artwork itself, nor the way in which it represented refugees. These artists were critical of the bureaucratic processes – the modes of decision making, assembling and assessing – through which the artwork came about (Low, 2006). They dismissed the artwork on the grounds that the council’s processes of selection excluded the perspectives of the very people whom they sought to represent. They considered the artwork an ‘image’ in the sense that it promoted the idea of creative engagement with place without any substantive engagement. What is interesting about this critique is the way that it situates government at the centre of a creative process and also as central to an authentic way of relating to a community and to a place. Even as these artists
are critical of council processes and question its political agenda, they call for greater engagement between local government and the artists and community groups within their purview.

A complainant, Footscray-based writer Scott Brook, explained how governmental practice could be improved:

I suspect there isn’t a strong policy around the public art panel and I suspect that it’s in need of reform, so that its membership is representative of the municipality’s demographic…We’d also like to see more accountability in the projects council selects to fund and the commissions it develops. I’d hope Council would ensure the identity and politics of particular groups in the area are not appropriated by allowing stakeholders to have substantive involvement in developing the project…Really involved not just put on retrospectively to ratify it. (Low, 2006, np)

Brook does not promote more authentic forms of creative engagement with place outside of the governmental process. Rather the governmentalising of art and local artists, their ‘substantive involvement’ within council processes and decision-making bodies, is perceived as being integral to how the authenticity of place might be produced and enacted.

Such a position is strikingly different to Claire Bishop’s avant-garde conception of ‘good’ community (or collaborative) art, in which art is valued for its autonomy and critical independence from institutions and structures of power (Bishop, 2006). It is different also to many postmodernist discourses of art which undermine artistic claims to representing an authentic self or portrait of the world. From a postmodernist perspective, there is no single reality behind the ‘image’ of Footscray projected by the local council. Rather, a plurality of voices would be valid projections of Footscray, perceived as a ‘reality effect’ in the play of different ‘textual operations’ (Lucy in Anderson & Schlunke, 2008, 94). But for the critics of The West Welcomes Refugees, the validity of a representation of place is anchored very strongly in the life experiences and social worlds of those who produce it. For them, artists are
judged on their collaborative processes and these contribute to the value and standing of the work. Some fundamental truth about place is lost in the playfulness of the postmodern position and in the detachment of Bishop’s critical avant-garde.

Brook’s comments also allude to a particular ideal of governance, one which does not correspond wholly with either a classic liberal or neoliberal paradigm (Rose, 1993 and 1996). Within governmentality discourses, the arts are understood as instruments of governance, a means of acting on the population for various social ends. But Brook implies a more dialogic relationship between the governed and those who govern. He implies that the arts open up a space of mutual engagement and collaboration in which the governed play a role in shaping governmental rationales and the vision of place or community these rationales seek to realise.

I am beginning this chapter, ‘Governing through art’, in the midst of this debate over *The West Welcomes Refugees* because it brings to the fore the tensions at the convergence of public art, place and governance. This chapter is about exploring these tensions; it is about understanding the ways in which art can be understood as a technique of governance. This chapter is also about the limits to this understanding. As the debate around *The West Welcomes Refugees* indicates, conceiving of community arts as an instrument of government is to miss the ways in which community arts practices also contribute to a reshaping of what it means to govern. First, I will outline the ways in which community art can be understood as a technique of governance by situating this work within a Foucauldian theory of governmentality. Foucault’s theory and the ways in which it has been extended by theorists like Nikolas Rose and Mitchell Dean is crucial for understanding the formation and rationale of community arts practice in Australia. Through this theoretical lens the intentions of the local council in *The West Welcomes Refugees* and the critical responses of the local artists can be understood as relating to the shifting and contested space of governing emerging in the present moment. Second, I will make an account of the emergence of community arts in Australia and the ways in which this field has been circumscribed by governance since its inception. (Hawkins, 1991, 45). Again, a Foucauldian theory of governmentality is crucial
for questioning the ‘self-evidence’ of the instrumental practices of community art and for revealing the assumptions, values and knowledges which inform and support these practices (Dean, 1999, 21).

This critical discourse reveals community arts’ ambivalent relationship with the governmental logics in which it is thoroughly enmeshed. While the field of community art has always been circumscribed by government, this structural context is at odds with some of the values and principles espoused by the field itself. In this sense, community arts discourse and practice reflects a contradictory relationship to power; its key advocates promote their practice as resisting the alienating and deracinating effects of modernity, while the practice itself incarnates a further refinement of the forms of social regulation and ordering which are the hallmarks of a modern exercise of power. But the Foucauldian critiques of community arts do not address the ways in which this discourse and its practices are also actively involved in shaping governmental practices and rationales (Hawkins, 1993; Gibson, 2001). In returning to The West Welcomes Refugees, I consider the ways in which exploring this work as it manifests in practice and in place strains the governmentality discourse through which community arts practices are most cogently critiqued. In this critique, the discourse of community arts is reduced to an effect of particular and coherent governmental rationales. Such a critique does not take into account the plurality of practices and perspectives enacted through this work, nor the ways in which this plurality diffuses the purpose or rationality ascribed to it.

**Governmentality**

The framing of community art as a technique of governance draws upon a Foucauldian theory of governmentality (Hawkins, 1993; Gibson, 2001). The diverse array of analyses and studies under the rubric of governmentality draw and expand upon two famously brief lectures by Michelle Foucault. The first of these was ‘Governmentality’ given at the College de France in February 1978 (Foucault, 1991). The second was ‘The Political Technologies of Individuals’ given in 1982 at the University of Vermont (Foucault, 1988). In the latter, Foucault traces a provisory response to a philosophical question emerging during the 18th
century: ‘What are we today?’ This question, continuing to the present and ever changing in import, is added to other major questions of philosophical enquiry. But it is this question that perhaps most succinctly underlies modern understandings of being. ‘What are we today?’ presumes the mutability of ‘the human’ and the contingency of ways of being in the world, the way life itself is shaped and reshaped within regimes of power and an attendant array of discourses and knowledges that give form to power. This question shifts Foucault’s field of enquiry from a study of subjectivity or the self, to the study of people in collectivities. He becomes interested, not in the ‘technologies of the self’, but in the myriad ways through which ‘we have been led to recognise ourselves as a society, as part of a social entity, as part of a nation or a state’ (Foucault, 1988, 146). This he defines as the ‘political technology of individuals’ (Foucault, 1988, 146).

Foucault goes on to explore the development of different techniques of governance from the 18th century onwards. He argues that beginning in the 18th century we see the development of forms of knowledge and corresponding offices of government responsible for the management of all aspects of the state and their interaction: population, health, trade, morality, mortality, criminality, the economy, territory, natural resources. These offices are instrumentalised through the role of the police, the equivalent of today’s state administration or civil service. Bearing on diverse aspects of the state, the development of this form of administration and management marks, for Foucault, a major shift in the operation and rationality of power:

We can say now that the true object of the police becomes, at the end of the eighteenth century, the population; or, in other words, the state has essentially to take care of men as a population. It wields its power over living beings as living beings, and its politics, therefore, has to be a biopolitics. (Foucault, 1988, 160)

In ‘Governmentality’ Foucault articulates this shift as a transformation in both the object and function of government: Governing is no longer a question of ‘imposing law on men, but of disposing of things: that is to say, of employing tactics, to arrange things in such a way that,
through a certain number of means, such and such an ends may be achieved’ (Foucault, 1991, 95).

A vast array of techniques, methods, knowledges, practices, procedures, institutions, arts and tactics link up in various and changing ways in this disposing of things (Rose, 1999, 15). The energies of the state are less occupied by maintaining the narrow power of the sovereign and more directed towards acting upon the population. The population become the true ‘end of government’ (Foucault, 1991, 100) as both subjects in and objects of this diffuse set of techniques and knowledges. In this sense, governance enacts an instrumentalisation of the population. Individuals and their diverse relationships with each other and with objects, services, places, become sites for governmental intervention, regulation and transformation. This relationship between those who govern and the governed is open-ended and symbiotic. The nature of the population itself, and the ends to which it should be directed, becomes one of the central questions of government.

The idea of government as a set of techniques for disposing of things re-characterises power from a repressive, negative and concentrated force to a productive and diffuse one. Power is no longer understood as applied from above to maintain centralised sovereign control over a people and a territory. Instead, power can be understood as productive, multilateral and diffuse, operating through various registers of the social, and directed towards achieving diverse, heterogeneous ends. Power is biopolitical in the sense that the life capacity of each individual contributes in some small way to the state’s functional capacity. It is this theoretical understanding, this concept of biopolitics, that lays the groundwork for a distinctly Foucauldian conception of power and for a theory of governmentality. Scholars working within a governmentality framework understand governance in very broad terms. For Nikolas Rose, governance is ‘any strategy, tactic, process, procedure or program for controlling, regulating, shaping, mastering or exercising authority over others in a nation, organisation or locality’ (Rose, 1999, 15). For Mitchell Dean, echoing Rose, it is ‘any more or less calculated means of direction of how we behave and act.’ (Dean, 1999, 2) And the
exercising of these actions of governance depend on, and lead to, the development of a proliferation of knowledges, expertise and forms of authority that change and develop over time. Governing is therefore not reducible to the centralised institutions of the state but becomes something both more expansive and less tangible than this.

Mitchell Dean argues that contemporary studies of governmentality open up these assemblages for interrogation and theorisation: ‘An analytics of government attempts to show that our taken-for-granted ways of doing things and how we think about and question them are not entirely self-evident or necessary’ (Dean, 1999, 21). That is, an analytics of government opens up a space for questioning how a particular articulation between the individual, a social ideal and a particular technique emerges as a logical and rational project.

It is under these conditions of enquiry that a community arts project in a particular inner-city suburban locality, initiated by the local council, implemented by a diffuse number of local participants and displayed to local residents, can be said to be an instance of governmentality. More importantly, it is within a theory of governmentality that the links connecting this assemblage of practitioners, community members, institutions, knowledges, and practices might be questioned, might be recognised for their cultural and historical specificity. An analytics of government makes apparent an understanding that participatory public art might be used to shape behaviour in some way. This art might be deployed to welcome refugees to a new community, or to encourage people to become more informed citizens, better parents, more respectful of social minorities in their neighbourhoods or more active in local networks. And these particular effects might contribute to broader governmental ideals: to building more cohesive communities; to reducing the risk of social alienation and social tension; to attracting economic activity and investment to a depressed locality; or to reducing the burden of the welfare of individuals on the collective resources of the state. These rationalities of governance reflect a liberal governmental paradigm in that they contribute to the ideal of self-governance through an array of internalised desires and aspirations. Nikolas Rose has articulated this modality of governance as a governing through
freedom. In his words, freedom ‘is a structuring theme of contemporary government itself’ (Rose, 1999, 63). Governmental techniques – compulsory education, health services, town planning – are mobilised, refined and modified in the interests of training citizens to fully realise their freedom, that is, to maximise their potential as individuals. Freedom in this sense is explicitly ‘linked to a norm of civility’ (Rose, 1999, 69). The free citizen is one whose individual desires and aspirations accord with the objectives of a civilised society (Rose, 1999, 79).

**Community arts in Australia**

In *The Uses of Art*, Lisanne Gibson (2001) invokes Rose’s argument to suggest that the liberal conception of freedom is one of the key underpinnings of contemporary arts policies and the rationalities that legitimate them. Since the mid 19th century she says, governments understood art as being ‘useful to the governance of populations, particularly where these populations are defined above all by their freedom’ (Gibson, 2001, 7). Public sponsorship of the arts was legitimated through a civilising discourse of arts and culture, whereby the citizen would imbibe the necessary values, tastes and distinctions in the realization of a ‘norm of civility’. Within this civilising discourse – freedom, understood in a romantic and humanist sense as liberation from encumbrance, as the fullest expression of one’s individuality and the pursuit of self-fulfilment – becomes entangled with the civilising norms of governance. In Mitchell Dean’s words:

> A key problem here is the assumption that human subjects and the liberty they exercise stand outside relations of power and forms of domination. By contrast, an analytics of government reflects its Foucauldian inheritance by showing how the capacities and attributes of subjects and the kinds of freedom which they make possible are shaped within regimes of government. Such regimes of government will include relations that are hierarchichal, irreversible, fixed and durable, that is – in Foucault’s sense – states of domination. (Dean, 1999, 35)
This is the entangled conception of freedom running deep through community arts discourses. In many ways art is conflated with freedom in these discourses. So, for Arlene Goldbard, making art awakens our innate desire for connection and liberates us from ‘imposed cultural values’ (Goldbard, 2006, 23). For Jon Hawkes, former director of the Community Arts Board of the Australia Council, arts policies should support the ‘UNIVERSAL creativity’ of ‘ordinary people’ (Hawkes, 2004, 20). For Deborah Mills the arts have an intrinsic value because they are ‘a large part of what makes us human’ (Mills, 2005, 2). There is a slippage here between art and freedom, a slippage which elides the notion that freedom, or the fullest expression of the human, does not ‘stand outside relations of power and forms of domination’. This romantic appeal to the power of the arts as essential and intrinsic is all the more incongruous within a field that has always been circumscribed by government and has always been conscious of the rationalities shaping its practices.

Lisanne Gibson (2001) situates community arts within a broader history of the relationship between governance and the arts in Australia. She traces the changing rationales Australian governments have used to legitimise the funding of the arts since federation. Her primary argument is that arts and culture have been mobilised by governments in Australia at different times to shape identity – implicitly, a national identity – articulated in different ways in response to different political and historical moments. For Gibson, community art emerged in Australia at a moment when the arts were being defined by two competing discourses: first, arts were increasingly being understood as an industry and thus promoted through ‘economically based arguments’; and second, the arts were understood as addressing a diverse audience ‘made up of distinct communities with specific needs and interests’ (Gibson, 2001, 97). It is this second discourse that pertains most to community arts and has informed its governmental function. Consolidating in the wake of a left-wing egalitarian politics on the one hand, and during an emerging discourse of multiculturalism on the other, community arts has always served two incommensurable constituencies: the expanded audience of the nation, and the distinct and discrete constituents of ‘community’.
Gay Hawkins’s history of the community arts in Australia explicates the tensions and challenges stemming from this dual address (Hawkins, 1993). In *From Nimbin to Mardi Gras* Hawkins characterises community arts as a ‘heterogeneous field of cultural activity’ framed by a discourse of access and participation, process and cultural democracy (Hawkins, 1993, xviii). In Australia, this diverse array of practices and artistic forms was formalised under the rubric of ‘community arts’ when the Whitlam government funded them as an independent program within federal arts funding in 1973 (Hawkins, 1993, xviii). The field became official in 1973 when the Community Arts Committee was added to the six other arts boards constituting the Australia Council, the principal funding body for the arts in Australia (Hawkins, 1991; Grostal & Harrison, 1994; Pitts & Watt, 2001). Although the varied practices that fall under the rubric of community arts have long histories and precede this policy decision, community arts became recognisable as an independent field of practice through their ‘official invention’ by government (Hawkins, 1991, 45). As such, they have always been deeply enmeshed within governmental rationalities for shaping the social domain in particular ways and for particular, targeted social ends.

Hawkins remains true to her Foucauldian theoretical paradigm by outlining the ways in which the invention of community arts did not just designate a category of cultural production, but actively constructed its constituents, its objects, its targets, and implicitly shaped the ‘problems of government’ that art would address. More than this, Hawkins illustrates the ways in which arts discourses were implicated in broader constructions of the nation and national identity, constructions that inflected supposedly universal values like creativity, the ‘ordinary person’ and the notion of artistic ‘excellence’ in particular ways.

The Community Arts Committee of the Australia Council was created under the auspices of a program to democratise the arts by expanding ‘access and participation’ beyond the elite minority accessing the arts at the time (Gibson, 2001, 101). But this commitment to access and participation was challenged by how best to identify and define the new expanded
constituency that the arts were to address. Hawkins makes this explicit when she draws attention to a fissure in the collective celebration of democratising the arts in community arts discourse. In an effort to move beyond the bland affirmation characterising much community arts commentary, Hawkins argues that ‘the tendency to praise this program as evidence of “cultural democracy” refuses to recognise the fundamental tension structuring most community arts discourse: the tension between the idea of cultural disadvantage versus cultural difference’ (Hawkins, 1993, 47).

Coming out of the activist culture of the 1960s and 1970s, the early years of community arts understood its constituents in terms of ‘disadvantage’. Graham Pitts and David Watts characterise this period and the practitioners emerging from it as passionately invested in a politics informed by Marxist theories of ideology and class consciousness. Jon Hawkes, one of the leading advocates of community arts currently and throughout its history, was influenced by Maoist principles of self-organisation and perpetual revolution, ideals that still influence his philosophy of the relationship between the arts and society. Within this radical left ideological framework, the kind of social change that community arts could precipitate meant empowering people through a will to social action. For Grostal and Harrison (1994, 148), ‘from the outset, the community arts movement was radical. It naturally made alliances with the trade union movement and with other progressive organisations. Its principles of access and equity implied that artists and communities from different cultures had an equal right to support and assistance’. In practical terms, for Pitts and Watts, this meant making a documentary film for the Builder’s Labourers’ Federation that explained ‘to working-class communities how they’re exploited’ (Pitts & Watt, 2001, 7):

For most artists of the time, this was initially a period of ‘art’ for ‘communities’, often defined as broadly as ‘ordinary people’ or sometimes more specifically as ‘working people’, who were seen as materially and culturally ‘disadvantaged’ by the modes of distribution of Australia Council funds. (Pitts & Watt, 2001, 8)
Gibson and Hawkins point out that the mandate of access and participation guiding arts policy meant extending art representing ‘national excellence’ to parts of the nation understood as lacking the material or cultural resources to get access to the arts (Hawkins, 1993, 49; Gibson, 2001, 101). Hawkins’s main critique of this mandate is the way in which the commitment to national excellence constrained support for a more progressive and plural understanding of both the arts and the audience it was to address. This mandate did not interrogate the ‘universalist terms’ framing its notion of art; it took no account for the ways ‘different cultural values, or an intrinsically different understanding of what and where culture was located’ might influence the way different communities engaged with the arts (Hawkins, 1993, 49). For Hawkins:

(E)xcellence and nation are used to attribute value to art and to the audiences that recognise and appreciate it. Arts policy has to be read as a particular discourse of value, one which draws on certain aesthetic discourses and remakes them within a specific public institutional sphere…However, it is when aesthetic discourse becomes hegemonic, when it is privileged in the identification of supposedly universal artistic practices that it needs to be scrutinized. (Hawkins, 1993, 10)

For some in the community arts sector, commitment to ‘community’ did not designate the extension of ‘nation’ and ‘excellence’ to formerly excluded social and physical locations. Rather, community represented an explicit challenge to these ideals (Hawkins, 1993, 11).

Hawkins suggests that the ideals of the community arts program were in contest with the ideology informing cultural policy at a national level. She is one of the few commentators to recognise that this tension emerged out of competing conceptions of the nation. When the community arts attempted to enfranchise particular minority communities, ‘the unity of the nation – a recurring motif in the discourses of the Australia Council – was implicitly questioned’ (Hawkins, 1991, 50). She goes on to explain that the ‘explicitly local flavour’ of these communities ‘meant that they could not claim national significance. In this contest the nation was not reducible to a series of regions or various publics, it was an imaginary unity over and above the parochialism of the local’ (Hawkins, 1991, 51).
In the 1980s the Australia Council did shift its priorities to funding communities and traditions outside of ‘national significance’:

Crucial in these changes has been the posing of community and access not as residual categories, not as signs of marginal forms for marginal groups, cowering in the shadow of nation and excellence, but as oppositional categories which challenge the hegemony of the deeply interconnected ideologies of nationalism and the pursuit of excellence which are at the heart of the Australia Council’s policies. (Hawkins, 1991, 51)

Hawkins’s critique of community arts problematises both the radical history promulgated by many practitioners, and the democratic ideals invoked within arts policy discourses. In their celebration of the creativity of ‘ordinary people’, their advancement of ‘universal creativity’, the most prominent voices in Australia’s community arts literature do not fully examine the nature of the social imaginary framing their ideals for social change. Nor do they interrogate the way these emancipatory ideals might be consonant with governmental rationales, or in Dean’s words, implicated within ‘relations of power and forms of domination’ (Dean, 1999, 35).

Concomitantly, arts policy discourses do not often recognise the specificity of the aesthetic terms through which cultural value is measured and the role policy itself plays in sustaining or transforming the terms for cultural value. Hawkins is rare in drawing seemingly benign governmental ideals, of participation, access and democratisation, into confrontation with the kinds of cultural orthodoxies sustaining the symbolic unity of the nation. In so doing, she exposes the fractures in the ideology informing arts policy; she also illustrates the locatedness of social imaginaries – whether it is the community or the nation – in the physical manifestations of culture. It is in relation to this latter point that thinking community art through Bhabha’s phrase, as a location of culture, is productive. This phrase connects the conditions of cultural production – discursive, governmental and material – to a more abstract but also more affective terrain: that is, the ways we conceive of (national) belonging.
and value. Community art is rarely theorised as a form pertaining directly to a shaping of the nation, indeed, as a practice that captures, in intricate and multifaceted ways, the detail of what it means to inhabit the nation in the liquid conditions of late modernity. It is my argument here and in the case studies to follow, that as a location of culture, community art does not only reveal various and conflicting governmental rationalities. Rather, as a technique of governance, this work can be understood as a potentially ‘oppositional’ practice that challenges the hegemonic narratives of national belonging – *from within*. This minor form, minimally analysed, yet widely deployed as a response to a range of governmental problems, is a place from which to consider how being-in-the-nation is enacted, sustained, transformed and contested in very material, quotidian ways.

**Community arts of the last decade**

Hawkins’s critique of community arts is now almost twenty years old. Since the publication of *From Nimbin to Mardi Gras* there has been a proliferation of organisations and institutions sponsoring or directly initiating community arts projects and programs. The field has grown in the complexity and variety of work being produced and this work has been deployed for an ever increasing number of constituencies, understood through a multitude of discourses and social identities. Where Hawkins and Gibson theorise community arts as an effect of different governmental discourses and policies, contemporary community arts discourse reveals a far more active engagement with both the policy and structures of governance. This talking to and with government constitutes some of the primary work of practitioners and advocates. In this work practitioners and advocates actively attempt to reshape the terrain of governance by making arts practice and policy more central to its core work. Jon Hawkes’s *The Fourth Pillar of Sustainability* is a key driving text here, one which has had a significant impact on the outlook and practice of other community arts practitioners in Australia. In *The Fourth Pillar*, Hawkes (2001, 9) argues that governments have recognised that economic rationales alone are not a sufficient basis for a healthy society. The discourses of ‘sustainability’ and ‘wellbeing’ have supplemented economic rationales but Hawkes argues that ‘new governmental paradigms…would be more effective if cultural vitality were to be
included as one of the basic requirements, main conceptual tenets and overriding evaluation streams’ (Hawkes, 2001, 2). Hawkes (2001, 5) invokes a broad anthropological definition of culture as denoting a system of value; culture is the means through which a society articulates its values and transforms them. Unlike the Australia Council’s narrow funding of ‘the arts’, Hawkes argues that culture should inform all governmental programs; culture should not be at the periphery of government, isolated within arts and cultural policy, but should be the ‘fourth pillar’ of government, at the centre of all aspects of policy and social administration.

Deborah Mills invokes a similarly broad conception of culture in her promotion of the arts to government. Like Hawkes she advocates for culture’s role in shaping more ‘sustainable communities’ (Mills, 2005, 2):

Creative processes and our critical engagement with the material culture these processes create that is, the arts, can free us from the traps of habit, help us to see things from a different perspective, suggest connections between varied subjects and transform communities and the way in which government agencies operate. (Mills, 2005, 2)

In her schema, common to many other community arts practitioners, art, in its broadest terms, is a way of relating. Like language, the arts mediate between individuals and social and institutional formations, between people and their material context. Through this organic, expansive, inclusive conception of the arts, Mills and others argue that the arts offer a method of developing new kinds of awareness, different ways of approaching and responding to particularly contemporary problems. In this sense, the arts not only proffer a new body of knowledge to apply to the social world, they also reanimate the foundations of knowledge in our culture by provoking reconsideration of the way knowledge is ordered, hierarchised and constituted.

Mills exemplifies her notion of art as a way of relating with a few examples where a creative process was central to reconstituting a multifaceted problem. In one example, a theatre
project breached the divide between scientific, Indigenous and local community ways of relating to the Murray River (Mills, 2005, 3). The process that ensued enabled this diverse assemblage of perspectives to be taken into consideration by those responsible for the river's future management (Mills, 2005, 3). In a different example the arts became a place of meeting between decision-makers and those whose lives were affected by these decisions, a place that dismantled the synthetic relationship between social policy and its object, a social group or political obstacle (Mills, 2005, 3). The problem of government itself assumes a central role in these examples. The relationship between those who govern, the techniques of governance, and the objects they govern constitute the crucial point of convergence at which art or the creative process can intervene.

So for both Hawkes and Mills the arts are understood more broadly then as solutions to a particular governmental problem or as instruments precipitating a particular social change – like enlightening working-class communities on ‘how they’re exploited’ (Pitts & Watt, 2001, 7). Rather, the arts, especially participatory public art like community art, are understood as affecting the social realm in a more structural sense; they mediate and contribute to (re)constructing a social domain, particularly a domain in which different community interests and the interests of government overlap but are in tension with each other. For Hawkes and Mills, the conception of the value of art and arts policy relates to its role in shaping, informing, defining, advocating for, or transforming, communities, where community is understood as mediated through various kinds of governmental structures and discourses. This is a considerable broadening of the parameters of ‘community’ to those used by Gibson and Hawkins. It is also a portrait of community art in which the field plays a far more active role in shaping its terms of reference and in intervening in the governmental frameworks through which it manifests itself.

A few reports on community arts projects of the last ten years illustrate the central role governance plays in this work. In a broad study of the relationship between community art (or community cultural development) and governmental initiatives for community wellbeing,
Deborah Mills and Paul Brown promote artistic practices as holistic approaches to governing. They assert that ‘only by engaging people in active debate on the kinds of society they want will people and communities explore and clarify their values, their goals and the means to achieve them’ (Mills & Brown, 2004, 7). Like many other practitioners and commentators of community arts, Mills and Brown value the participatory basis of this work for being able to access layers of the social otherwise inaccessible to more traditional governmental instruments of regulation and service provision (Hawkes, 2004; Mills & Brown, 2004; Mulligan & Smith, 2010). Art of this kind is seen to resonate with deep structures of being; it is understood to be able to perform social transformations through tapping into fundamental energies that nurture individual and collective life. Similarly, Mulligan and Smith’s report on the Generations Project (2010) highlighted the value of the arts to local government approaches to creating healthy communities. They argue that ‘local government in Australia has more to learn than ever from a field of practice that has evolved in this country over a period of nearly 40 years and which specializes in the art of creating community’ (Mulligan & Smith, 2010, 16). Refill was one of the five Generations Projects and my account of this project in a later chapter illustrates the degree to which the intricacies of governance are at the forefront of the artists’ practices.

In these reports and the projects they refer to, community art is depicted less as an effect of government policy discourse than as an active agent, participating in the ‘how’ of governing. Community art is concerned with the role art and community plays in ‘how we govern and how we are governed, and with the relation between the government of ourselves, the government of others, and the government of the state’ (Dean, 1999, 2-3). The refiguring of governance that takes place through community art can be linked to broader changes within forms of liberal governance. Where Foucault analysed 19th century modalities of governing the population of the nation-state through centralised institutions, Nikolas Rose accounts for the ways in which this (theoretically) homogenous population has fragmented. He argues that contemporary forms of governance are reconfigured around more plural societies, transected by multiple attachments and social bonds, and where consumer-driven forms of
self-fashioning and self-fulfilment atomise collective identities. In this context, techniques of
governance no longer assume the hierarchised, centralised forms they did in the 19th century.
Rose argues that contemporary forms of governance employ a range of ‘rationalities and
techniques that seek to govern without governing society’ (Rose, 1996, 328). Rather,
governing occurs through ‘regulated choices made by discrete and autonomous actors in the
context of their particular commitments to families and communities’ (Rose, 1996, 328).
Expressed another way, governing occurs through ‘allegiance and responsibility’ to those
with whom one is closest and to whom ‘one’s destiny was linked’ (Rose, 1996, 330). ‘Each
subject was now located in a variety of heterogeneous and overlapping networks of personal
concern and investment – for oneself, one’s family, one’s neighbourhood, one’s community,
one’s workplace’ (Rose, 1996, 330-1). Rose characterises this form of governance as a shift
from a governing for society, to a governing through community (Rose, 1996, 330; Rose
1999, 250).

Community constitutes the already existing structures and social bonds through which the
governance of individuals and collectives takes shape. Governance is not imposed on people
from some external source – like an institution – but is embedded imperceptibly within the
networks and relationships of everyday life and compelled through ‘relations of mutual
obligation’ (Rose, 1996, 331). From the perspective of Mills and Brown, and Mulligan and
Smith, the community that constitutes the object of various forms of governmental
intervention – local governments are said to govern in the name of creating ‘sustainable’ or
‘healthy’ communities – is also the means of governing. In Rose’s terms, ‘its ties, bonds,
forces and affiliations are to be celebrated, encouraged, nurtured, shaped and
instrumentalised in the hope of enhancing the security of each and of all’ (Rose, 1999, 250).

The embedding of technologies of governance in community, knitted into the ‘fabric of
existence itself’ (Rose, 1999, 246), makes the exercise of power difficult to identify, difficult
to separate out from the aspirations and affiliations that seem inherent in everyday life
(Bennett, 1998, 67). But, although they take part in this more consensual, more embedded,
more participatory form of power, community arts projects, like *The West Welcomes Refugees*, like the case studies later in my project, also work against the invisibility of this form of power. The visibility of governance, its strategies and intentions in these projects has something to do with the heterogeneous and fluid social worlds to which community arts seem so attracted. These projects reflect a mode of governing through community. But, in the complexity and open-endedness of the community they address, they attest less to the imperceptibility of power than they do to the fragmentation, diffusion and contestation of power. In Gay Hawkins’s words, in a very different context from her work on community arts, in these projects a rationality of governance gives way to the ‘plurivocity of being’ (Hawkins, 2006, 36).

**Return to The West Welcomes Refugees: Governing Through Community**

A project like *The West Welcomes Refugees* illustrates both the ‘turn to community’ within approaches to governance and conveys a sense of the tensions and diffusions *within* this ‘turn’. By not including refugees on the Art and Advisory Panel, the council may have betrayed themselves in conceiving of refugees as objects of governmental intervention rather than as subjects in their own right, active in shaping their own collective identity and their own needs and aspirations. The criticism of the council from Hoang Trang Nguyen, Scott Brook and others, their skepticism about the council’s intentions and processes, suggests that governing through community is complex and contested in new ways. In the case of Maribyrnong City Council, although they may have attempted to address the issue of local refugees through art *involving* local refugees, they failed to identify that this community was transected by other internal and invisible allegiances – like non-English-speaking artists or refugees from non-English speaking backgrounds. And they lacked the practical and procedural means for accessing these other internal constituencies. Paola Bilbrough, a local writer following up Nguyen’s original complaint with the council, enquired how the public art panel was established: ‘So I asked them, given that the population in Footscray speaks a variety of languages and a great number of people speak Vietnamese or Arabic, did you
advertise in those languages when you were looking for members for the public art panel?
And the answer was no – they didn’t’ (Low, 2006, np).

Brennan defended his work and the process he went through to ‘reach out to refugee communities and relevant stakeholders’ (Low, 2006). Moreover, he argued that his work was not explicitly about representing the refugee experience ‘here and now’ (Low, 2006). He wanted to paint a broader picture of refugees and migrants, one that acknowledged the ‘major history of migration to the area’ and also included those not legally classified as refugees, but who consider themselves as such. He wanted to assemble this ‘ richness of content…where varying accounts dynamically interact and subvert any preconceived homogenised views about refugees’ (Low, 2006, np). The divergence of views surrounding Brennan’s work – on what it means, on the motivations behind it, on its proper relationship to the community it addresses – reveal the opacity of and discontinuity within the ‘relations of mutual obligation’ that define community in governmental terms. The complexity of community mobilised here is not something that can be governed into consensus, just as the ‘relations of mutual obligation (Rose, 1996, 331) are not always mutual.

In her history of place based public art in the United States, Miwon Kwon’s detailed accounts of various public art projects illustrate how conflict over such art reveals ‘the extent to which public art discourse functions as a site of political struggle over the meaning of democracy’ (Kwon, 2002, 80). At their heart, such struggles say something about the continuing power of a language of authenticity and democracy in orienting discourse around public representations of community and place. And yet, the pursuit of authenticity and democracy in public and participatory representations is complicated by the instability and mutability of place and community in liquid modernity. The authenticity and inclusiveness of a representation will always be contested in social contexts that are fluid, heterogeneous, plural and fragmented (Rouse, 2002, 157). In Bhabha’s terms, struggles over such public representations articulate the ‘shifting margins of cultural displacement’ that characterise the postcolonial world (Bhabha, 1997, 21). There has been an enthusiastic adoption of Bhabha’s
language of hybridity and displacement (or exile) in postcolonial theorisations of identity and subjectivity. But these concepts are difficult to translate into the practical and personal realm of governance where decision-making occurs in the context of material and conceptual constraints and in the fray of very particular allegiances and attachments. Bhabha’s provocation to assume the ‘cultural and historical hybridity of the postcolonial world’ as the ‘paradigmatic place of departure’ (Bhabha, 1997, 21) raises unforeseen difficulties for governmental regimes still assuming the coherence and stability of community, culture and place. Assuming this hybridity and instability is also challenging for the constituents of government who have a very personal stake in maintaining their community and their cultural integrity in the ‘here and now’. Their stake is made more urgent in the face of (real and perceived) unequal access to wider forms of representation – both governmental and symbolic – which continues to characterise multicultural, settler-colonial societies.

In its efforts to address the complexities of the refugee experience through Brennan’s artwork, Maribyrnong City Council failed to identify the complexity of the bonds of ‘allegiance and responsibility’ transecting the community in their sights. For some in this community, this failure rendered the gesture insincere and tokenistic. And yet, attempts by Brook and Nguyen to refine the council’s processes for commissioning and assessing public art works attest to an understanding that ‘community’ and ‘social bonds’ are deeply imbricated within structures of governance – and thus malleable and amenable to governing. For Kwon this imbrication is poorly recognised. She is critical of the way critics, commentators and practitioners of community art often assume community as self-evident, as given. They do not question the way that community is mobilised through discourse, the way that it is activated performatively through arts practice; that, in fact, community may be the very thing created or posited – temporary, arbitrary, conditional – through arts practice and the kinds of governmental processes that surround it (Kwon, 2002, 145). I see Brennan’s work as enacting a performance of community in Kwon’s sense. In seeking to ‘dynamically interact and subvert any preconceived homogenised views about refugees’ Brennan attempted to dismantle the taken-for-granted category of ‘refugee’ circulating within
governmental and popular discourse. His work posits a more elastic, more ambiguous framing of this community. But like Bhabha’s notion of hybridity, such a performative understanding of community is difficult to reconcile with the claims to authenticity underpinning much community arts discourse.

Kwon is attentive to the way the boundaries of community are distinctly shaped by the governmental ‘forces’ through which they are articulated:

What remains invisible in the process (of representing community) are the mediating forces of the institutional and bureaucratic frameworks that direct such productions of identity, and the extent to which the identity of such institutional forces are themselves in a continuous process of (re)articulation. (Kwon, 2002, 151)

Kwon’s point recapitulates Rose’s theorisation of governing through community: that embedded within the ‘flows of everyday existence’ (Rose, 1999, 234) power is rendered invisible and identity and community appears natural and self-evident. But Kwon also stretches this theorisation. She is rare in recognising the ambivalence operating within processes of governance themselves and that these qualities – fluidity, plurality, hybridity – are not just attributes of the thing – community, place, identity – to be governed. The tensions apparent in The West Welcomes Refugees (and in my case studies to come) reveal the persistence of other, inherited governmental dispositions and paradigms – liberal, conservative, colonial, paternal – operating alongside and within the ‘turn to community’ paradigm. What these projects reveal most strikingly is the dual complexity at the interface between community and governance; both formations are plural, hybrid and unstable; both are mutually entangled, and in various degrees of making and unmaking themselves.

I began this chapter in the thick of these convolutions in order to give a sense of community art as it manifests itself in practice and in place. The West Welcomes Refugees acts as a prelude to the projects I explore in more expanded fashion in my case studies. I want the detail of these projects to indicate the plurality and partiality of rationalities and allegiances operating at the
nexus of community, arts practice and government. Much of the critical literature on community arts is concerned with scrutinising the uneasy marriage between governance and artistic production (Bennett, 1993; Hawkins, 1993; Gibson, 2001; Mulligan et al., 2006; Belfiore & Bennett, 2007 and 2010; Khan, 2011). This literature problematises the instrumentalisation of the arts by government and reveals the tensions within both community arts discourses and governmental discourses legitimating arts and culture as a technique of governance. This discursive focus means that this literature assumes a certain distance from community arts practices and the work it produces, a critical distance that enables a clear-eyed view of the rationalities that shape the field and inform its objectives, its objects and the way it makes meaning (Bennett, 1993). Disentangled from the messy material work of community arts this critical approach is unable to envision the plural, competing and open-ended nature of the practices this work entails. In making an account of this here and in the chapters to come, it is possible to say that community arts projects are not always fully circumscribed by the rationality that gave rise to them. More than this, such work strains the very notion of rationality operating at the centre of a theory of governmentality.
Chapter Three

THE FRONTIER, THE BADLAND

Places, rather than being locations of coherence, become the foci of the meeting and the non meeting of the previously unrelated and thus integral to the generation of novelty. The spatial in its role of bringing distinct temporalities into new configurations sets off new social processes. And in turn, this emphasises the nature of narratives, of time itself, as being not about the unfolding of some internalized story (some already-established identities) – the self-producing story of Europe – but about interaction and the process of the constitution of identities – the reformulated notion of (the multiplicities of) colonisation. (Doreen Massey, 2005, 71)

This chapter situates my argument about art and governance within a settler-colonial politics of place. Here, I revisit the example opening Chapter One. As a governmental form of place-making *The West Welcomes Refugees* intervenes in place in order to realise certain ideals of liberal governance. Despite the debate surrounding the council’s intentions, the project can be understood within governmental discourses of social engagement, gentrification and community-building (Maribyrnong City Council, 2011, 4). These discourses contribute to longer term governmental agendas for developing more self-regulating and responsive citizens and for cultivating a more stable and prosperous civic domain. These are the discursive terms that dominate the interpretive literature on community art. But *The West Welcomes Refugees* illustrates the ways in which this immediate and local place-making also animates a poetics of place, a poetics that is in excess of, yet integral to the problem of place addressed by government. For *The West Welcomes Refugees*, this poetics is manifests in the ambivalent appeal to a marginal ‘west’ within the ‘West’ of neoliberal modernity. In this chapter, I argue that this marginal west can be understood as an effect of the ambivalence of
settler-colonial place. The governmental problem of place is somehow bound up in this larger, more enduring problem of securing settler-colonial belonging.

In Paul Carter’s terms, the art of community art’s place-making work is in its deviation from ‘linear reasoning’ (Carter, 2009, 53); *The West Welcomes Refugees* fails to circumscribe place within a single coherent narrative. In its ambiguous address to place, the writing inscribed across the Albert Street bridge is a dark writing. It gestures ‘toward other presences…other places inside the one we agree to inhabit’ (Carter, 2009, 2). For many writers, Australian place is inhabited by the ‘other presence’ of Europe (Gibson, 1992; Seddon, 1998; Langton, 2003; Rigby, 2003; Rose, 2004). In an anthology on Australian sense of place, John Cameron argues that this ‘tension between a European cultural and intellectual heritage and the physical realities of the Australian continent lies at the heart of our constant reinvention of ourselves as a continent and as a people’ (Cameron, 2003b, 1). Australian sense of place is restless, Cameron implies; the intuitive connection to place, the ‘pull of place’ (Lippard, 1997, 7) celebrated by phenomenologists is interrupted or frustrated by the dissonance between an imagined home and the ‘physical realities’ of living on this continent.

Another source of ambivalence emerges from the presence (and absence) of an Indigenous relationship to place which precedes and exceeds European relationships to land and country. For Cameron (2003b, 5), no ‘sense of place’ in Australia can be expressed without taking into account Indigenous relationships to the land. In one sense, Indigenous belonging – expressed through traditional knowledges, The Dreaming, art and culture – functions as a well-spring, a reservoir, to nourish non-Indigenous belonging, to precipitate and educate non-Indigenous Australians in a more authentic relating to place (Cameron, 2003b, 5; Langton, 2003; Goodall, 2009). Writing about Aboriginal art, Marcia Langton captures non-Indigenous ambivalence and their yearning to be placed, in this way:

One thing is plainly clear: Aboriginal art expresses the possibility of human intimacy with landscapes. This is the key to its power: it makes

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5 In same anthology, see Catherine Laudine, Peter Bishop and Kate Rigby.
available a rich tradition of human ethics of relationships with place and other species to a worldwide audience. For the settler Australian audience, caught ambiguously between old and new lands, their appreciation of this art embodies at least a striving for a kind of citizenship that republicans wanted: to belong to this place rather than another. (Langton, 2003, 55)

And yet, in another sense, in this literature, recognising Indigenous belonging is a way for non-Indigenous people to recognise their disconnection from place. Or rather, non-Indigenous being in place is constantly haunted by what it is not – a ‘rich tradition of human ethics of relationships with place and other species’ – and expressed in a ‘striving’ that cannot be fulfilled. Non-Indigenous Australians may know little about how Indigenous belonging is ordered and felt, but this is the measure against which their belonging in place is judged.

Both of these ‘other presences’ appear, spectrally, in the place-making work of my case studies. However, these places are better characterised through a different kind of ambivalence. For Ross Gibson and Deborah Bird Rose non-Indigenous belonging is haunted, not by the knowledge of a more authentic Indigenous belonging, nor by identification with Europe, but by the repressed knowledge of the violence of colonial settlement. They explore how settler-colonial belonging is secured through repeated forms of destruction and mis-inhabitation of place. ‘Settler societies’, Rose says, ‘are brought into being through invasion; death and silence pervade and gird the whole project. This fact is most evident in those regions of immediate conquest known as the frontier’ (Rose, 2004, 58). Rose and Gibson argue that belonging in the nation is secured through the containment of this violence and destructiveness within a marginalised or stigmatised place, excised from symbolic inclusion in the nation.

To own up to a badland may seem defeatist, like an admission that the habitat cannot be completely conquered. But a prohibited space can also appear encouraging to the extent that it shows that savagery can be encysted even if it cannot be eliminated. A badland can be understood as a natural space deployed in a cultural form to persuade citizens that unruliness can be simultaneously acknowledged and
ignored. This is the kind of paradox that myths usually support. In a culture unconvinced of its sovereignty in the landscape, a badland is mythic and far from useless. (Gibson, 2002, 15)

These are the frontiers and badlands to settlement; they are both material places and symbolic projections or ‘narrative things’ (Gibson, 2002, 15), containing everything which disturbs colonial imaginings of place.

In this chapter, I explicate Rose’s and Gibson’s theorisation of the usefulness of the badland and the frontier for sustaining settler-colonial belonging. Their conception of these places informs my reading of the maligned and stigmatised localities of my case studies in the chapters to come. Through their argument that I can claim that places like Broadmeadows north-west of Melbourne, Miller in western Sydney and Footscray in Melbourne’s inner west, perform settler-colonial work.

In Rose’s and Gibson’s argument, the destructive technologies of settlement are understood in broad terms. They include the devastation of the land through large-scale agriculture, the hypocrisy and inconsistency of colonial law, and the formulation of governmental policies to build and sustain a White Australian way of life. Unpicking the mechanism of settler-colonial belonging requires a questioning of the very qualities and achievements that ground the good life of the nation and that define national identity. Nationalist narratives of progress and innovation, of social tolerance and egalitarianism, of governmental benevolence and social cohesion are thus implicated in a ‘structure of violence’ that repeats itself across generations and in many different facets of the life of the nation (Rose, 2004, 71).

In the context of this argument, the governmental work of community art assumes an ambiguous charge. Intervening in the immediate local narratives of place, community art is conscripted into the work of sustaining settler-colonial belonging. As a governmental attempt to recuperate or tame an unruly place, this kind of place-making is ambivalently positioned; it both extends the norms of settlement and the settler-colonial narrative to
marginal places in the nation, and subtly transforms this narrative. In Massey’s terms, community art projects may be funded by government in the hope that they produce ‘locations of coherence’. But the inevitable pluralities of, and ambivalence towards, place mobilised in this work also create spaces for the ‘generation of novelty’. The contemporary shaping of, and intervention in, place through art animates ways of belonging and ways of knowing place that exceed national narratives and national norms of belonging. In this work, place and place-making assume a vitality and significance beyond physical borders. As I have argued earlier, this location of culture has bearing on the ways we understand the nation, particularly on the ways a coherent national culture is sustained through an uneven investment in the diversity of cultures, communities and social narratives of which it is composed. Taking these expressions seriously may be a chance to ‘disturb those ideological manoeuvres through which “imagined communities” are given essentialist identities’ (Bhabha, 1997, 149). Or in Deborah Bird Rose’s terms, such place-based or place-making expressions may unmake the ‘narcissistic singularity’ of the nation and contribute to the recovery of other narratives within the story of colonisation (Rose, 2004, 21).

**West of the West**

Before raising questions about refugees or about council processes for commissioning public art, *The West Welcomes Refugees* caught my attention because of the ambiguity of its address to place. The original graffiti and the artwork inspired by it appeals to the specificities of a place, the ‘west’, set apart from the metropolis to which it is attached. This west slides across a double meaning: the local or minor west of the city, and the global or major West of ‘power, wealth and cultural influence’ (Connell, 2007, 212). Australia considers itself to be an extension of the West – but in the antipodes. As a West it is ‘both strange and familiar’, uncomfortable both in its geography and its cultural outlook (Gibson, 1992, xii). The west that welcomes is also of that West that, ‘grew historically out of European and North American imperialism’ (Connell, 2007, 212), although displaced from it. Implicitly, the west that welcomes refugees is in contrast to some other place that is indifferent or hostile to refugees, both the West, which has thrown up barriers to the flow of refugees from former
colonies and developing countries, and the rest of the metropolis which considers itself Western in outlook, wealth and influence.

Footscray, in the inner west of Melbourne, is considered to be the gateway to the city’s minor west. It is a place demarcating a spatial, but also social and cultural, boundary within the metropolis. This difference is reinforced in subtle and overt ways in popular culture, in official discourse, in art, in common understanding, to a degree that makes it assumed and unremarkable for most Melbournians. Alice Pung’s family memoir, Unpolished Gem, is one such reiteration of the pre-existing difference of this place, this west. In her affectionate portrait of Footscray, this place, wholly within the radius of the city, is on the outer edge of metropolitan civility, good taste and sophistication.

This suburb, Footscray, has possibly the loudest and grottiiest market in the Western world, although that term doesn’t mean much when you’re surrounded by brown faces. Footscray Market is the only market where you can peel and eat a whole mandarin before deciding whether to buy a kilo; where you can poke and prod holes in a mango to check its sweetness…this is the suburb of madcap Franco Cozzo and his polished furniture, the suburb that made Russell Crowe rich and famous for shaving his head and beating up ethnic minorities, so it doesn’t really matter that these footpaths are not lined with gold but dotted with coruscating black circles where people spat out gum eons ago. (Pung, 2006, 2)

Footscray is literally a place of refuge for Pung’s family who came to Australia escaping the Khmer Rouge. Like the stories of refugees stencilled across the Albert Street bridge, Pung’s family story is one story amongst many in the successive diaspora communities that, over several decades, have settled in Footscray and the western suburbs beyond: Maltese, Polish, Ukranians and Yugolsavs following World War II; Vietnamese and Cambodians in the 1970s (Barnard, 2008, 37); and over the last decade, Chinese, Indian, Afghani and communities from the Horn of Africa. Their presence, over successive generations, and the way that this presence has filtered into popular representations and understandings of the west, is one of the reasons why the ‘difference’ of the west is widely accepted as a kind of folklore.
Tellingly, Pung distinguishes Footscray from the mainstream city, indeed, from the ‘Western world’ not only because of how everyday life and commerce are conducted there, but also because of how it has been represented. ‘Russell Crowe rich and famous for shaving his head and beating up ethnic minorities’ did so as an actor in Geoffrey Wright’s 1992 film *Romper Stomper*. In Pung’s memoir this fictionalised account of neo-Nazi skinheads in Footscray is juxtaposed against ‘madcap Franco Cozzo’, an emblem of the very ethnic presence the extreme right sought to eliminate. Franco Cozzo is an Italian migrant whose furniture business became widely known to most Melburnians via his TV advertisements, spruiked, famously, in an idiosyncratic mélange of Greek, Italian and English for a specifically migrant audience. Veering sharply towards kitsch, Franco Cozzo’s furniture seems like a parody of the excessive gaudy tastes of consumers not worldly or urbane enough for Melbourne metropolitan sensibilities. So Pung articulates the ‘difference’ of this place by drawing on its pre-existing difference expressed in layerings of an array of widely understood cultural references: the chaotic and sensual overload of Footscray market; the panorama of bad taste and over-the-top consumerism in popular advertising; the racist violence of outcasts at the social and political extremes of the national mainstream, and stylised by arthouse cinema for a middle-class audience.

Both Brennan and Pung invoke the west as an *other* city within the city where differences jostle together in concert and in conflict: a heterogeneous population and its mixed cultural attachments; the promise of easy consumerism and the indulging of bad taste; extreme behaviours, both violent and eccentric; opportunity and the promise of a new life, and the disappointments that accompany this. There is an ambivalence to the ‘difference’ demarcated here. It is something to celebrate as Pung does in her memoir; it is also something to deny, because this difference which marks a hierarchy of value that has been imposed rather than chosen.
The socially and culturally distinctive west invoked by Pung and Brennan grew out of its particular economic history. The western suburbs are Melbourne’s industrial belt, zoned to house the city’s ‘most offensive trades’ since the 1950s (Lack, 1991, 375). In John Lack’s history of Footscray, he argues that ‘the 1954 planners saw the western suburbs not merely as a manufacturing region, but as Melbourne’s industrial sump…’, a dumping ground for the wastes and poisons associated with the area’s animal-processing and petrochemical industries (Lack, 1991, 375). Lack describes the way these zoning decisions affected living conditions in Melbourne’s western suburbs, and influenced the way outsiders perceived them. Touring the area in the 1970s, the Minister for Urban and Regional Development, Tom Uren, said: ‘This place is a wasteland. There is squalor, educational and social starvation – everywhere you look facilities are either sub-standard or totally inadequate for the needs of over 300,000 people’ (Lack, 1991, 378).

The western suburbs of Melbourne were befouled and stigmatised long before the industrial zoning of the 1950s. Since the middle of the 19th century, the Maribyrnong River was used as an industrial pipeline for the pastoral industry, for chemical and fertiliser manufacturing, for textiles and, later, for munitions and explosives (Barnard et al., 2000, 16). Slaughter houses and abattoirs lined the banks. When meat was no longer profitable, tanneries, tallow, soap and candle makers made use of their by-products (Barnard, 2008, 30). The Maribyrnong was an important conduit linking Victoria into a colonial economy. Wool from the pastoral industry ended up in British mills; bluestone (basalt) quarries sprang up along the Maribyrnong River banks. The stone was used as ballast for ships returning to England and in central Melbourne’s building boom in the 1880s (Barnard et al., 2000, 9-10). ‘By the 1890s’ Martin Flanagan says, ‘the Maribyrnong was the colour of tar from the industrial sewage that ran into it, not to mention bloody hides and body parts from the many abattoirs’ (Flanagan, 2005).

Life in the western suburbs has historically been intertwined with the growth of these industries. Successive waves of migrants drawn to the area because of government-assisted
housing and nearby employment have contributed to the character and working-class reputation of the inner west (Barnard et al., 2000, 32). The patchily planned housing developments have been intersected by the heavy traffic arterials of large-scale industry, infused with the odours and fumes of oil-refineries, abattoirs and their associated by-products, and endangered by the environmental hazards relating to the storage and processing of these materials (Lack, 1991, 375). In the disregard for social welfare and the environmental degradation that accompanies these industries, the Maribyrnong River and the townships around it can be considered in Val Plumwood’s (2008) terms as ‘shadow places’ supporting the prosperity of lives elsewhere. In its address to this shadow place The West Welcomes Refugees (both the original graffiti and the artwork evolving from it) makes such a compelling yet cutting statement. The same west that contains the industries and wastes that maintain the modern city is also the place that ‘welcomes’ a particular population: implicitly, those beings unwanted anywhere else.

The original graffiti statement on the bridge may have been prompted by the local and highly publicised presence of refugees confined in the Maribyrnong Immigration Detention Centre. Located on the edge of Footscray, the centre was once a migrant hostel housing South East Asian refugees in the 1970s, many of whom have settled in and around Footscray (Barnard et al., 2000, 38). In the 1990s it became a detention centre, confining those awaiting deportation or confirmation of refugee status and release into the community. In the highly politicised debates over refugees of the last decade, the Maribyrnong Immigration Detention Centre has been the most prominent and widely known detention centre in Melbourne. As a symbol of the government’s refugee policy it is doubly denounced: resented by those who reject the right of persecuted people to seek asylum, and reviled by those critical of Australia’s highly punitive refugee policy as an illegitimate prison for locking up the innocent.

It is in this sense that the ‘welcome’ of the west is an ambivalent one, both a disavowal of the racist politics of Australia’s immigration policies and an acknowledgement of the limited terms on which ‘others’ are welcomed into the Australian nation. The slippage between the
west and the West lies at the heart of the politics of the welcome being proffered. The
refugees welcomed to the minor west of Footscray are a source of fear and anxiety for the
global West, to which Melbourne Australia is ambiguously connected. Even as they settle in
the antipodean West, in Melbourne, they are contained within this minor west, where their
difference further inscribes the difference of this west from the West of the nation. In this
sense, *The West Welcomes Refugees* draws on an assumed understanding that some places are
more *of the nation* than others. More than this, it implies that the nation is more comfortably
itself if certain elements remain separate and distinct, contained within their own place. *The
West Welcomes Refugees* invokes, as its central trope, a question about the nature of place and
the subtle yet immediately understood distinction *between* places in the nation. It is this
internal difference within the nation – a difference that is lived and shapes identities both
collective and individual – that I seek to understand through the settler-colonial metaphor of
the badland and the frontier. Some writers have argued that maligned suburbs, places
denounced as bad, as marginal, as deviant or deficient, reflect an effort to consolidate the
boundaries of social class (Powell, 1993; Johnson, 1997; Symonds, 1997; Peel, 2003). This is
a compelling argument and I draw on it in later chapters. But I also think that this internal
differentiation and disparaging of place reflects a less explicable mode of inhabiting the
nation, a mode relating to the ambivalence of settler-colonial belonging.

**Settling the nation**

In his book *The End of Certainty*, the political commentator Paul Kelly (1994) argues that
Australian settlement can be defined in terms of a broad national consensus on five key
issues. Since federation, the White Australia policy, industry protection, wage arbitration,
state paternalism and a belief in the imperial benevolence of Britain were the bedrock on
which all other national decisions were based. Australia could be said to be settled as a
nation having achieved broad and enduring agreement over these principles of national
governance, social ordering and social value. Kelly goes on to say that this consensus has
been undermined since the 1980s when many of these founding principles and values came
into question. The Hawke and Keating governments’ multicultural policy and its turn
towards re-imagining Australia as part of Asia undermined the myth of White Australia. The neoliberal policies of deregulation of the Australian economy, privatization of state assets and the winding back of industry protectionism marked the end of an insular and stable national economy. And a campaign for Australia to become a republic questioned the nation’s connections to its colonial origins and its self image as an antipodean extension of the British Empire (Kelly, 1994). Kelly’s thesis has been extended by the political scientist Geoffrey Stokes, who argues that terra nullius, state secularism, a culture of masculinism and the tradition of Australian democracy are other key founding principles of Australian settlement (Stokes, 2004, 8). He implies also that settlement did not only take effect through a state of consensus but also is exercised through primary and enduring drives that underpin the direction of change and development in the nation.

Stokes is more attentive to culture, land and character than Kelly, but both writers conceive of settlement in abstract and hegemonic terms. I will contrast this view of settlement with that of a group of writers who I would loosely group as inhabiting a postcolonial perspective of Australian nation-ness and national experience. For writers like Deborah Bird Rose, Paul Carter, Val Plumwood, Inga Clendinnen, Jane Goodall, Jennifer Rutherford and Ross Gibson, the material, psychological and philosophical dissonance of the colonial project is central to understanding Australian nationalism and nation-ness. Just a fragment of Deborah Bird Rose’s introduction to Reports from a Wild Country is enough to communicate a sense of this very different outlook:

> Our generations alive today may be the first wave of settlers to try to grasp the enormity of conquest, and to understand it as a continuous process. In consequence, many of us really search to understand how we may inscribe back into the world a moral presence for ourselves. (Rose, 2004, 6)

For Rose and others, settlement means something other than an agreement on the terms of national governance. Settlement does not only take place within the consciousness of political process, it is not only procedural, legal and social, but involves an ethical dimension
– an ethics of relating to the place, to the people and to the circumstances we are in, both individually and collectively.

There is something of the biblical myth of the fall in Rose’s writings. The settler state represents a fallen state in which ‘there is no former time/space of wholeness to which we might return or which we might resurrect for ourselves’ (Rose, 2004, 24). Unlike Kelly and Stokes, settlement for her does not represent an achievement of founding principles on which the nation can be built. Nor is settlement an achievement of the past now being undone by contemporary changes like globalisation, multiculturalism and neoliberal capitalism. It is instead, a continual process of undoing and making over the order of things. For Rose, the catastrophe of settlement lies somewhere between the callous indifference Europeans felt towards the lands they occupied and the peoples who lived there, and their own misplaced hopes for a better life and a better future for themselves (Rose, 2004, 5).

Rose’s understanding of settlement never deviates from this primary ambivalence. Colonial values of progress, nation-building and a shared vision of the good nation are also part of a process of destruction, dehumanization and alienation. Settlement involves an ongoing contradictory process where colonial law brings disorder, where nation-building undoes the connections between people and place and where dominant visions of the good bring desolation and destruction for some. In most postcolonial accounts of settlement, the immediate and ongoing destructive burden of European colonisation has been borne by Indigenous people. But many of these accounts also extend the damaging psychological, environmental and physical impact of settlement to the coloniser as well.

Rose’s view on settlement is informed by her extensive ethnographic work with Aboriginal people from the Victoria River Downs area in the Northern Territory. The grounds of these encounters are more than metaphorically significant. These placed encounters, at the socio-geographical margins of the nation, provoke insights into settlement experiences largely written out of national histories, the nation’s sense of itself and its past. Like Val Plumwood, Rose is also driven by a powerful ecological critique of modernity. Damaged environments
are the by-product of the modern self’s dislocation from the systems that support it and of the destructiveness of modern forms of knowledge and technological innovation (Rose, 2004; Plumwood, 2008). Place assumes a vital importance in this work, both materially and intellectually. The settler-colonial nation’s ways of relating to place reveal something of the dissonant qualities of settlement as an ongoing process. The qualities of this relating are accessed through an analysis of settler-colonial feeling for and towards place. In this sense, the phenomenological perspectives of Tuan and other sense of place writing reveal more than just individual experiences of place. Feeling encodes powerful social narratives that structure ways of being (in the nation) across generations. Embedding her thinking in place, drawing her analyses and interpretations out of an extensive engagement with place, Rose reassesses the workings of settlement. She argues that these workings are particularly evident at the frontiers of the settler state. These fringe places dramatise a reckoning between the ideas defining the settler-colonial nation, and the physical processes that indelibly and violently mark its terrain and the people who live there.

**THE FRONTIER**

Rose’s *Reports from a Wild Country* begins with a radical inversion. In one sharp stroke, she turns the tables of the colonial narrative and places us here, in the wild time of European settlement: ‘Captain Cook was the real wild one. He failed to recognise Law, destroyed people and country, lived by damage, and promoted cruelty’ (Rose, 2004, 4). This inversion is a provocative way to start thinking about how nation and place are configured in a settler-colonial context like Australia because, from its founding gesture, Rose’s *Reports* portrays this relationship as perverse. She begins by narrating the way settler-colonial nations produce an inhabitable place. The nation is realised through place, a place to which the colonisers not only belong and feel entitled but to which they are passionately attached. How did opportunists and outcasts from Europe generate this passionate attachment to a territory they found inhospitable and illegible? How was this passionate attachment realised in a place that was ‘from the first conceived as hell on earth’ (Rose, 2004, 44) and that they treated with such apparent disregard?
‘The wild’ describes the contemporary circumstance of ‘place’ evolving without care. Within the spatial patternings of settlement the wild is difficult to characterise, difficult to identify, because the failure to care for place is as much a product of colonial industry and progress as it is an outcome of neglect. In this sense, the wild is a paradoxical mixture of order and anarchy, process and randomness, and is marked by wildly contradictory and hubristic behaviours. Settler societies, Rose says, compulsively clear the land of its vegetation and native inhabitants and then replace them with new populations and a new nature of their own making. She cites Hobbles Danaiyarri, a descendant and survivor of European occupation, who describes how Captain Cook, an emblem of colonisation, perceived the country: ‘I been want to clean that people right up. That’s good country. I like to put my building there. I like to put my horses there. I like to put my cattle there…’ (Rose, 2004, 61). The extermination and relocation of Indigenous people and native species – whole social and natural ecologies – provides the blank slate on which to start over, from scratch (Rose, 2004, 62): ‘The left hand creates the tabula rasa upon which the right hand will inscribe civilization’. Paul Carter contends that the phrase tabula rasa is wrongly understood to be a blank slate. It is ‘in fact’ he says, ‘a board scrubbed clean’, a surface forcibly erased and on which a ‘new text’ can be written (Carter, 2009, 39). From this chaotic cleaning up, eliminating, eradicating, follows prodigious and purposeful activity. Settlers plant over the tracks and patterns of native soils, they exploit the land’s natural resources, build roads and towns and cities.

Drawing from the diaries and memoirs of explorers and early settlers, Rose demonstrates that this rampant development is never sufficient, never complete. The initial conquest and material work of colonial domination constitutes only the first stage of an even more grandiose fantasy of future expansion, wealth production and growth. Rose identifies a powerful, biblical meta-narrative structuring these fantasies: ‘On the frontier, the coloniser establishes his right to play God and destroy the world in order to fulfill his vision of creation’ (Rose, 2004, 63). This trope of entwined human and divine agency unlocks a
particular temporal paradigm operating in settler societies. In the argument that follows, Rose describes how the disjunctive temporality of modernity – propelled by human invention and a fixation upon the new – and the disjunctive temporality of Christianity – inaugurated through the transfigurative life, death and salvation of the messiah – fuse to create a Year Zero, the pivotal moment of colonial transfiguration. Just as the New Testament fulfils the promise of salvation in the Old Testament, at Year Zero, the coloniser becomes the (divine) agent fulfilling a historical destiny to replace the old world with the new. The significance of this paradigm is that the colonising process, in its most primary structures, its temporality, is non-reflective because colonisation is understood as fulfilling a prophetic teleology. The coloniser is incapable of recognising the singularity and self-sufficiency of the land and peoples it has occupied and incapable of realising the significance of their loss. Colonial time is prophetic time; all acts, however destructive or random, are understood as leading to a known, preordained and divinely sanctioned future.

This palindrical paradigm of prophesy and fulfilment, the old world extending backwards from the new, although primarily temporal, is equally constitutive of colonial spatiality and relations to space. The elemental forces of destruction and creation function like centring devices for the settler to imprint himself and his vision of the future on the land. Rose cites an explorer, John Stokes, sailing up the Victoria River in 1839:

I would fain hope that ere the sand of my life-glass has run out other feet than mine will have trod this distant shore, that colonisation will, ere many years have past (sic), have extended itself in this quarter; that cities and hamlets will have risen on the shore of the new-found river, that commerce will have directed her track thither, and that smoke may rise from Christian hearths where now alone the prowling heathen lights his fire. (Rose, 2004, 63)

Paul Carter cites Stokes envisioning a similar scene of ‘a succession of tapering spires rising from the many Christian hamlets’ (Carter, 2009, 61) as he surveyed land near the Gulf of Carpentaria. Carter uses this ‘mirage’ of a familiar future to argue for the continuity between the imaginative and technical labour of ‘territorial expansion’ (Carter, 2009, 61). There is
comfort in this picture of a populated and industrious city rising out of a land envisioned as primal and empty. In Rose’s extract, Stokes imagines his feet preceding the footsteps of many settlers who will come and build a productive and civilised life here. He envisions the track along which a familiar European future will extend, like a hand, reaching out for its entitlement, its natural inheritance. And when the land has been taken and labour and resourcefulness has made it rich, the coloniser will retire to a cosy hearth with its pleasant views of river and town, admiring what he has achieved. Even as he marks the limits of his life, Stokes draws himself into this vision and surrounds himself with the comforts of this coming world. Within the unfolding of the narrative, it would be a loss if these things, these insubstantial hearths and hamlets, were not to materialise. We as readers are drawn into the vision too. We forget that Stokes is alone in his present, in a place where he does not belong and which he regards as primitive and backward. In following the line of his thought we are drawn into the ‘continuous line of intellectual reasoning’ (Carter, 2009, 61) that drives the physical labour of colonisation. Through these labours, feelings of attachment are manufactured from indifference, even antipathy, and a sense of entitlement replaces illegitimacy.

Rose identifies the frontier as the pivotal site where this alchemy is performed. The transformation from the ‘prowling heathen’ around his fire to the order of a civilised city requires invasive action and conquest to usurp claims to land, to food, to life. But the comforts and homeliness of this civilised world would feel hollow if the destructiveness required to build them were to be included in the narrative of settlement. The Christian would not sit easily at his hearth. The frontier keeps these two sides of settlement separate; it occupies the liminal zone between the conflicting impulses of destruction and creation. It is the site where the left hand of conquest has not yet been replaced by the civilising hand of cultivation, law and governance. In the frontier, lawlessness, destruction and damage are allowed to flourish so that civilisation might follow.
For Rose, the nationhood of settler societies is precipitated, unambiguously, through the violence of the frontier:

Settler societies are brought into being through invasion; death and silence pervade and gird the whole project. This fact is most evident in those regions of immediate conquest known as the frontier. In settler societies, nationhood is asserted in the wake of the frontier; thus the frontier is quite explicitly not the nation, but rather a site for the making of the nation. (Rose, 2004, 58)

The lawlessness of the frontier incubates the lawfulness of the nation. Once the frontier has been absorbed into the body of the nation through the expansion of settlement, the lawlessness that preceded it cannot be acknowledged, cannot be recognised as the foundation of national sovereignty and prosperity. Put another way, law and lawlessness become alarmingly intertwined in settler societies. The frontier is not lawless but rather designates a zone where the law is in a state of strategic suspension. The resulting vacuum and its effects – dispossession, massacre, exploitation – fuel the future advancement of the colonial project.

But expanded territorial control is only one part of this project. More fundamental is the way the frontier functions as a catalyst for transforming an operational activity into an affective relationship between people and place. Rose intimates that the making of the nation does not proceed from the conquest of territory alone but rather through the legitimation of this conquest in the deliberate (re)instatement of the law suspended to advance this very conquest. The frontier then is crucial to the nation as a symbolic site where the reclamation of colonial order from ‘the wild’ can be dramatically staged and restaged, constituting the colonial nation as lawful and rightly placed.

This is one of the most compelling aspects of Rose’s argument. She manages to illustrate that colonial indifference towards the colonised land and people and their destructiveness of place does not only signify alienation, their non-belonging, but is also a strategic way of organising and legitimating their attachment. Rose is able to argue that the wild is the
condition of our present because in settler-colonial nations, destruction fuels belonging. Destruction becomes law and this lawful destructiveness becomes the foundation of national being. Framed by this logic, the silence hanging over the colonial project is not quite the nation’s forgetting of colonial violence; nor is it precisely the wilful denial of this violence. More insidiously, the silence denotes the smothered retreat of the law from itself such that the necessary violence fostering colonial belonging to country can be both known and not known at the same time.

**THE BADLAND**

This contradictory state is given dramatic form in Ross Gibson’s *Seven Versions of an Australia Badland*. Although written two years before *Reports from a Wild Country*, Gibson’s book could serve as a template for understanding the syndrome of the wild in settler societies. Gibson excavates seven histories of a run of country extending across the hinterland of Central Queensland from Bundaberg to beyond Mackay, country mythologised as the Horror Stretch, the brigalow, a badland. His *Seven Versions* indexes seven histories skipping from tabloid accounts of the recent past to histories of the frontier before federation and just afterwards, to personal accounts of his own experience of this place and its people in the present. Over the course of successive generations, the brigalow has been the site of several lurid ecological disasters brought on mostly by aggressive large-scale agriculture that overwhelmed the area’s highly variable, tropical habitat. Here for example, Gibson narrates the advent of industrial farming in the 1940s and 50s. Following the Second World War, the now useless machines of battle were turned on the land: ‘(P)latoons of men re-entered the paddocks and commenced burning, bulldozing and drenching with arsenic peroxide’ (Gibson, 2002, 9). Farmers used cannon trailers and tanks and started ‘blitzing the scrub’; planes ‘bombed the country’ with a chemical version of Agent Orange. This is agriculture as warfare, where colonial attachment to the land is realised perversely though physically destroying it (Gibson, 2002, 10). These attacks lead to an uncanny kind of ‘natural’ retaliation. Flood followed by drought, followed by cyclones, flood, poison, plague in a succession of ecological catastrophes redolent of a divine curse.
Natural devastation coexists with social dis-ease and disaster. Beginning with a spate of arbitrary murders along the Horror Stretch dating back to the 1960s, Gibson excavates further, tracking a series of massacres of the region’s Indigenous inhabitants dating back to the mid 19th century. The syndrome of the wild becomes most apparent in the story of Frederick Wheeler, an officer of the Native Mounted Police Force ordered to stand trial for the murder of a local stockman. His case appears anomalous to Gibson in the colonial context of 1876:

The circuit court had requested the exhumation of the victim, a black stockman named only as Jemmy. This was strange in itself. But even more unusual, the corpse had been buried in a marked grave, European-style – laid to rest in accordance with somebody’s idea of respect. Weirder still, a white man had brought charges against Sub-Inspector Wheeler. (Gibson, 2002, 54)

He questions why Wheeler is being brought to account for one Aboriginal death when he may have been responsible for hundreds. The Native Police advanced the European’s expansion into the unmapped country outside of their territorial control. With their horses and their killing machines they were ‘singular modernists’, eating up distance, terrorising and massacring the outlying Indigenous tribes who were resisting white incursions into their land (Gibson, 2002, 5). Gibson depicts Frederick Wheeler as a zealot of this kind of violence. Colonial administrators were alarmed his activities might shame them if they were made known to more civilised parts of the country. Gibson interprets the criminal charge against Wheeler for the single murder of Jemmy as an attempt by the administrators to quietly extract him from the field. As more stable settlement increased across the former frontier, the behaviours of this man who had ‘grown accustomed to living unregulated’ (Gibson, 2002, 79) suddenly became incompatible with the expectations of civilised conduct. Wheeler was an embarrassment and a relic of a frontier time at the moment of its passing. After failing to appear for his own murder trial, he disappears from the historical record.
We know about people like Wheeler by reading between the lines of official reports they themselves wrote, obliquely yet meticulously cataloguing their actions and exploits on the frontier. Wheeler’s writing has a strange, staccato rhythm made more mechanical by the complete excision of himself, the first-person narrator, from the account:

> It was too late in the evening to do any good but next morning overtook them but were not able to shoot any as they had already crossed the river…Cannot say whether any of the murderers are amongst the mob, but they must all suffer, for the innocent must be held responsible for the guilt of others… (Gibson, 2002, 65)

The absence of the first-person subject seems significant. Without an individual responsible for the retribution ‘they must all suffer’, this suffering is construed as the inevitable and part of the natural order of things. They do not suffer because they are the victims of an individual with personal grievances or a mania for violence; they suffer because that is their fate. There is a strong sense here of Wheeler inhabiting the prophetic temporality of colonialism explicated by Rose and depicted in her account of the explorer John Stokes. Excising himself from his own historical narrative, Wheeler’s individual conduct is subsumed by the greater narrative of colonisation. He is the impersonal agent or instrument of the predestined progression of one people eclipsing another, of the country giving way to its rightful occupants.

Gibson argues further that this documentation does not only reveal a particular historical mentality; it also serves a practical and symbolic purpose:

> But why were the lieutenants required to write reports at all? This seems puzzling at first, for writing constitutes evidence and therefore produces the stray chance of culpability. True. But the writing fulfilled at least two purposes. First, it was a ritual of governmental accountability, a means of ritualizing and ‘realising’ the new European order. The reception and tabling of reports and inquiries about the Native Police were ceremonies marking the transition of the frontier country into law. The writing worked on the country, rendering it a known quantity. (Gibson, 2002, 71)
Here again is Rose’s logic of the wild at work. The destruction of the frontier becomes formalised through the rituals of government, which then conscript destruction into law. In fact Wheeler’s story seems to be the very embodiment of the colonial entwinement of ‘death and silence’. His body was the vessel through which colonial violence was unleashed and then subsequently ceremonially reigned in and silenced. Like Rose, Gibson is emphatic that this syndrome does not only pertain to the frontier but also becomes the foundation of the colonial nation’s relationship to land, a precursor to an attachment to place:

By venting their violence and then moving on, the (Native Police) troopers shielded civilised people from the knowledge that murder and undeclared war were the reasons they ‘owned’ their land. The corpsmen were encouraged to act as if memory was irrelevant to them. (Gibson, 2002, 73, my emphasis)

Thinking within the terms of the wild is easiest, clearest in accounts where violence is rendered literally and physically on the bodies of Indigenous peoples and on the natural landscape. Both Rose and Gibson depict colonialis’ treatment of the land as destructive, and at times hostile. Similarly, the story of Frederick Wheeler is an account of a very bloody, bodily kind of violence perpetrated against individuals and a people. But, in arguing that the law is inherent to this violence and not a restraining force outside of it, Rose and Gibson also suggest that the violence of colonial settlement is something other than literal, something more subtle and perhaps pervasive. For both Rose and Gibson the settler-colonial nation is troubled by two tensions: first, that it is founded on lawful destruction and, second, that this violence (which is internal to the nation), has to be projected outside into the literal and psychological space of the frontier or badland. The good nation is constituted out of and sustained by the externalisation and silencing of unruly forces relegated to its margins.

In this sense, the Seven Versions is most gripping where it is most deceptive. These tales of murder, obsession and gross misjudgement overshadow Gibson’s central concern. He does not document moments of excess, aberrance and depravity to depict the colonial nation as
deviant. Rather, it is through these accounts that Gibson draws out its precarious modes of normality – how civilised people have come to inhabit this place in ways that seem inevitable and legitimate, stable and safe. The badland is a strategy for securing settler-colonial attachment to place.

Why does some country get called bad? Partly it’s because the law needs the outlaw for reassuring citizens that the unruly and the unknown can be named and contained even if they cannot be annihilated. Their function is to acknowledge but also to deny insufficiencies that are part of everyday social and psychic reality. Perhaps you know of a place close to your home, some ‘wrong’ suburb alongside a rail line, a no-go house or part around the corner where something dreadful is said to have concussed the spirit of the environment. Such places are badlands. Some of them are not places you can drive or walk to. For a badland can exist inside your own consciousness, in the past perhaps, or in caches of denial shoved to the back of the mind. (Gibson, 2002, 178)

Importantly for this argument, badlands are not especially remote or inaccessible. They are places we pass through in our everyday activities, or places habitually avoided for reasons we have mostly forgotten. These ordinary, everyday evasions of place are habitual practices so that a vision of the safe and comfortable settled life can be maintained. Badlands are the lull in this normality. The badland is a method of inhabiting a place where the present is not reconciled to the past and where the law of the land doubts its own legitimacy. More importantly, it is a method of sustaining the asymmetries of the colonial nation’s relationship to place.

Although critiques of colonialism often proceed from an account of literal violence, a remembering of what has been destroyed and lost in the realization of the nation, they are often, equally, critiques of the things that have been preserved, the current values, institutions, identities and cultural forms sustaining the postcolonial nation in its present. It is more difficult to conceive of these things as extensions of violence because they are things

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6 I am thinking of work by Chris Healy on the way White Australia both remembers and forgets ‘Aborigines’ and Gillian Cowlishaw on the inter-relationship between black and white identities in settler-colonial Australia.
usually associated with its opposite - social order, security, national cohesion, or law in its many forms. Within Gibson’s and Rose’s understanding of colonisation, Paul Kelly’s interpretation of settlement – as a broad national consensus on the principles of national governance, social ordering and social value – is one implicated in a structural kind of violence and denial.

This is what Gibson explores later in the Seven Versions. He extends his argument about settler colonialism beyond the realm of the physical and the bodily and into the realm of discourse through the formation of national social policy. In version six of the badland he describes the fabulously mixed and fluid social world circulating around the cane cutting industry of the central Queensland hinterland. The sugar industry attracted a large and diverse labour trade recruited from the islands to Australia’s north. Gibson (2002, 119) lists Melanesians from New Ireland, Vanuatu, New Britain and the Solomon Islands. There were also Chinese migrants, Javanese and Indigenous people, employed and managed by European overseers. Gibson conjures a rich, mobile and mutating society of mixed languages and culture. Island customs and traditions were imported onto the plantations. Some may have influenced the structure of the migrants’ working lives: the division of male and female labour, the way one plant was cultivated in comparison to another, the planting of herbs for magic. The legacy of these traditions – like the herbs – are visible in the cane fields today. Other traditions, deracinated in the strange land and recontextualised in an industrial economy, were skewed beyond recognition. Daily social gestures, interactions, the interpretation of everyday signs became uncertain, hesitant. Nevertheless, a polyphony of intercultural engagements and interactions came into play here, striking up new knowledges, new perceptions of home, place and culture. Gibson says it succinctly here:

In this ‘impure’ context, people came together to produce a little wealth at the cost of wounds, deaths and enmities, but they also produced ideas, new habits and progeny. All the brusque and ingenious heterogeneity of colonialism caused invention, negotiation and an ardent, unpredictable sense of a new world constantly
emerging. But the administrators of White Australia refused this protean world. (Gibson, 2002, 156)

As much as they wanted to exploit these migrant workers for profit, the colonisers feared their plurality, the boisterous traffic of this burgeoning society. They feared also a social and cultural world in which they may be relegated to the role of bystanders, bit players, rather than the pivotal point around which commerce and power flowed.

Australia’s modernity was fully realised in 1904, not long after the birth of the Australian Federation when what was to become the White Australia policy developed out of the outlawing of indentured labour for tropical agriculture. As a result of this policy the Islander workers were repatriated. More significantly, in defining its social borders explicitly through race, the new federation refused the memory of these other participants in the nation and disavowed or marginalised the evidence of their continued presence. This too, along with the unleashing of violence, is the perplexing logic of the wild at work in the present. Colonialism unleashed violence and contained this within European law. But, through the White Australia policy, Gibson also depicts the unleashing of a kind of order, a strangling of difference, heterogeneity, intermingling and the complexities and uncertainties that accompany this. Echoing the language of Hobbles Danaiyarri’s Captain Cook, the White Australia policy enacted a desire to ‘clean that people right up’ – not only Indigenous people, but any society or culture that cut across the mirror image of white Western civility the new nation imagined as homely, hospitable and inhabitable. The White Australia policy underscored the good nation and the good life in Australia. It secured the provision of work and fair wages for white Australian workers through the increasing prominence of the trade union movement. It projected an image of national cohesion and a sense of social order, ‘a dream of Australian purity and simplicity, a dream that was radically different from the actual complexities of daily experience still remembered in the recently colonised landscapes that comprised the new nation’ (Gibson, 2002, 158).
What makes Gibson’s succession of discrete stories so convincing as a meta-narrative of settler-colonial place? Structuring his atmospheric, almost cinematic renderings of event, eye-witnessing, historical fragment is a refusal to consign each instalment to randomness or coincidence. He attributes something real to the eerie presence of place in the badland with its suggestion of waste, ruin, malevolence – as palpable in the landscape as it is in the characters who inhabit it. Without building a coherent causal argument for the relation of one event to another, one instance of injustice leading to some corresponding calamity, Gibson embodies the rationality of colonisation through the mixed and tangible materials that remain accessible to him as writer, ethnographer and bricoleur. A very unusual, distinctive portrait, not of a place, but of a particular mode of inhabiting place emerges as a result. Like Rose’s work, Gibson’s is not an excavation of place. He does not reveal the ugly truth of colonial violence beneath the thin veneer of the nation. In taking seriously the ambiance and ambivalence of place apparent in all of its contributing elements – in old photographs, in newspaper clippings and radio broadcasts, in a cut of the highway and its litter of car wrecks – Gibson suggests that this truth is in fact superficial, transparently legible on the surface of things. The Seven Versions opens up the accordion folds of place to represent place, not as an essence, but in its constant deferral. Place, in the settler-colonial context, is always in the act of making itself over, replacing itself; or, in a process of ‘cleaning up’ its others, disavowing or denying its past, covering over or scrubbing clean the traces of other modes of habitation and connection. These are the practices through which a myth of national cohesion is sustained.

Gibson’s work informs my work in a variety of ways. His method of reading place becomes a model for reading the places of my case studies. Through his work it becomes possible to link disparate events and seemingly unrelated qualities into a narrative of place. The badland itself is not a consistent diagnosis of place; it signifies both excess and lack, the punitive force of the law and its absence. Alice Pung’s depiction of Footscray conveys this inconsistency. Footscray is a place where racist violence and uncouth behaviour can thrive outside the governmental gaze. It is also a promiscuous place, a place of excessive and sensuous
consumption, and a place of hyper-diversity where cultures and cultural worlds meld and mix in unpredictable ways.

In the chapters to follow, I use the badland metaphor to contextualise the governmentalised place-making work of my case studies. I see the benign governmental work of renewing a stigmatised place, of building community and civic harmony, of fostering civic participation and encouraging enduring connections between people and place, as more than problems of governance on a local scale. They are also attempts at addressing the ongoing problem of settlement through the circuitry of place. Paul Carter’s *Dark Writing* suggests that settlement can be both understood and reconfigured through the practical and poetic work of place-making. For Carter, the default mode of settler-colonial place-making is to ‘reduce the world to one great repetition from which the reality of change has been leached out’ (Carter, 2009, 17). These are the ‘ideal representations’, the coastal maps, the planner’s grid, the uniform delineations of spaces in which ‘nothing moves’ (Carter, 2009, 5). But, like Gibson, Carter argues that the traces of other times and other modes of inhabitations are never fully erased from these idyllic designs; they persist as a ‘haunting’ (Gibson, 2009, 17) to trouble colonial reason. The ghostly trace of *The West Welcomes Refugees* graffiti beneath the Albert Street bridge mural may be one such ‘haunting’. Or, in being authorised through the official processes of public art and instrumentalised by government, this once vernacular utterance may also be a form of repetition ‘from which the reality of change has been leached out’. This is the conundrum of interpretation that governmentalised place-making through art incubates, and that I explore further in the chapters to come.
Chapter Four

THE WEAVING LANDS: MAKING AN INHABITABLE PLACE

Journalists and other sojourners sometimes talk about ‘venturing’ into Mount Druitt, Inala and Broadmeadows. Most, too, have learned the venturer’s vernacular. The working-class outer suburbs of Australia’s cities always sprawl. Country towns and rural retreats nestle. Middle-class suburbs bask. Inner suburbs hum and bustle. But outer suburbs sprawl, as if the very laziness of their hold upon the landscape tells us something about the deficient people who live in them. (Mark Peel, 2003, 16)

Mark Peel is not the only writer to draw attention to the contempt transmitted in the off-hand description of suburban sprawl. Aidan Davison points out that the rhetoric of sprawl draws from a long-standing unease with what suburbia represents – neither a sustainable adaptation of nature nor an authentic or admirable incarnation of urbanity (Davison, 2006, 209). The ‘idea that suburbs sprawl has conveyed the impression that they are a cancer growing uncontrollably in the social body, rather than being the product of ongoing negotiations and choices’ (Davison, 2006, 209). Lesley Johnson (1997, 35) has argued that ‘the very notion of “urban sprawl” indexes a ‘particular way of visualizing the urban landscape’ that excludes the perspectives of the people who live there. Increasing urbanisation, a rising proportion of the population living in suburbias, especially rapidly expanding outer suburbias, has not diminished the pejorative rhetoric of sprawl. Rather, Peel’s and Johnson’s observations suggest that this unease persists through the projection of the negative connotations of suburbia onto particular urban landscapes, those associated with a certain segment of the population. The newest, most marginal, most socially diverse and
disadvantaged neighbourhoods on Australia’s urban fringes are most likely to attract the descriptor of sprawl. For Peel, the rhetoric of sprawl encodes unease about social class as well as the failures and deficiencies of suburban life itself.

The rhetoric of sprawl does not necessarily correlate with lived experiences of suburbia and with the visual memories attached to this. The landscapes of Melbourne’s and Sydney’s outer wests are often low and flat. You traverse through them, usually at high speed, along freeways or rail corridors designed to transport you elsewhere. Unlike a harbour view or inner-city apartment, outer suburbias offer little opportunity for a vista, for an expansive vision of the built terrain. Car parks and sporting ovals seem to stretch out to infinity. But the view of residential space is usually partial and disrupted. Housing developments turn in on themselves, locking your gaze inwards along their internal no-through roads, winding in picturesque curves to no purpose. In a gesture to the appearance of security and exclusivity, these developments might be walled and gated from the similarly insular-looking ‘communities’ next door. Such residential space is transected by a variety of different zones serving other interests: multi-laned roads quarantined by sound barriers or massive advertising billboards, mysteriously fenced-off industrial zones, vast shopping plazas surrounded by car parks, parklands, greenbelts and vacant lots, constitute a multi-scalar landscape that is difficult to interpret, describe or visualise. This landscape seems both incoherent and non-descript. Visually, it is an interrupted landscape, lacking the relentless sense of expansion that the rhetoric of sprawl suggests.

Sprawl then is not a descriptor drawn from the experience of dwelling in the disparaged place. Sprawl designates a transcendent vantage and a ‘theoretical’ one (de Certeau, 1988, 93). To name a sprawling suburbia is to rise above it and be outside of it. For Johnson, this is the perspective of urban planning in which the view from above ‘relies on the notion of the master planner that reduces a knowledge of the city as a whole to a totalising perspective that reads only its surfaces’ (Johnson, 1997, 60). Echoing Paul Carter’s critique of modernity’s sterile designs on the world, Johnson argues that this omniscient, aerial
perspective reduces ‘the complexity of the city and the needs and desires of the diverse urban populations…to this surface’ (Johnson, 1997, 60). More than this, a kind of knowledge is claimed from this position; it establishes a neutral site from which ‘experts of truth’ (Rose, 1999, 30) make judgements on the lives, habits, aspirations and possibilities of the people within their purview. This perspective is thus integral to the techniques and rationalities of governance. For Johnson, from this perspective, the ‘desires of one section of the population’ are classified ‘as rational, and those of the “others”…as feral, as out of control’ (Johnson, 1997, 62). This is the position from which narratives about life in western Sydney and Melbourne have been formulated and from which strategies for intervention are developed. As many writers who have interrogated the stereotypes about these places have discovered, overwhelmingly, describing the reality of life in western Sydney and Melbourne is the province of those from outside the lived worlds of these neighbourhoods (Powell, 1993; Johnson, 1997; Johnson et al., 1997; Peel, 2003; Poynting et al., 2004).

While the rhetoric of sprawl is commonly understood as a way of consolidating class differences, it can also be understood as bound up with settler-colonial ambivalence to place. As a device that protects the comforts of middle-class place by displacing unease about the urban environment to some disparaged elsewhere, the rhetoric of sprawl adapts the badland metaphor to contemporary outer suburbia. More obliquely than the bad press and negative stereotypes generated by a suburb like Broadmeadows, the offhand descriptor of sprawl, with its cancerous connotations, naturalises the separation between legitimate and healthy settlement, from settlement deemed illegitimate, unruly and malignant. As a term used unthinkingly, as though self-evident, as a discourse designating a certain kind of problem of place, sprawl is an incarnation of Gibson’s ‘narrative thing set in a natural location’ (Gibson, 2002, 15). The sprawling suburbia seems innately deficient, indifferent to its destructiveness – of the environment, of social and civil norms – and incapable of addressing these qualities from within. Combating sprawl requires intervention; and this external expert intervention further legitimates the authority and expertise of those who intervene and the vision of settlement they hope to instil.
In Broadmeadows, a sense of being illegitimate in place has persisted since it was first established as a public-housing estate in the 1950s (Peel, 2003, 43; Mulligan et al. 2006b, 20). The feeling that Broadmeadows’ problems are due to some innate deficiency, rather than the product of ‘ongoing negotiations and choices, (Davison, 2006, 209), forms the subtext to a succession of governmental attempts at urban renewal carried out over the last four or five decades. *The Weaving Lands* is a community art project initiated as part of one such program of civic renewal implemented almost a decade ago. Initiated in 2003 by Anne Kershaw, the Arts and Cultural Planning Officer of the local council of Hume, *The Weaving Lands* is a sculpture woven by a multi-ethnic group of weavers from and beyond Broadmeadows, using mostly native grasses from the immediate locality. The sculpture depicts a tree, ‘The Galgignarrak Yirranboi Tree’ or The Backbone of Tomorrow, named by Norm Hunter, a Wurundjeri elder. It was designed to be displayed at the opening of Broadmeadows’ new Global Learning Centre, a public library and information hub intended to bring much needed resources to a community classed as disadvantaged. Two metres high and one metre at its greatest width, here it stands, diminutively, in the uninspired modern foyer, largely ignored by local visitors, lured upstairs to the library’s multilingual borrowing collection, magazines and free internet access.

*The Weaving Lands* invites the question of how you make an inhabitable, hospitable place in a badland. More particularly, as a government-initiated project, it provokes questions about how government creates positive ways of relating to a place overwritten by a succession of poor governmental ‘negotiations and choices’. Accompanying a large-scale program of infrastructure building and development, *The Weaving Lands* can be interpreted as extending the norms of settlement to a marginalised place in the nation. The civilising and progressive ideals of settlement – education, civic harmony, a celebration of culture and a tamed nature – will rehabilitate this formerly neglected place. ‘Nature’ becomes an important device for mediating this rehabilitation. Nature becomes a metonym for recovering the real Broadmeadows, the place as it existed before or despite the poor planning decisions and
failed policies of government. At the same time, nature becomes a material resource for articulating other modes of relating to place, for animating new and old narratives, outside of the ambit of governmental ideals of the good suburb and the healthy community. In this chapter, I start by situating *The Weaving Lands* in the recent social and governmental history of Broadmeadows. I then expand on the project itself and try to convey the multiplicity of modes of relating to place that it animates. Like *The West Welcomes Refugees*, this project gestures towards a governmentality that is not purely instrumental, that animates a poetics of place, at the same time that it endeavours to shape conduct.

**Broadmeadows**

Taking the train to Broadmeadows from Melbourne’s CBD, the narrative of the suburb’s recent planning history is made visible through a clashing of scale. To the right of the tracks, the suburb’s 1950s ‘broad acre’ industrial housing estates for which it is known, extend east in low brown blocks towards Campbellfield and south to Glenroy and Jacana. Gradually, trees and shrubs have grown around the single-storey dwellings, most, planted well back in their plots, surrounded by a perimeter of tended lawn. Small ornaments here and there, an old trailer, a neglected attempt at topiary, a single lemon tree weighted with fruit, these minor distinctions inscribe each block with a character and mark of home. It is not immediately clear how many of the original prefabricated concrete houses remain. Some have been replaced with brick or weatherboard. Some blocks have been bulldozed completely, to be divided up for units as developers take advantage of the generous size of the original blocks of land (Roper, 2003). This is still low-density suburbia, unassuming and a little shabby. Aside from the row of shops along Railway Crescent, the nearest shops on this side of the tracks are Olsen Place, a single-story open mall running less than 100 metres between two suburban streets. On this Saturday afternoon it is almost deserted; the few Turkish bakeries are finished with the lunchtime trade and are closing for the day. A pool hall remains open along with a milkbar and a bazaar selling Middle-Eastern dried goods, nuts and sweets. These are the locals’ local shops. In the late afternoon, a steady stream of people come and go from the milkbar, mostly young boys buying drinks and snacks.
Small attempts have been made to vitalise the modest public space through the centre of the mall. Below the sign of the Olsen Place Clinic, a faded mural drawn by local primary school children peels off a wall facing some public seating. The explanatory sign reads:

This mural represents the thoughts, dreams and messages of the local community.
Each of the leaves represents a thought, or a dream or a message that someone in the community wants to share with you.
The tree represents the community, the leaves are the people who live in it. We are all connected to it, as we grow and live together.
The mural has been supported by a number of organisations and businesses. Each have contributed something to make this mural possible.
We would like to say a huge thank you to the Community and the following organisations and businesses…

Stick figure drawings of cheerful people holding hands, baskets filled with abundant produce and local bargains, ‘2 for $5’, express a narrow range of affirmations: ‘A place to come together because everyone belongs’, ‘Thankyou Olsen Place for giving me childhood memories’, ‘Olsen place is multicultural’.

An urban design studio proposal for a children’s playground at the centre of the mall sheds doubt on the strength of this community feeling. ‘The community of Broadmeadows shops at Olsen Place on a daily basis, but there is little community interaction outside the commercial transactions’ (Hadi, 2011). The designer has proposed an undulating structure connecting climbing bars, a loop and a slide. It unfurls like Turkish script, referencing ‘the Turkish culture prevalent in the area’ and would not look conspicuous in Olsen Place.

On the other side of Broadmeadows, on the outside of the Town Hall, another art project, also involving children but this time funded by Hume City Council, ripples across the full length of this red brick building. The Serpent and Guard Dogs Community Art Project was unveiled on 30 March 1995. A giant serpent has been fashioned out of a mosaic of hundreds
of terracotta tiles, individually decorated by students from a range of local schools. The students’ messages and inscriptions are more varied than the Olsen Place mural. Some show their support for various football teams. Others paint angels, flowers, beaming suns. One tile commemorates ‘Greece 1 – 1 – 1994’, another proclaims ‘ROLLER BLADES A PART OF BROADY’. Another reproduces the Nike Air swoosh with uncanny accuracy.

Mark Peel notes that in the 1980s, Broadmeadows was described as ‘The Bronx’ – ‘perhaps to make Australia’s urban poverty look more like the real thing’ (Peel, 2003, 16). With its connotations of lawlessness, gangsta violence and social dysfunction this label was no doubt wildly misleading then and comes across as simply ludicrous now. But, while there is no sense of a ‘feral’ suburbia in the modest, somewhat subdued Broadmeadows of the present, the repeated attempts at a public display of community feeling suggest an unspoken unease about this place and its history. *The Weaving Lands* is one amongst a succession of such displays and has most likely been succeeded by several others in the last decade. The continuing hold of Broadmeadows’ badland reputation is transmitted through these affirmations of community, affirmations invested in constructing the very thing that they affirm.

Returning to Broadmeadows train station, to the left of the tracks, the residential scale gives way to a macro-structure of the civic and the commercial, separated by a large car park servicing both. The sleek multistorey towers of the City of Hume office block and Global Learning Centre import a design aesthetic resonant with the corporate and the metropolitan, strikingly out of scale with the flat suburban hinterland of Olsen Place. The tallest structures visible in the landscape, they designate this space as the new governing centre of the growing north-western municipality of Hume, encompassing the surrounding neighbourhoods of Coolaroo, Broadmeadows, Dallas, Tullamarine, Meadow Heights, Jacana, Campbellfield, Sunbury and Roxburgh Park. These towers were completed only a few years ago and face the more dated modernity of Broadmeadows Shopping Plaza. This is a mid-size single-storey centre with a lofty, glass-panelled roof. Too large to be exclusively local, too small to attract
residents from the extremities of the municipality or beyond, its nondescript façade of faded pastels signifies a modest suburban refinement: homemaking without pretence. A railway bridge links the residential and civic arms of this space, separated by the multi-lane axis of Pascoe Vale Road which runs north–south into the very outer northern suburbs of Melbourne.

Approaching the Global Learning Centre from the train station, you pass the Civic Plaza, a landscaped square comprising a paved space lined with a generous expanse of long metal benches and a garden of native grasses geometrically arranged in a triangular plot. A plaque in front of the plaza indicates that it was opened on 27 November 2007, ‘celebrating 150 years of local government in Hume’. It reads:

Local government is the ‘light on the hill’, as it is the level of government closest to the people working to advance the wellbeing of the community by providing services, facilities and support networks. The solar lights used in this plaza are a symbolic reminder of the important role of council in lighting the way to create a world class city for a community that is committed to learning, social justice and caring for the environment.

On the day of observation, teenagers from a local school were throwing a ball across the paved square, their school bags casually abandoned on the benches nearby.

It is clear that the aspiration for global status and world-class amenity have not grown organically from the ground up in Broadmeadows; nor has the ‘light’ of government always shone benignly down from above. The discontinuity of scale of the built environment and the current brazen corporate and civic branding in the city’s central hub attests to a concerted effort, one of many over the decades, to lift Broadmeadows out of the misfortunes, or rather, neglect of its past and conscript it into the 21st century circuits of power/knowledge deemed essential for ‘world class’ status and social progress.
What is more interesting is the way these efforts to transform Broadmeadows, these multiple efforts over time, reveal a layered history of place and place-making here. And the making of place is expressed through many voices, or multiple social registers, speaking to a mixed, or shifting audience: to locals transected by various lines of allegiance and affiliation, to government and its multiple and competing mandates, to outsiders, friendly, hostile and indifferent.

Susan Stewart (1984) argues that all public art is about narrativising the relationship between the governed and those who govern. Public art speaks from the vantage of those who govern, but includes a designated space for the vernacular life of the people:

Distinct from the domestic arts and the decontextualised art of the collection/museum, the art of public space is an eternalised parade, a fixing of the symbols of public life, of the state, within a milieu of the abstract authority of the polis. The reduction of the individual viewer in the face of the public monument is all the more evident in the function of the inscription; one is expected to read the instructions for perception of the work – to acknowledge the fallen, the victorious, the heroic, and be taken up in the history of place. All public monuments of this type are monuments to death and the individual’s prostration before history and authority. (Stewart, 1984, 90)

There is a sense of this ‘fixing’ in the Civic Plaza plaque. Reference to Ben Chifley’s ‘light on the hill’ speech invokes the narrative of government as care for the people, ‘bringing something better….better standards of living, greater happiness to the mass of the people.’ (Chifley, 2004)\(^7\). Referencing this speech also rather self-consciously connects this suburban periphery to the grander narrative of national progress, conscripting the council’s project here into the longer ‘heroic’ history of the Labour movement and its democratising ethos.

However, intertwined with this is also a different modality of public art, one that attempts to interpellate the viewer, not as prostrated subject, but as a citizen whose values and aspirations are shared by government. In addition to establishing the ‘abstract authority’ of the state, the

\(^7\) This speech was made in 1949.
voice of the plaza plaque reaches for proximity. While not claiming to embody ‘the people’, this voice emphasises government’s closeness to them, its commitment to enhancing the lives of the citizens within its purview. In this art, government reduces its stature from monumental symbol to human scale guardian. It figures itself not only as the light above, but also as the lights below, a ‘lighting the way’ on the citizen’s individual path through life, on their level, helping them to fulfil their aspirations. This art of public space reflects Nikolas Rose’s notion of a governing through community (Rose, 1996 and 1999). Rose is attentive to the language of this form of governing, its ‘vocabulary of community care, community homes, community workers’ and so on (Rose, 1996, 331). In Broadmeadows, governing through community is also reflected in built form, in the landscaping of public space, in public architecture and art, and in the voice of government as it speaks directly and officially to its constituency. This visual and spatial language of government mediates the citizen’s relationships to place. The clashing of scales in Broadmeadows suggests that an authoritarian model of governance has not simply been replaced by a more collaborative communitarian style. Rather, these different modes of governing, these different governing voices coexist and sound together and mediate citizens’ experiences of place.

THE PAST

Broadmeadows has a long colonial history but its reputation was forged in the 1950s and 1960s when the state government transformed its empty paddocks into large hastily constructed industrial housing estates built to absorb the population of declared slum areas from Melbourne’s inner city (Peel, 2003, 44; Mulligan et al., 2006b, 20). In his study of poverty in Australia, historian Mark Peel includes Broadmeadows amongst those neighbourhoods ‘perceived as the most disadvantaged places in the larger eastern cities’ (Peel, 2003, 3). The original estates were built to house a maximum number of occupants with minimal cost and so provided only the most basic amenity for living. The estates were poorly designed: ‘… in some streets, shifting ground prised apart the prefabricated concrete houses and rain poured down the walls. Mildew covered everything in cold weather’ (Peel, 2003, 44). An early resident, Carmel McMennemin, arrived in Broadmeadows in 1956 after
living in Brighton. She recalled coming to ‘the most Godforsaken place.’ No roads, just paddocks, framed the houses, built entirely by the housing commission.

When we came out here we didn’t have fences around the place, we didn’t have paths up to the house. So naturally when it rained, the children would be bringing mud and god knows what into the house. We had to equip the house with – it’s not like now. We had to put the blinds on ourselves and the floor coverings…

And these houses were hot as hogies in summer time, particularly in the early hours of the morning and very cold in winter time. Walls would run with condensation. Within a couple of days, shoes would grow mould with fur and behind the walls would be black….And to put in a complaint or make it known to the Housing Commission or the officers at the housing commission, one was actually ridiculed. You were inferred that you were dirty…” (McMennemin, 2003)

The unsympathetic attitude of the Housing Commission was remembered also by Jack Roper, another early Broadmeadows resident who later became a councillor in the area. He recalled a conversation with the public housing commission’ about combating the mould and mildew:

‘...cause you know the problem with the mould, it is warmth and damp.’
Yes I would go along with that,
‘Well if people would open their windows…’
In the wintertime?...you expect fucking people to load up their fireplace with wood to keep warm and then have the windows open to create a bloody draft so they won’t get the mould there, I said, they might as well not light a fucking fire at all, they should just sit there and freeze.
‘Well, I don’t like your language councillor.’
Maybe you don’t, I said. But that was their attitude, sometimes it was a tenant’s problem. (Roper, 2003)

Housing in this early period was inadequate and poorly designed. The estates were built on clay soil, which was unstable and untested as a construction base. Carmel McMennemin
explained that ‘on a clay soil, when it’s actually been dry for a while, well then when the rain comes, it actually moves, so you get gaps in the walls and corners. So it’s very hard to heat and cool’ (McMennemin, 2003). While these residents clearly remember their physical struggles with their flimsy temperature-challenged houses, it is the attitudes of the Housing Commission staff that they recall most vividly. Being thought of as troublesome or ridiculous or ‘dirty’ if they complained, reinforced a sense that they were second-class of citizens, lucky to have been provided with shelter and a patch of ground at all.

In Broadmeadows, the poor design, planning and amenity of the neighbourhood itself has had more enduring effects on people’s lives. The residential parts of Broadmeadows are sliced up by freeways and transport corridors. Pascoe Vale Road separates the central civic and residential zones of the suburb on its western end, while the Hume Highway carves through the eastern end, lined all along by large industrial parks including the Ford motor factory. At the southern end of Broadmeadows, the Western Ring Road runs into the Metropolitan Ring Road linking the northern and western suburbs of the city and funnelling freight traffic into the fast-moving freeway system. Built to foster the expansionist corporate and industrial ambitions of a metropolis, these urban arteries erode the habitability and integrity of the localities they cut through or bypass.

Drawing from the residents he spoke to, Peel’s account of this period conveys the overwhelming impression that this place was not conceived in terms of how people would dwell there. Broadmeadows was developed under the rationale of ‘not wasting money on the poor. In the minds of hard-pressed housing commission authorities, houses had to be built quickly to meet demand. ‘They had to be cheap in order to spread limited resources as far as possible. This meant providing very little’ (Peel, 2003, 42). Roads, schools, public transport were always promised for the future but were slow to materialise (Peel, 2003, 47). Basic infrastructure – gas, electricity, sewerage connections, and even basic footpaths – was only installed long after people had moved into their housing (Mulligan et al., 2006b, 20-21). This lack further entrenched the population’s social disadvantage, contributing to Broadmeadows’
reputation for being rough and inhospitable. As the years of government neglect continued, the locality’s colonial history was forgotten, its potential as a place of promise and natural beauty denied by the social ugliness it had cultivated (Lemon, 1982).

Compounding these problems was a paucity of local industries. Jack Roper said that there were no jobs in the area in the 1950s.

No industry around here, not until Ford got established, probably around the mid 60s I think they come up here. They were the biggest and then of course Eriksson’s came along and a different lot of industries came along then, but up until about the mid-60s most people went to work out of the area. (Roper, 2003)

Roper recalled also that there were only a few local shops within walking distance from his house – just a butcher’s shop and a milk bar from which he would carry home the fruit and veggies every Thursday. There was no public library and the school had insufficient infrastructure and teachers for the large number of students suddenly overwhelming the new estates (Roper, 2003). The Whitlam government of the 1970s provided some funding to improve local amenities, contributing to a community health centre and sporting complex. But the post-Whitlam period led to ‘a new period of neglect’ (Mulligan et al., 2006b, 21); development stagnated, and unemployment in the area grew as a young population vied for an insufficient number of jobs (Mulligan et al., 2006b, 21).

Peel’s account of Broadmeadows depicts it as a ‘shadow place’ of the nation, a badland in the sense that it concealed a social problem in order to make other places more inhabitable. Through the stories and memories of local residents, he conveys a sense of the multitude of ways the comforts of dwelling, and legitimacy in place, is instilled and fostered. The inhabitable place takes form through several different scales and registers – from the care in constructing an individual house, to public planning and social welfare policy, to state and global networks financing labour markets and industry – all of which were lacking in Broadmeadows. Most importantly for many residents, the very attitude and feeling of the
state towards them as citizens was palpable and present in every broken promise for infrastructure and resources, and every seeping wall and muddy unpaved tract of land that formed the daily grain of their life, silently impressing on them their expendable position in the nation space.

Less evident in Peel’s account is the way in which Broadmeadows’ history is also part of a story of reform and social progress through planning. The first housing developments were constructed after a Slum Abolition Board plan urging the removal of low-paid workers from crowded slums in the inner city (Mulligan et al., 2006b, 20). For Aidan Davison, such plans illustrate the ‘accelerated advance of Enlightenment rationalism’ that fuelled settler societies’ attempts to establish a modern society against a backdrop of ‘the wild strangeness of Indigenous order’ (Davison, 2006, 205). As much as residents were critical of the planning regime they were subject to, they were also invested in these reformist ideals, combining modern technologies of planning and zoning, modern discourses of health and hygiene and liberal ideals of upward social mobility, individuality and personal responsibility (Hoskins, 1994, 5; Davison, 2006, 207). Jack Roper recalled various successes as a councillor, like getting a swimming centre in the area or fighting to improve local schools. He also talks about his young daughter’s health improving in the open space of the estates, attributing this to the clean air and healthy lifestyle of suburban living: ‘There were no factories, no pollution, there was nothing’ (Roper, 2003). Although they were keenly aware of the deficiencies and difficulties of living in Broadmeadows, the stories of place from locals like Jack Roper and Carmel McMennemin are full of anecdotes celebrating neighbourliness, ingenuity and their persistent advocacy for themselves and their community in the face of governmental incompetence and wider political apathy. Carmel McMennemin remembered the tacit feeling of community solidarity during the early muddy days before footpaths and roads had been laid out:

…you’d go up to the station and there would be rows and rows of gumboots (to cross the mud in the absence of roads and footpaths) and oddly enough, I don’t think any of them were missing. They were
still there when you came back on the train after doing your shopping or wherever you went. And I will say this, I was never frightened coming home late at night. (McMennemin, 2003)

These kinds of attitudes are very different from the portraits of Broadmeadows painted by outsiders, dominated by opposing metaphors of criminality and violence – the badland, the Bronx – and of apathy, laziness and deficiency encoded in the rhetoric of sprawl. Rather, Jack’s and Carmel’s memories suggest an early investment in and ownership of this place, and also, in liberal governmental ideals of independence, responsibility, self-improvement and progress. In this sense, although the governmental plans for Broadmeadows were deeply flawed, the locals’ criticism of these plans did not reflect disinvestment in the social ideals these plans embodied.

THE PRESENT

Broadmeadows could be said to be only tangentially included in the geography of Melbourne’s west. It does not have the long settlement history or the noxious industries that mark traditional inner western suburbs like Footscray and Yarraville. Geographically, it is no longer the very outskirts of the city, the last stop on the train line. Contemporary Broadmeadows is more middle suburbia, and aspires to all the attributes and ideals of mainstream social life – home ownership, educational advancement, recreation, industry, commerce, creativity. The area has attracted a plethora of governmental services, often linked up with or complemented by highly active and diverse community groups.

Over the last two decades refugees and new migrants have settled in this once predominantly Anglo area and now, one in three of the local population was born in a non-English-speaking country (Mulligan et al., 2006b, 22). In addition to Vietnamese, Iraqi, Sri Lankan, Lebanese and Italian people, Broadmeadows has the largest Turkish population in greater Melbourne and a fast-growing Arabic-speaking community. The local council of Hume has been active in trying to reflect this changing social demographic in its cultural policy. Hume has had, and continues to have, cultural festivals, programs and projects that either involve or display this
‘new Broadmeadows’ to the local community and those outside it. Over the last decade, a
ing string of new facilities and services have been injected into the area, including the
construction of the Global Learning Centre, the first library in the suburb’s history.
Nevertheless, Broadmeadows is not widely known for its thriving cosmopolitanism, and
continues, to some degree, to function as a known site to project middle class ideas of
poverty and deficiency. As Jack Roper observed, ‘People don’t understand that the situation
has changed but the stories don’t’ (Roper, 2003). Broadmeadows’ history of bad press and
bad reputation has endured despite the transformations in the suburb’s demography and
governance.

Stories by outsiders reveal a similar kind of ambivalence to the media projections of western
Sydney documented by Diane Powell. But there is an interesting obliqueness to the
contemporary media stigmatisation of Broadmeadows. In September 2008, Lindsay Tanner,
the then federal finance minister, deployed Broadmeadows in opposition to Toorak,
Melbourne’s most affluent suburb, in a comment about the luxury car tax8. The ease with
which he reached for this comparison made the connotations clear without elaboration:
Toorak, the epitome of bourgeois wealth and social ease is the antithesis of Broadmeadows,
home of disadvantage, unemployment and social struggle. More recently, the international
model, the strikingly beautiful ‘femiman’ Andrej Pejic has been making headlines in
Australian newspapers. While poring over his androgynous features, few articles fail to
mention that Pejic is from Broadmeadows, as if to wonder how such a flower could emerge
from this wasteland of a place (Herald Sun, 2011; Carbonne, 2011). A year earlier, a
newspaper headline referred to Broadmeadows as a ‘jobless ghetto’ after the closure of a few
large employers in the area (Shneiders, 2010). Reportage of a ‘surge’ in unemployment may
have been based on factual data, but use of the word ‘ghetto’ once again recalls the
sensationalist language of the ‘Bronx’ with its associations of indentured poverty and
depravity.

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8 This comment was made on an interview on the current affairs program, Lateline, 4 September 2008.
Returning to the present and the visible urban landscape, the language of governance is writ large, inscribed at varying scales across the terrain of public life. Apart from a couple of eateries, Broadmeadows train station is sheathed in a number of governmental agencies or their subsidiary service providers: Breastscreen Victoria, Victorian Legal Aid, the Adult Multicultural Education Service (AMES) and Distinctive Options Employment Agency are the commuter’s first introduction to the neighbourhood. The building housing the Global Learning Centre extends the reach of governmental service from the personal to the civic. The Hume Council logo and The Age newspaper logo dominate the lower third of the outer glass skin of the building, merging governmental with corporate branding. The Civic Plaza plaque further amplifies the effects of this signage, narrating in overt terms the governmental narrative of community advancement materially visible in the built landscape.

The City of Hume was, in 2001, the first municipality in the nation to introduce a Social Justice Charter, containing a Citizen’s Bill of Rights. The Charter is built around a governmental ‘vision’ of Hume as a city ‘renown for social justice, lifelong learning and community inclusion’ (Hume City Council, 2007, 2). In the introduction to the Charter, the then mayor of Hume, Gary Jungwirth, identified the Global Learning Centre as a key governmental ‘action’ taken to meet their vision of ‘lifelong learning’. ‘One of the pathways out of disadvantage is lifelong learning and we have created the nationally and internationally acclaimed Hume Global Learning Village and first library in Broadmeadows’ (Hume City Council, 2007, 1). A poverty enquiry in 2003 identified high levels of ‘disadvantage’ in Hume (Hume City Council, 2007, 1). Australian Bureau of Statistics figures from 2001 indicate that Broadmeadows had three times the unemployment levels of Melbourne as a whole and that almost a quarter of those employed were in part-time, largely low-skilled, low-income employment (Mulligan et al., 2006b, 23). In 2004, the federal member for the electorate of Calwell (which includes Broadmeadows) gave a speech to parliament drawing attention to governments’ failures to include everyone in the opportunities of the nation. ‘Broadmeadows’, Vamvakinos said, ‘is a suburb which historically has carried social stigma
and a reputation of hardship... In two reports over four years, Broadmeadows has remained one of the nation’s most disadvantaged postcodes (Vamvakinou, 2004).

Such statistics suggest that Broadmeadows’ reputation as disadvantaged and socially marginal is not simply the overhang of some sort of historical bias, but is based in fact. These reports and statistics form the evidentiary base from which politicians and local agencies advocate for increased funding and renewed efforts to end disadvantage, and to ‘close poverty traps’ as Vamvakinou (2004) expressed it. At the same time, the discourse of disadvantage and marginality can easily overwhelm the specific focus on income and employment disparities and have an impact on the framing of place as a whole. Gillian Cowlishaw argues that the discourse of the ‘marginal’ or ‘disadvantaged’ place establishes a position of judgement that serves explicitly to reinforce the legitimacy and dominance of a centre. Cowlishaw (2004) analyses the dramatization of racial tensions in the rural town of Bourke in mid-west New South Wales. She depicts Bourke as a town rigidly racially divided, where the apparently violent and abject lives of the town’s significant Aboriginal population are routinely scripted into a narrative of social degeneration and malaise. These lives in this place are rendered marginal because they are deployed to illustrate their failed conscription into the norms of national sociality and civic conduct by ‘those whose judgments dominate the world’ (Cowlishaw, 2004, 5). Cowlishaw’s analysis is instructive because of the way she resists this marginalising discourse. First, she bears witness to the way Aboriginal residents of Bourke actively, and at times, gleefully, perform the abject roles in which they are cast. Second, Cowlishaw exposes the unequal and racialised relations of power this discourse sustains.

Similarly, Mark Peel avoids reiterating this politics of domination by documenting the way residents of Broadmeadows perform their poverty. He narrates the way external ‘experts’ and the objects of their expertise collaborate and collude in a performance that reinforces the roles of each party:

For people living and working in suburbs such as these, describing disadvantage is always a dialogue. Albeit one in which they never have
the final say. The constant round of reports, consultations and news stories was and is part of life’s rhythm…When you are asked stupid questions like ‘Are there any problems?’, you seize your opportunity. They won’t listen to you anyway, because their answers are already in place, and their images of your life – a few used needles, tattooed teenagers and the only smashed-up house in the street – are already on the videotape. If they’re not, they’ll cut in from last year’s exposé. In the end it’s easier just to play the game. (Peel, 2003, 26-27)

There is a significant difference between the social agency of urban, white, working-class subjects impoverished through economic downturns or poor planning, and rural Indigenous subjects dispossessed at the very inception of the nation-state. But Cowlishaw and Peel converge in illustrating how a discourse of marginality strips people of the integrity of their lives, discounting the possibilities of alternative cultural worlds and their systems of value. In such a discourse, each party is condemned to ‘play the game’ over and over. What is more interesting still is the complex interaction between mythologies of place (the badland, the sprawling suburbia), techniques of governance, and social structures and behaviours. Peel suggests the ways in which reports on poverty and experts in social health and wellbeing might actually contribute to reproducing the very thing they are meant to highlight and eradicate. In this sense, to govern the disadvantaged or marginal place is to take an active part in shaping this ‘narrative thing’, the badland, ‘set in a natural location’ (Gibson, 2004, 15).

**THE GLOBAL LEARNING CENTRE**

Entering the foyer of the Global Learning Centre, the visitor ascends a curved stairway leading to the library above. This space is the heart of the building, bustling and well resourced. The library features computer terminals with free wireless and internet access, casual armchairs for reading magazines and newspapers, CDs, DVDs, a local history and family history collection, a quiet study room, meeting rooms, conference facilities, an exhibition space and a sizable borrowing collection in nine different languages other than English – Arabic, Chinese, Turkish, Vietnamese, Sinhalese, Croatian, Italian, Spanish and
Greek. Enthusiastic, multiethnic staff run a variety of library programs for the local community – like a bilingual story time for children in Assyrian, Arabic and Turkish, and an IT learning program. The library is busy. Under the bright lights African teenagers browse the internet, old Anglo women read magazines, Turkish mothers and their children attend a Turkish language story time and a Vietnamese family search the library shelves for school books.

Where the library hums with activity of all ages and ethnicities, the foyer below is bland, uninviting and almost empty. In the foyer, the only evidence of the kind of social diversity and vibrancy apparent in the library above is through a community notice board, discreetly positioned behind the stairs near an empty computer lab. An extraordinary polyphony of activities, social services and circuits, community concerns and needs, networks and advertisements exude from the bricolage of pamphlets and notices on this board. They include but are not limited to numerous volunteers for foster-carers; Greenvale Youth Futsal League; a computer and homework program; a service to detox your home; free English lessons for textile workers from the Textile Clothing and Footwear Union of Australia; a call for volunteers to teach English for the Adult Migrant English Program; Centrelink advising of penalties for welfare recipients who do not register changes in personal circumstances; a call for volunteer tutors for AMES; Our Broadmeadows, a notice informing residents of a plan to merge secondary schools in Broadmeadows; Join the Fun, an advertisement for a children’s playgroup and many other playgroup notices; YADI, a group for 14-23 year old gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender youth in the city of Hume sponsored by several community organisations and health services in the area; a proposal about the new Merri Creek Park plan from Parks Victoria; wheelchair football, and several notices for yoga classes. The abundance of activity and community involvement evident here seems even more remarkable when compared to my own public library notice board in an inner city Melbourne suburb. Over a period of six months, St Kilda’s public library notice board featured no more than eight or so notices, most from the city council itself, at least two advising of meditation workshops in the local public gardens.
Taking in the present landscape of Broadmeadows’ city centre, the governmental discourse of social justice, lifelong learning and community inclusion, the cluster of activity in the library and the dense network of interactions and affiliations reflected in the community noticeboard, there is a perceptible change here from the atmosphere of governmental neglect and intimidation documented by Mark Peel and remembered by Jack Roper and Carmel McMennemin. The recent history of Broadmeadows can perhaps be best characterised as a history of the changing dynamic between governance and place. During the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, governmental neglect alternated with targeted social and welfare programs responding to local needs. The 1990s were characterised by a more punitive approach, where rather than illumination from the governmental ‘light on the hill’, Broadmeadows people were caught in the headlights of power, beholden to rigid stipulations for welfare while abandoned to the vicissitudes of the global free market.

The present Broadmeadows reflects both a concentration and a diffuson of governmental investment in place and people. Governance here seems to be a structuring presence in people’s everyday lives, involved in their care and their personal and collective development through a variety of agencies, programs and experts. This is expressed at different registers, from the abstract discourse of ‘rights’ documented in the Social Justice Charter, to the more concrete provision of services and facilities available in the library. Citizens take shape through their engagement with this multi-layered governmental apparatus; they are ‘active elements in their own self government’ (Rose, 1996, 347) in that governmental ideals of educational advancement and community wellbeing are tied to the citizens’ own aspiration for themselves. Nikolas Rose, through Paul Veyne, has noted that ‘there is no universal object, the governed, in relation to which a body of governors proceeds to act’ (Rose, 1999, 40). For Rose, the relationship between the governed and those who govern is reciprocal, fluid and co-constitutive. ‘The governed vary over time; indeed there is no such thing as ‘the governed’, only multiple objectifications of those over whom government is to be exercised, and whose characteristics government must harness and instrumentalise’ (Rose, 1999, 40).
The current Broadmeadows reflects a shift in the objectification of the governed, and a corresponding shift in the modes and methods of governance. ‘The people’ have been reframed from a cost to be minimised, a social risk to be managed, to being understood as ‘citizens entitled to aspire to the quality of life that allows them to freely realise their potential’ (Hume City Council, 2007, 5). This framing coexists with the discourse of marginality and disadvantage that ties aspiration to nationally sanctioned norms. *The Weaving Lands* represents a further nuance (or added layer) in this governmental reframing: ‘the people’ are to recognise themselves as members of an interconnected, cross-cultural community, and to see themselves as of this place.

**The Weaving Lands**

*The Weaving Lands* sits in a corner of The Global Learning Centre, under the stairs. Every year it seems to move farther and farther back into the shadows. Its homespun quality is at odds with the anodyne corporate polish of the foyer, like an odd prop displaced from the play that once gave it meaning.

*The Weaving Lands* was initiated in 2003, at a time when the municipal government of Hume was undertaking a large-scale urban renewal of key precincts within the municipality (Hume City Council, 2003, 7), one of many renewals over successive decades. The council recognised the need to ‘visually acknowledge and celebrate the diverse localities, cultures and histories that exist within Hume City through built and environmental design’ (Hume City Council, 2003, 7). There is evidence of this recognition of cultural diversity in the multiple languages used in public signage, for example. The main language groups, Turkish, Arabic, Italian, Greek and Vietnamese, are prominent on and around major public buildings and there is further recognition by the council to include these groups more consciously in participating in the broader community (Hume City Council, 2007, 4). *The Weaving Lands* is singled out in the strategy document as one of the rare instances in which the council has embarked on a public art project. Projects like these are perceived as important because they
are one of the other ways through which diversity – cultural, environmental and historical – can be articulated and fostered.

Within the civic vision of Hume’s Social Justice Charter, *The Weaving Lands* could be interpreted as responding to a governmental commitment to ‘community inclusion’. The Charter defines Hume as a city ‘in which its citizens, together with those who work within and visit Hume, experience the highest quality of life, a healthy admiration for the environment and a genuine respect for friends, neighbours and strangers alike’ (Hume City Council, 2007, 2). In the same way that the council’s commitment to lifelong learning tacitly intimates the high levels of disadvantage in Hume, the reference to ‘admiration for the environment’ and ‘genuine respect’ for others suggests, obliquely, anxieties about social friction in this culturally diverse locality and a sense of dislocation. Anne Kershaw talks about *The Weaving Lands* in the context of these anxieties and negative feelings. She talks about the social tensions in Broadmeadows, with its large Middle Eastern and Islamic community, after the September 11 attacks (Kershaw, 2006):

> Hopefully …those who aren’t the dominant culture, who aren’t usually represented in the community, take reassurance and strength from the fact that they are acknowledged and represented visually. And those from the Anglo backgrounds start to think, for example, that that’s a pretty design without even realising it’s an Islamic design. They will start to realise that there are beautiful things in these cultures. That not everyone from overseas is a terrorist. (Kershaw, 2006)

She mentions the difficulties in acclimatising ‘our community from overseas’ to the natural environment, so uninviting and unfamiliar to people with a European ideal of landscape. She notes also the importance of transforming the negative stereotypes about Broadmeadows. For her, the project is about ‘uniting people under one project’ and ‘bringing people together. We’re celebrating our cultural diversity’ (Kershaw, 2006). But, like earlier displays of community feeling around Broadmeadows, Kershaw suggests that this celebration skirts around strong feelings of social unease. Those who are not in the dominant culture require ‘reassurance and strength’; those who are ‘dominant’ need proof that ‘not everyone from
overseas is a terrorist’. It is clear that Broadmeadows’ cultural diversity is threatening to some and that everyone here feels an equal stake in place. The Weaving Lands is not a direct response to Hume’s civic vision – and was initiated before the wording of the 2007 version of the Social Justice Charter was finalised. However, Kershaw circumscribes her explanation of the project largely within its official policy language; it is about ‘community participation’, ‘community engagement’ and ‘cross-cultural’ work. Only occasionally does she hint at the deep-seated problems of place this language obscures.

Anne Kershaw was the Arts and Cultural Planning Officer of the local council of Hume. She had worked in policy development within local government, particularly arts and cultural policy. In an interview about The Weaving Lands, she considers her role in the project in terms of community cultural development. She emphasises that for her, community cultural development is about “giving up control. For me, control and power, and where they sit in a community project, is very important” (Kershaw, 2006). Not being an artist or a director herself, Kershaw said that she did not feel “protective” (Kershaw, 2006) over the project in the same way an artist might. She implies that her value to the project is in her distance from the work; she is able to cede control to others – locals, residents, visiting artists, other professionals working in Hume – so that the project can take shape through their views and contributions. She narrates the genesis and motivation for the project as emerging through a number of different conceptual threads. The first and most resonant motivation was in addressing the way people related to Broadmeadows’ natural environment.

I know that the environment people (in the local council) have always had that real challenge, and been quite motivated by the challenge, of interpreting our indigenous environment to the community, and particularly to communities from overseas. (Broadmeadows forms) part of the basalt grasslands, it’s not treed, or woody, or rainforest, or anything that is visually appealing, or understood, or appreciated by people. It’s more a sort of dry functional environment. So it’s always been a challenge to interpret and place a value on the environment. (Kershaw, 2006)
Using the environment as their subject, Kershaw also wanted to express something of the cultural diversity of Broadmeadows, inflecting a civic optimism and sense of participation that diverged significantly from the locality’s rough, isolated reputation, maintained by outsiders, but also felt by many residents. This expression of cultural diversity was organised around the cross-cultural engagement of local people rather than the performance of different cultural groups, the multiculture, to an unmarked (white) audience:

I was looking for a project that would have broad community participation. So I really wanted a number of cultural groups to be involved in the project. That was one of the indicators we set early on in the work. We were looking to try and share skills and designs and techniques across community groups. I was looking for organised groups – such as the Basketmakers of Victoria – to come and realise the local assets that we had as a place of traditional skills, and for them to increase their knowledge and skills by using our local people as a resource. I was hoping that that would be a reciprocal thing as well – that some of our local people would realise that they had skills which would take them into some of these mainstream organisations.

(Kershaw, 2006)

Kershaw locates the initial idea for the project in a story from a participant in the multicultural Spring Planting Festival, another community arts project in the area:

Kurdish women had picked grasses that were growing near where they were doing the plantings, and had woven them into hats, and had worn them around, and saying that this was what they would do during the harvest festival in Turkey. It was just a little story that stayed with me. (Kershaw, 2006)

Soon after hearing this story Kershaw attended a conference organised by the Cultural Development Network where an Indigenous artist talked about a basket-making project they had run with the Indigenous community in the local council of Port Phillip. ‘The two stories sprang together’ and Kershaw decided to mobilise all of the different community groups and social networks in and around Hume and those connected to more mainstream weaving
collectives in Melbourne, to participate in a basket-making project for and about Broadmeadows.

Our aim was always through this to produce a big sculpture that would go on display at the Global Learning Centre, because that opened a few months after this project finished. We needed something that was a cultural project which would have a permanent presence in the Global Learning Centre and which spoke very strongly to the cultural diversity of the community, and just grounded it in this community. So basketry made predominantly of indigenous materials is of the community in a way which the building isn’t necessarily’ (Kershaw, 2006)

Through a series of workshops held at the City of Hume’s Multicultural Planting Festival, Broadmeadows Festival, at Migrant Resource Centres, TAFE colleges, the houses of local people and a large one-day basketry forum at Youth Central, the sculpture took form in an intricate collage of woven styles and textures, under the direction of artist Wendy Golden. Participants included Kurdish, Samoan, Maori, Indian, Sri Lankan, Italian, Laosian, Pakistani, Japanese and Indigenous weavers from Broadmeadows and its surrounds, as well as some visiting basket-makers from the craft group, Basketmakers of Victoria.

Wendy was the Artistic Director, but we didn’t know what the piece would be. That sat with Wendy for a while. We were originally thinking something spherical, like literal interpretation of the Global Learning Centre. Wendy eventually settled on the idea of a tree. She gave us a lovely statement – with Hume as a growing community, the branches and leaves representing the diversity of the community, and the setting down of roots representing new migrants to the area and refugees and new arrivals. (Kershaw, 2006)

Kershaw saw the need to further ‘reinforce’ the meaning of the sculpture through an Indigenous naming. She sent a letter to Norm Hunter, who had attended one of the workshops at the Spring Planting Festival and asked him to provide a Wurundjeri name. “The structure of the sculpture is made of “the lawyer vine” (vines from Queensland) and Norm said he’d watched that process and said the shape of it was like a backbone. And also
a sense of moving to the future’ (Kershaw, 2006). The Backbone of Tomorrow, or ‘The Galgi-gnarrak Yirranboi Tree’ emerged from these observations.

Up close, the Galgi-gnarrak Yirranboi Tree is a complex intertwining of textures, styles and subtly varied colours. Bulrush, tall spike rush, tussock grass, wedge leaf, hop bush, mat rush, flat lily, eucalypt bark and twigs, lawyer vine, New Zealand flax, fav grass, rattan, wool (dyed using Indigenous plant dyes) and industrial textile waste make up its skeleton, its body and canopy of leaves. You can see the interlocking weft of the lawyer vine snaking up the trunk of the tree, very much like a backbone or ladder reaching into the future. Despite the varied weaving styles visible in the sculpture, there is a coherence and integrity to the whole structure. The textures and detailed patterns draw your eye inward, into the inner workings of the branches, as if a highly evolved system of veins and arteries has evolved to supply the tree with a grassy energy.

Kershaw’s vision of the project is faithful to Lucy Lippard’s ideal of community art as an art ‘of place – made by artists within their own places or with the people who live in the scrutinized place, connecting with the history and environment’ (Lippard, 1997, 263). Place is animated at a multitude of levels from the locality’s native grasses, to its networks of local community groups, its educational institutions, annual festivals, sites and resource centres. And yet, what is interesting about this work is the hybridity of place it animates; there are many ‘elsewheres’ that are ‘of’ this place. In Paul Carter’s terms, *The Weaving Lands* animates the ‘cumulative trace of many journeys’ (Carter, 2009, 5), which lie below the surface of any design on the world. Kershaw’s story of the Kurdish women weaving hats – the generative spark of this project – captures something of this hybridity and displacement. Does their weaving on the grasslands of Broadmeadows, in the way they would during the harvest festival in Turkey, recall a loss of traditional culture; and does the translation of this story into the formality of the sculpture display this loss? Or does their weaving, extending across continents, across the ‘middle passage’ as Bhabha calls it, constitute a continuity of culture, a continuity linking this land to the ‘home’ land of Turkey which is also, notoriously, not the
home land of the Kurds? And do the grasslands of Broadmeadows now not only embed an Indigenous presence, but also harbour this foreign tradition? The women seem to have an ease with the landscape. They know which grasses to pick. They are able to make something useful of them where others have seen only emptiness or wasted space. Their weaving seems ‘of’ this place in a way that makes the ground itself indeterminate in its connection to Anglo-Australia. It is as if these women – a people without a homeland – have had a presence here all along.

The notion of tradition comes across as equally hybrid and fluid. One participant, a Samoan community elder, Mai Grey, learned to weave as the wife of the local pastor for the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa. She went to missionary school where she was taught basket-making as ‘something she could pass on to local women as a way of kick starting local industry’ (Kershaw, 2006). Wendy Golden wondered whether her basket-making techniques were ‘traditional’ or missionary-taught, ‘which would have happened a couple of hundred years ago’ (Kershaw, 2006). Such a distinction only underscores the ambiguity of tradition. It gestures towards the ways in which ‘tradition’ functions as an invention of modernity, to instate the ‘modern’ culture at the tip of a hierarchy of social progress. The uncertainty over Mai Grey’s weaving invokes all the traffic of this colonial modernity: the human exchanges between coloniser and colonised and the economies, cultural and monetary, that flowed from this; the transmission of ideas, techniques and practices, and their fusing in ways that defeat any search for authenticity or origin. It is in this sense that The Weaving Lands embodies the kinds of cultural hybridities that for Bhabha tell another story of colonialism and of the modern nation (Bhabha, 1997)9. In this other story, ‘cultural displacement’ is the ground from which one begins to understand culture, and the condition from which an idea of place is expressed.

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9 See particularly chapters 1 and 8 of The Location of Culture.
Despite the hybridity of the weavers’ traditional techniques, Kershaw notes that most weavers were not interested in learning the techniques of their fellow participants. They were concerned with maintaining their own practices in an environment lacking the right materials:

The Samoans couldn’t do basket-making without pandanus leaves, and the Maoris had to have the flax for their basket making. So they did realise that cumbungi, our indigenous bulrush, is a lovely material to work with. So that fed back to the environmental aims that we were after. And we showed them where cumbungi grows locally, and where they can harvest it from if they want to. That gave us the link back to understanding our indigenous environment. We don’t have pandanus trees growing here; we don’t have willow, which is what the Kurdish people were after; we don’t have loads of flax. But these are the materials that we do have, and they are very lovely to work with, and this is where it grows. (Kershaw, 2006)

Somehow, Indigenous presence gets lost here. While Norm Hunter’s naming of the sculpture indicates Indigenous relationships to this place in a symbolic sense, Indigenous presence, a sense of their activity in this landscape, with their own traditions for using and maintaining its resources, recedes in Kershaw’s story of cultural mixing, invention and substitution. But Kershaw’s story recalls another grassland, a grassland rationalised by the profit-driven motives of industrial agricultural. Ross Gibson describes the canefields of 19th century central Queensland as a place brimming with ‘ingenious heterogeneity’ (Gibson, 2002, 156) as a profusion of Islanders, Melanesians and Chinese were drawn in to labour for the sugar industry. Sharing only a ‘mutual estrangement’ (Gibson, 2002, 119), this diverse group of people found themselves together, forced into ‘invention’ and ‘negotiation’ as a way of preserving their own cultures while making ‘a little wealth’ (Gibson, 2002, 156). For the ‘administrators of White Australia’ (Gibson, 2002, 156), such cultural and social abundance, and its inevitable entropy, could not be assimilated within their vision of settlement and the national home they were committed to building. This ‘protean world’ (Gibson, 2002, 156) had to be isolated, and ultimately erased. By comparison, the administrators of Hume seek to insinuate themselves deep into the fibres of the immigrant community within their jurisdiction. In their efforts to govern through art, to develop trust, cross-cultural sharing
and respect, they seek to create conditions where the ‘ingenious heterogeneity’ of this place can be both enfranchised and controlled.

I encountered *The Weaving Lands* long after it was completed and so was not present at the workshops and basketry forum where the work took place. In 2011, I came upon a similar community basket-making project developed to revive the traditional weaving practices of the Aboriginal community around Blacktown, NSW. *Garaarr* (grass), by the artist r e a, was exhibited at the Blacktown Arts Centre. It featured a video installation of the weavers ‘interlaced’ with sound recordings of their reflections about what weaving meant to them (r e a, 2011). The video frames each weaver seated in close-up, their hands at the centre of the screen. Something of the embodied quality of weaving, its rhythms, what it teaches about materials and methods, is conveyed through a steady choreography of hands. As the artist herself remarks, one cannot help being struck by the ‘extraordinarily visceral, tactile and almost meditative state that weaving seems to induce in those who engage in it’ (r e a, 2011, np).

As a technique of governance designed to re-narrate place, to connect citizens to place and to each other, *The Weaving Lands* brings the ‘art of public space’ (Stewart, 1984, 90) into the body of the citizen. If considered in the narrative terms defined by Susan Stewart, rather than establishing the authority of those who govern, in this instance, governmental authority, its techniques for shaping conduct, becomes imperceptible, physically absorbed in the ‘meditative’ act of weaving. This tree which represents community literally binds a disparate collection of people into a durable, integrated organism through their shared process. But one cannot help recalling the other tree in the mall of Olsen Place, its faded leaves actually peeling off the wall of the local clinic. The impulse to articulate community in ‘natural’ terms, as natural as a tree laying down roots, seems to wilfully elide the labour of making community – a labour that itself performs governmental work.
Nikolas Rose talks about the way governing through community is also always a governing to create community. Governments ‘attempt to ‘empower’ the inhabitants of particular inner-city locales by constituting those who reside in a certain locality as “a” community’ (Rose, 1996, 336). Moreover, this empowering, this constituting ‘as’ community serves a broader governmental rationale. Community ‘is itself a means of government: its ties, bonds, forces and affiliations are to be celebrated, encouraged, nurtured, shaped and instrumentalised in the hope of enhancing the security of each and of all’ (Rose, 1999, 250). Rose is talking here about the instrumentalisation of community to control crime. However, this rationale seems equally valid in the context of Hume City Council’s commitment to ‘community inclusion’. Kershaw’s reasoning for *The Weaving Lands* was not simply to empower community. The project was itself the means through which not-yet-existing social ties were to be instrumentalised in the hope of re-shaping place in terms of ‘cultural diversity’ (Kershaw, 2006). Kershaw acknowledges her ‘limited’ capacity ‘politically within local government’ to directly address the social tensions resulting from this reshaping of place (Kershaw, 2006).

But her oblique references to trying to allay feelings of insecurity, fear and hostility in Broadmeadows\(^\text{10}\) suggest that the benign discourse of ‘community inclusion’ is not so far from the more conservative neoliberal discourse of managing risk for the ‘security of each and of all’. I do not mean to suggest that the council’s commitment to ‘community inclusion’ betrays its fear of the ‘other’ in Broadmeadows. Nor do I mean to suggest that the interests of White Australia continue to reside at the centre of governmental policies around cultural diversity (as Ghassan Hage and others have argued). What I am arguing here is that the cultural politics enacted through a project like *The Weaving Lands* are more ambiguous than either the rhetoric of White Australia or multiculturalism can articulate. This politics is glimpsed in the bad feeling which skirts the edges of this project and the place it addresses. It is in Kershaw’s careful navigation of this feeling that her governmental work can be said to be bound up in the ‘narrative thing’ of the badland.

\(^{10}\) The vilification of Arabic-speaking and Muslim residents following the September 11 terrorist attacks in 2001 was renewed after the Bali Bombings in 2005.
In this chapter, I have endeavoured to illustrate how The Weaving Lands can be interpreted through a variety of discursive framings. As a form of governing through community it attempts to inject ‘community feeling’ in a problematic place where issues of dislocation and cultural tension run deeper than what the transformative power of art can access. Within an arts discourse, it is an inversion of the conventions of public art. Rather than being prostrated before history and authority, the citizen’s own experiences and knowledges become the subject of art, and expressed as the ‘life of the city’ (Stewart, 1984, 90). Within an anthropological discourse, The Weaving Lands expresses the hybridity of tradition within a multicultural, postcolonial context. As diasporic communities, the weavers adapt their techniques to this new environment while still maintaining their cultural difference. The Weaving Lands also conveys the ambivalence of settler-colonial relationships to place. It attempts to re-script the badland narrative of Broadmeadows while at the same time, preserving the authority and values of a national centre. But, in my schema, as a location of culture The Weaving Lands has to be considered through all these discourses and the gaps between them. More than this, it has to be considered for its material and conceptual work, for the way it tethers different practices, rationalities, discourses, social relationships, social registers and objects into new configurations that exceed the classifications of settler-colonial modernity. Thinking about the project in this way means abandoning the idea of making a definitive interpretive statement about this project. The plurality and instability of this location of culture suggests the need for new terms to understand the ‘continuous process’ of settlement (Rose, 2004, 6).

**EPILOGUE**

For one weaver, The Weaving Lands foregrounds the way in which ‘human intimacy with landscapes’ (Langton, 2003) can be manufactured, even in a landscape to which she could claim no deep personal connection. Kiri Dewes is an elder in the Maori community in Broadmeadows. As an immigrant – she immigrated to Australia permanently in 1996 – Dewes was highly conscious of the need to maintain the traditional culture and language of the local Maori community. Trained originally as a teacher, Dewes is also a poet, storyteller
and translator. She is deeply conscious of what the loss of language and culture means for people. “Even today, I’m teaching a lot of our traditional stuff, including our language to our people” (Dewes, 2006). She explained that for about fifty years, the Maori language was banned in schools. “So there’s a lack of knowledge about language for those up to fifty years old. So a lot of them are going back to university to learn. Because without a language you are nothing” (Dewes, 2006). Dewes was interested in participating in The Weaving Lands, but not as an exercise in cross-cultural learning or for the aesthetic qualities that Kershaw valued. For her, the project was an opportunity to advance her primary concern: keeping Maori culture strong in a changing world.

For me, (weaving) is just hanging onto a part of me that was born into me. Weaving was a skill that my people before me had, they handed it down, and I don’t want it to die in my generation. I want my children, and my grandchildren, and my great grandchildren to learn the skills of their people, and to hang onto the language. And weaving is one of them. So I teach my grandchildren. They’re singing our songs, they’re dancing our dances, and they are learning the language through song and through conversations I have with them. I tell them these stories about the flax plant and how important it is. And I tell them not only about the flax plant, but also about any plant. I don’t want them to hurt any plant. (Dewes, 2006)

Kiri Dewes wanted to make use of the flax, which is not abundant in Melbourne. And the flax that is around has been ‘badly treated’ she said (Dewes, 2006). ‘I’ve already made my complaint to the Hume. Some people have already been there cutting, but they don’t cut it right. They need looking after. The dead ones have to be taken away’ (Dewes, 2006).

Dewes draws on a range of ways of relating in articulating a ‘human intimacy’ with place. For her, The Weaving Lands was not an opportunity to celebrate her culture, nor was she interested in connecting with other communities in the vicinity. In contrast to Kershaw’s aesthetic valuing of art and weaving – the ‘pretty’ designs, the ‘lovely’ materials – Dewes values weaving for its pedagogic qualities. It is a way of retaining what was ‘born into’ her; it is a means of transmitting this knowledge to her children, grandchildren and great
grandchildren; it is a vehicle for learning to properly care for a natural resource, to maximise this resource and make it useful. This is a practical and quotidian cultural discourse but also one bound up with ‘cultural connection’ (Rigby, 2003, 112). Through this holistic combination of qualities and practices, Dewes can be said to have an ‘intimacy’ with place. Notably, her pedagogy extends to the governmental authorities responsible for the care of the land around Hume. Like the artists critical of *The West Welcomes Refugees*, Dewes sees local government – ‘the Hume’ – as integral to the way an authentic relating to place might be enacted. Her sense of belonging in place is not only about personal memories, tactile encounters and knowledge, but about having this officialised in some way and built into commonplace practices of care. This is how she inhabits Broadmeadows as part of an integrated system of living. It is not clear whether Dewes feels at home here. More likely, she knows that in this constantly changing and multilayered place, home in phenomenological terms – as sanctuary, as the origin of the self, as retreat from the world – is not recoverable. Her rationale for making place is aligned with, but less contradictory than the rationales informing most community art in the badlands. It is about establishing conditions where an inhabitable place is possible when the recovery of home, the world she was ‘born into’, is not. Dewes’s pedagogic practices enact a minor reworking of belonging in the settler-colonial nation. Her kind of place-making bears upon how we might interpret the everyday exchanges and encounters theorised as ‘everyday multiculturalism’ and explored in Chapter Six. Like Dewes’s practices, these mundane exchanges also speak of a foregoing of the taken-for-granted comfort of home in exchange for making an inhabitable place.
Chapter Five


In my Introduction and Chapter Two: Governing Through Art, I discuss the contradictory politics of community arts. I note that while this work is celebrated for ‘mobilising resistance to imposed cultural values’ (Adams & Goldbard, 2001, 2) it is at the same time enmeshed within the apparatus of governance. As such, the arts are instrumentalised for the purpose of extending dominant social norms to socially marginalised or disadvantaged parts of the population; they are legitimised precisely because of their capacity to impose cultural values where other governmental techniques have failed. In Australia, the early community arts movement’s ‘radical’ politics (Grostan & Harrison, 1994, 148), its commitment to progressive social ideals and a transformation of society, is still apparent in contemporary discourses celebrating the ‘art of ordinary people’ (Hawkes, 2004, 20) and art’s abilities to ‘transform communities’ (Mills, 2005, 2). But this transformative power and activist politics is in tension with the professionalisation of community arts as a field of practice and its increasing deployment by government as a viable response to a range of targeted social problems, addressed for the purpose of sustaining mainstream interests and norms (Mowbray, 2005).

Mae Shaw echoes a number of community arts commentators in recognising the contradictory qualities inherent in the field:

Undoubtedly, part of community development’s continuous attraction as mediator between the state and particular ‘problem’ constituencies lies in its professional versatility and political adaptability. This is both its strength and its weakness because, although it can be appropriated to maintain the *status quo* and preserve privilege, it can also create an
increasingly rare public space for the expression of various forms of
common position and collective identity or, indeed, dissent. (Shaw,
2007, 33)

Shaw argues that the ambivalence of community arts rests upon the inherent ambivalence of
the appeal to community itself. A thorough unpacking of the history of sociological
understandings of community is beyond the purview of this thesis.\footnote{Gerard Delanty, Zygmunt Bauman and Richard Sennett have both written extensively on the appeal to community. Martin Mulligan’s 2012 symposium paper, ‘Working with the idea of community’, includes a thorough history of sociological understandings of community, and more recent critiques of these understandings.} What I take from this
richly theorised area of study, however, is Shaw’s pithy summation. She sees the appeal to
community as emerging out of two ‘competing visions’ that have ‘produced two separate
discourses, which continue to vie for loyalty and legitimacy in policy and in practice’ (Shaw,
2007, 25). These competing visions are the ‘backward-looking’ community of romanticism
and the ‘forward-looking’ community of socialism (Shaw, 2007, 25). In other words,
community is invoked either in sustaining an existing (but perhaps waning) set of social
structures and beliefs, or in order to transform these structures and beliefs and to proffer an
alternative social vision. The ideals of community arts are, as Shaw observes, easily adaptable
to either of these contradictory drives. More than this, what Raymond Williams calls the
‘warmly persuasive’ rhetoric of community obscures the ideological nature of the social
interests it serves (Williams in Mulligan & Smith, 2010, 37). In Martin Mowbray’s terms,
‘community’ lacks a critical counterpoint and this works to ‘depoliticise’ the social problems
that governing through community is meant to address (Mowbray, 2005, 257).

Drawing from the assessments of Williams, Mowbray and Shaw, the appeal of community
arts as a technique of governance resides in the opacity of its politics. More than other
liberal governmental techniques, the political power of governing through art ‘hides behind,
or within, the processes of its own existence’ (Bennett, 1998, 67) – in this case, within the
affirming rhetoric of ‘community’ and within the transformative power of ‘art’.
Guy Rundle (2010) takes up this latter point in an essay in Meanjin. He argues that the arts in Australia no longer sit at the critical edge of society and the state. We live now in a ‘culturestate’ where the arts are thoroughly internal to the institutions and structures of governance. ‘Today, what confronts the questing artist is not the indifference of society and the state, but its embrace, and the requirements associated with it’ (Rundle, 2010, 57). This shift has not precipitated a corresponding shift in the self-understanding of artists, nor in cultural understandings of the arts and their role in society. The arts continue to be associated with the modernist avant-garde, a vantage that challenges or disrupts the comfortable consensus of modern liberal democracies from outside ‘the establishment’. Rundle calls for a new kind of cultural critique, one which takes into account this new location of the arts in society and takes ‘a far more critical stance towards the sort of roles and positions offered by the culturestate’ (Rundle, 2010, 63). While Rundle’s essay is more sophisticated than a nostalgic lament for the demise of the avant-garde artist, his argument rests on some fundamental oppositions supporting this figure. Key amongst these is his assumption that art that is ‘resistant, disordering, liberating’ can only come from outside the state and that this is only possible within the elite ranks of an authoritative, genuinely independent avant-garde. Like the critical views of Gay Hawkins and Claire Bishop, which I canvassed in Chapter One, Rundle’s perspective implicitly devalues the social effects of the community arts as someone like Arlene Goldbard understands them. Like them, he fails to envision the kinds of politics, or indeed, the kinds of ‘disordering’ effects that might emerge from ‘creative process becoming fused with state processes’ (Rundle, 2010, 59). From such a vantage, the art produced from this location of culture can at best be characterised as compromised, inoffensive, inauthentic or unoriginal. At worst, such art is dishonest, ‘appropriated to maintain the status quo’ (Shaw, 2007, 33) in the guise of free expression.

Through my final case study I examine this political ambivalence at the core of community arts practices – both the opacity of its politics and the insufficiency of critical discourses in addressing its politics. Refill took place in Miller 2168, a suburb within the real and imagined geography of south-western Sydney. Refill involved capturing the waning attention of
vulnerable, ‘alienated’ young subjects (Mulligan & Smith, 2010, 64), by exposing them to an alternative education. Over a period of three years, artists, musicians, film-makers and songwriters came to Miller Technology High School and mentored students of Indigenous or Arabic-speaking background in various methods of story-telling and a range of dramatic skills and multimedia techniques to express them (Sabsabi, 2009, 4; Curious Works, 2009, 6). The students were 12 years old when Refill began and 15 when it ended, a pivotal three years covering the transition from childhood to young adulthood. Using digital cameras and editing equipment, the students produced and performed in their own short films and sketch comedies and developed simple stop-motion animation. They created canvasses of stencil art drawing from their own photography as backgrounds. They made infra-red spray cans out of plastic bottles and supermarket batteries, that sprayed virtual paint across a virtual screen of thin air. They wrote, edited and performed their own hip hop, which they recorded and set to their own music video. In late 2008 the students exhibited their work and performed for their families at the Police Community Youth Centre in Miller. They exhibited their work again in mid-2009 at Casula Powerhouse, an arts centre in south-western Sydney dedicated to giving expression to the diverse experiences of this locality. In that same year, I was able to see some of the students, their teacher Sally Atkins and the project’s main champion and director, Khaled Sabsabi, present their experiences of Refill during the ReGenerating Community Conference in Melbourne. Three of the participating students performed a hip hop song they had written as part of the project.

I draw on the Melbourne presentations, the Casula exhibition and several long interview transcripts in my analysis of Refill. But this complex and multifaceted project far exceeds these fragments. As a researcher, my limited access to the participants and their ‘process’ during the project recalls the provocative statement by Paula Jorgensen that I first raised in Chapter One. In her address to an audience of arts and local government workers, she introduces her project with a familiar caveat:

…it’s important to say, although I’m sure you know, that words and a picture don’t do the energy and creativity justice. The power of these
projects is in the process as well as the outcome; what you’re seeing here is just a shadow of a memory compared to the real thing. (Jorgensen, 2007, np)

In this chapter, this complex and unwieldy ‘thing’, the Refill project, inflects the ‘power’ of the process with a political connotation. ‘Central’ to such projects Mae Shaw says, ‘is the relationship between agency and structure – the recognition that action is always mediated through relations of power; autonomy always constrained by the dialectics of control’ (Shaw, 2007, 27). She goes on to say that the ‘role’ of community arts ‘must surely be to enhance agency, but this necessitates an understanding of power and how it mediates and controls’ (Shaw, 2007, 27). ‘Agency’ and ‘control’ are tightly interwoven in the Refill project, where art is a vehicle both for creative expression and for moral reform. What is not evident from Shaw, or indeed other critical commentators like Mowbray, is how to articulate the politics of this work. What kind of social significance can be attributed to the ‘agency’ or capacity being fostered here, thoroughly enmeshed within the machinery of ‘control’? I return to Jorgensen in this discussion because her caution foregrounds the compromised conditions from which the researcher obtains the ‘real thing’ of community arts – not just ‘words and a picture’ but a lengthy ‘process’ that surrounds the material artefacts and imbues them with their ‘real’ meaning. Within the fray of this unwieldy thing, partially obtained and involving numerous participants and practitioners, what is the nature of the ‘power’ being mobilised? How can the researcher claim some insight into what is ‘real’ – politically – about this ‘thing’?

Refill draws us into the centre of debates surrounding the politics of community arts. It does so because it addresses an intensively problematised social group: youth, mostly male, most of Arabic-speaking background, in south-western Sydney – a targeted group in a marginalised and stigmatised place. This social group have been objects of ‘moral panic’ in the nation since the 1990s (Poynting et al. 2004; Poynting & Morgan, 2007), subject to a polarised governmental response of either ‘coercion’ or ‘moral rescue’ (Poynting et al., 2004, 85). Such a ‘problem’ constituency (Shaw, 2007, 33) sharpens attention to the political rationales driving efforts to govern through art. Are these efforts in the interests of managing a
potentially deviant and unproductive social group? Or are they about social critique and expanding the possibilities of belonging in the nation? At the same time, Refill draws attention to the constraints within available political discourses for describing these rationales. In this chapter, I illustrate the ways in which the Refill project complicates understandings of what happens in the processes of governing through art, processes that conform neither to maintaining the ‘status quo’ nor to articulating a politics of ‘dissent’.

I begin with a sketch of south-western Sydney, a place with an identity linked to a long history of social stigma, media sensationalism, moral outrage and governmental mismanagement (Powell, 1993; Grace et al. 1997; Poynting et al. 2004; Poynting & Morgan 2007). As in The Weaving Lands, I am interested in how this ‘narrative thing’, the badland, informs the governmental response to place that Refill represents. Unlike The Weaving Lands, here I concentrate on this place more as a social and discursive landscape than as a physical one. I then consider the project itself, the range of contributors, mentors, artists and supporters it involved and the range of perspectives they bring to the ‘process’ of the work. Drawing out the tensions both within and between the various participants and practitioners reveals the wavering political positions a project like Refill assumes – at times a conservative politics of moral reformation, at others, a progressive politics of social transformation. Contrary to Guy Rundle’s (2010) claim that contemporary artists have not adapted their self-understanding to the conditions of the ‘culturestate’, the practitioners of Refill are highly aware of their dual role as instruments of the state and as creative agents of social change. The young participants seem similarly conscious of how they have been variously conceived: simultaneously targets of a governmental program of risk management, objects of broader social derision and fear, and subjects in transition, perhaps agents of an alternative community to come.

Out West

Some distance behind the tight fist of Botany Bay, the Cumberland Plain extends backwards, fanning out towards the NSW interior, a long, almost continuous, low-lying suburban stretch
of 9000 square kilometres, or 72 percent of metropolitan Sydney (Grace et al., 1997, 6). In these suburbs, these domiciles – 2.2 million residents, or one in eleven Australians\(^\text{12}\) – turn their backs to the harbour, fronting onto the shallow green of innumerable sports fields and ovals. These lives unfold outside the orbit of the Opera House, the Harbour Bridge, Bondi, all the internationally recognised icons of Australia’s most internationally recognisable city. Sydney’s west is serviced by numerous intersecting train lines but, looking out the train window, everywhere is evidence of the dominance, perhaps necessity, of the car: the wide freeways congested even between peak-hour traffic; innumerable car-parks lapping at the edges of the factories, wholesale outlets, and shopping malls defining the mega-scale of outer suburban living. Smash repair and mechanics shops proliferate, their Arabic, Italian, Vietnamese signage testament to the different waves of settlement that link this antipodean ‘local’ into a shifting global ethnoscape (Appadurai, 1998, 33).

Since the migrant influx in the 1970s, western Sydney has been popularly understood as a place of social diversity and cultural difference. As Diane Powell (1993) documents, this has been overlaid by associations with disadvantage, isolation, governmental neglect and social dysfunction. In Out West (1993) Powell explores how public, media and governmental discourses contributed to and sustained the stigmatised ‘westie’ image throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Like the western suburbs of Melbourne, western Sydney is subject to the rhetoric of urban sprawl and all of the negative associations this invokes (Johnson, 1997, 33; Peel, 2003, 16; Sweet, 2011, 1):

\begin{quote}
The west is seen as the repository for all of those social groups and cultures which are outside the prevailing cultural ideal: the poor, the working class, juvenile delinquents, single mothers, welfare recipients, public housing tenants, Aborigines, immigrants from anywhere but particularly Arabs and Asians. Western Sydney includes all of those groups as well as diverse other groups. All are cast out to the margins, to the ‘outer’ of the reconstructed city. (Powell, 1993, xviii)
\end{quote}

Powell’s analysis of the discourses framing western Sydney ends at the early 1990s. More current accounts of this region suggest that this othering, this casting out and marginalisation has continued over the past two decades. In an ethnography of Aboriginal communities in Mt Druitt, Gillian Cowlishaw contextualises this community within the social and imaginary geography of Sydney’s west. Like Powell, she seems fascinated by the way this area’s inferiority is assumed within a popular vernacular language used reflexively, unthinkingly, in social descriptors of place. From the perspective of inner-city urbanites like herself, these western suburbs are ‘that discomforting backyard of the rich cosmopolitan city of Sydney’ (Cowlishaw, 2009, vi). Cowlishaw herself calls them ‘The City’s Outback’ in the title of her book, strengthening the association between suburban wests and the colonial frontier. They are also known as ‘cultural deserts’ (Cowlishaw, 2009, 3), or the ‘western desert – or wild west…’ (Cowlishaw, 2009, 59-60). Mark Peel’s analysis of newspaper headlines about Mt Druitt reveals similar associations: ‘wasteland, wantland’ were two, but also an ‘Urban Desert’ (Peel, 2003. 16).

More current newspaper headlines of the last two years refer to the ‘Forgotten suburbs’ of western Sydney (The Age, 2010) as ‘logjammed’ with motorists on their way to work. These are the suburbs ‘that successive governments forgot’ and this explains their lengthy hospital waiting lists, their infrequent public transport services, their high unemployment (double the national average) and high levels of ‘mortgage stress’ (The Age, 2010). These deficiencies, the author says, have sown the seeds of social anxiety and insecurity, producing a ‘fertile ground’ for ‘xenophobia’ and a sense of being under threat (The Age, 2010). A newspaper article from a more local source announces an ‘eruption of violence’ by bikie gangs while also reporting that ‘police have denied that western Sydney is in the grip of an escalating gang war’ (Lawrence, 2011). Complementing this depiction, the Daily Telegraph reports how ‘A once-thriving shopping strip in the heart of western Sydney has become a seedy haven for thugs, junkies and drunks’ where local shopkeepers live ‘(i)n fear of their lives and worried about the future’ (Speranza, 2011). Adding to the dangers of life in the west, the Mt Druitt-St Mary’s Standard reports that ‘Western Sydney has one of the largest number of smokers in
NSW’, almost two percent higher than the national average (Mt Druitt-St Mary’s Standard, 2010).

Less obliquely than the ‘west’ of *The West Welcomes Refugees*, these popular and vernacular tropes reflect an othering of this place from the norms of the nation and the norms of the Western city. But more than this, they reflect a primitivist discourse designating this place and the people who live here as outside of Western modernity. Rather than representing a cosmopolitan or multicultural extension of the city, such a discourse prescribes a narrative that can only imagine these people living in a primitive or degraded state without the agency or rationality accorded to other citizens. These current depictions are consistent with many of the representative tropes Powell identifies from thirty years ago. Her media fragments depict western Sydney residents as ‘aimless’, ‘lacking incentive’ or immobilised by an ‘unrelenting wall of hopelessness’ (Powell, 1993, 10-11). Such tropes find a contemporary echo in reports of people who ‘gravitate’ like inert matter to Mt Druitt ‘when they fall through the welfare net’ (The Age, 2010). Or they find themselves helplessly ‘in the grip’ of fear (Lawrence, 2011). Powell argues that these depictions illustrate the unequal degrees of personhood accorded people in the nation. Some struggles – like farmers, ‘battling’ drought – are national struggles in which the nation itself takes part because their plight is shared (Powell, 1993, 10). She suggests further that this unequal designation of personhood is tied to the lesser sense of belonging to the nation experienced by people in the west. Their struggles do not invite the sympathy or responsive action of the nation because they are not of the nation. Rather, they are an unfortunate by-product of more important national concerns.

Michael Symonds links this othering explicitly to Australia’s ‘*terra nullius* heritage’ of colonial displacement (Symonds, 1997, 89). He characterises Sydney’s west as ‘outside the spaces of modernity’ (Symonds, 1997, 66), projected into ‘not just a different cultural space, but also into a different cultural time. Such an odd, space-time configuration perhaps starts to make sense of how impossibly far the west seemed to be away, much further than just its
geographical distance from the city centre’ (Symonds, 1997, 89). There are strong resonances here with Alice Pung’s portrait of Footscray, so close to the city centre, but culturally, socially, temporally, worlds away. Symond’s argument about western Sydney feeds into Massey’s broader theorisation of the relationship between the spatial imaginaries of Western modernity and European colonialism. The creation of a spatially and temporally distant ‘out there’ (Massey, 2005, 65) ‘out west’, contains the ‘savages’ (Symonds, 1997, 89) and primitives (Cowlishaw, 2009), lawlessness and foreignness of the Australian continent itself, and ejects these elements from the national space and national psyche. This cleansed space, this board ‘scrubbed clean’ (Carter, 2009, 39) creates the ‘conditions for the emergence of the modern subject’ (Symonds, 1997, 89). It is not difficult to identify the badland myth operating through these characterisations. The city, the nation, the mainstream, are secured through an externalisation of unruly and abject elements, quarantined within a specially designated zone and embodied within a particular population. In this way, western Sydney is freighted with manifold sources of social dis-ease, ensuring that other places in the nation (or the nation itself) might be experienced as ‘well-regulated, social and secure’ (Gibson, 2002, 173).

The work on western Sydney by people like Diane Powell, Gillian Cowlishaw, Scott Poyning, Greg Noble, George Morgan, Paul Tabar, Jock Collins and Ghassan Hage, suggests that the effects of this national othering have been carried, disproportionately, by certain sectors of the western Sydney population: particularly young men, Indigenous communities or people of Asian, Arabic-speaking or Muslim background. At different times, these groups have become the objects of different narratives articulating broader problems in Australia’s modernity. They represent variously, obstacles to national progress (Powell, 1993; Cowlishaw, 2009), risks to national security (Poynting et al., 2004; Dreher, 2007), threats to secular democracy (Poynting et al., 2004; Poynting, 2007), a problem for national cohesion and hegemony (Hage, 2009), and by-products of modernisation and the ongoing process of colonial settlement (Powell, 1993; Cowlishaw, 2009).
It is this recurrent narrative of a problematic community of ‘concern’ to the national public, into which youth of the *Refill* project are conscripted as subjects, objects and targets ‘at risk’. Western Sydney has been a common destination for many Arabic-speaking migrants, many of them Muslims, and has the highest concentration of these communities within Sydney and within Australia (Poynting *et al.*, 2004, 5). Increasingly since the 1990s the media has seized upon this population, linking Arabic-speaking and Muslim communities – especially young men – in western Sydney to criminal behaviour, terrorism, ethnic gangs, misogyny, violence, antisocial conduct and a general failure to assimilate the mainstream values of modern Australia. In *Bin Laden in the Suburbs*, (2004) Scott Poynting and his co-writers have tracked this moral panic over almost two decades, tracing its development through the tabloid media to the mainstream, from a populist political discourse to the policy-orientation of the federal government. Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, Poynting and his co-writers argue, highly publicised news stories about ethnic gang crime, ‘race rape’, ‘boat people’, the September 11 terrorist attacks and the Bali bombings, were conflated into a generalised fear of the ‘Arab Other’, the mythologised figure or ‘folk devil’ behind these events (Poynting *et al.*, 2004, 11). ‘This Arab Other functions not only in terms of the specific concerns embedded in fear of crime; it also functions in the national imaginary to prop up the project of national belonging’ (Poynting *et al.*, 2004, 3).

This ‘othering’ has had particular implications for young men of Arabic-speaking or Muslim background in western Sydney. The social behaviour of young men in western Sydney, however antisocial or ill-intentioned, was interpreted through a lens of criminality and terrorist threat and this threat was related, explicitly to their race or ethnicity (Poynting *et al.*, 2004, 90). The ‘problem’ of Lebanese gangs, or crime by young men of ‘Middle Eastern appearance’ precipitated a slew of governmental responses to assuage public fears and re-instate national social norms (Poynting *et al.*, 2004, 91). Responses to the problem of Arab-speaking and Muslim youth were overwhelmingly punitive, resulting in expanded police powers, calls for tougher sentencing laws and expressions of condemnation from Lebanese and Muslim community leaders (Poynting *et al.*, 2004, chapters 3 and 6). Poynting and his
co-writers examine the way that a range of community leaders within the Arabic-speaking and Muslim community were drawn into the ‘dominant paradigm’ of explaining criminal behaviour in terms of ‘cultural background’ (Poynting et al., 2004, 181). These leaders distanced themselves from the behaviour of the young men while at the same time engaging in a form of ‘self-criminalisation’, acknowledging that their community bore some of the blame for their crimes (Poynting et al., 2004, 181). ‘In doing this’ Poynting and his co-writers say, these leaders were conscripted into and perpetuated a narrative of national belonging in which their community occupied a ‘subordinate position’ in relation to the ‘dominant white culture’ (Poynting et al., 2004, 181). Their inhabitation of the narrative of ‘white culture’ and their marginal position within it suggests the limited terms for national belonging in Australia where belonging is secured through the subordination or exclusion of another’s belonging. Such a narrative has implications for the dominant culture as well: the constant need for marginalised groups to display their belonging and to prove their loyalty and attachment to the values of the nation so that the dominant culture can feel both inclusive and secure in its dominance (Hage, 2009 and 2000).

**Refill**

At the end of 2005, the Cronulla riots provoked a resurgence of the anti-Lebanese, anti-Muslim public sentiment prevalent during the period which Poynting and his co-writers discuss (Poynting et al., 2004; Poynting, 2007). *Refill* began in 2007, a period still within this climate of ‘moral panic’ around Arabic-speaking and Muslim youth. The project took place in the south-western Sydney suburb of Miller, part of the local government area of Liverpool. It is clear from the comments of those involved in *Refill* that the general stigma around western Sydney shapes their sense of this place and informs their approach to the project. While the moral panic around Arabic-speaking and Muslim youth is not raised directly, this particular social narrative seems to underlie the way the targets of the project were selected, and the ‘social outcomes’ its architects hoped to achieve (Sabsabi, 2009, 4). It is also palpable in the responses of the young participants, especially the boys, who recognise themselves within this narrative as objects of public concern.
Miller and its surrounds is governmentally defined by its ‘locational disadvantage’, a term condensing low levels of education, high unemployment, poverty, family distress, health problems and drug and alcohol abuse (Sweet, 2011, 1). In a sympathetic portrait of this area, Melissa Sweet (2011, 1) expresses her confusion at the ‘mixed messages’ of Miller. She does not know how to assimilate the positive stories of a community dealing with its problems in innovative and collaborative ways, with evidence of social dysfunction, stigma and discrimination. Her eye is drawn to people drinking in the morning in front of a colourful community mural; she sees signs of welcome seconds before seeing another sign warning that ‘offensive or aggressive behaviour will not be tolerated’ (Sweet, 2011, 1). Sweet’s sense of the unknowability of Miller, of its ambiguity and difficulty, is echoed by Phil Tolhurst, the General Manager of Liverpool City Council, who was to oversee the Refill project. He was quick to characterise this area as difficult to know and difficult to govern:

One of our challenges at Liverpool Council is to connect with our community. We try really hard to do that. It’s not an easy community to connect with because often it’s a wide, diverse community – 130 nationalities – and it has a wide variety of people. That makes it interesting to work in. (Tolhurst & Gouriotis, 2007)

This problem of how to know the community, how to better connect with ‘the people’ becomes a frequent refrain from respondents in Refill. Even as intensive and detailed statistics are gathered about the number of different nationalities living in the area, their occupations, country of origin, the high-school attrition rates of their children, modes of transit and rates of smoking, bureaucrats and politicians at both local and federal levels seek something more, another more authentic way of knowing and connecting, which, if anything, is diminished rather than enhanced by conventional governmental techniques of information gathering. Tolhurst goes on to say: ‘Rather than the noisy minority, we’re trying to get to the majority and find out what they want, what their wishes are, where they want us to go and those sorts of things. Any time we can, we jump at those opportunities’ (Tolhurst & Gouriotis, 2007).
Almost all of the professionals and arts practitioners working on the *Refill* project characterise Miller as marginal, isolated or depressed. For Kon Gouriotis, the Executive Director of Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre, which hosted *Refill*, Miller is:

… quite distinctly different, because at the time when we were doing the research there was 400 bedsitters within a small community. That means it’s a very transient community, a community that largely would be seen outside of mainstream. They’re either criminal activity, or drug-related, or people who are low income or social benefits. It’s a very needing kind of environment. (Tolhurst & Gouriotis, 2007)

*Refill* began as part of the Generations Project, a national community arts initiative of the Cultural Development Network, funded primarily by the Australia Council. Involving five local councils across Australia’s three eastern states, Generations was developed to raise the profile and reach of community arts within local government. Generations aimed to encourage local governments to place more importance on the arts and cultural development in their wider work; to learn to develop ‘more effective partnerships’ between arts organisations, artists, community groups and local government; and to show how arts projects could enhance local governments’ capacities to engage with their constituencies across the diversity of governmental responsibilities (Mulligan & Smith, 2010, 8). At the very early stage of the Generations Project, the project initiator, Judy Spokes, outlined that a key aim of the Generations Project was to alter the peripheral place arts-based activities had within local government priorities. The Generations Project, she said, was designed to illustrate the way community arts could ‘achieve really important jobs that local government deals with on a daily basis’ (Mulligan & Smith, 2010, 15).

In accordance with this aim, Stokes said, the Generations Project wanted councils to nominate a difficult problem of government, something that was an obstacle to their sustaining ‘healthy communities and healthy places’ (Mulligan & Smith, 2010, 15). For the project in Liverpool which was to become *Refill*, recent youth riots in nearby Macquarie
Fields led to the project directors nominating the issue of ‘alienated youth’, or what Phil Tolhurst called ‘child truancy’ (Tolhurst & Gouriotis, 2007), as an appropriate starting point (Mulligan & Smith, 2010, 64). Refill was intended to respond to the kind of neediness identified by Kon Gouriotis. Implicitly, it was designed to avert the kind of social threat that might result from neglecting early signs of disenfranchisement. Mulligan and Smith suggest that the process for ‘identifying the parameters for the project’ reflect a ‘top-down’ ‘welfare mentality’, which went contrary to the organic process of community and government engagement that Generations was aiming for (Mulligan & Smith, 2010, 64). However, the general issue of ‘youth’ was refined considerably by Khaled Sabsabi through an onerous collaborative process of getting to know Miller in the details of its governmentality.

Khaled Sabsabi was Refill’s Project Director and Exhibition Curator, and its main champion, driving it to fruition. He undertook several roles in the project, bringing the collaborating team together, managing funding, making connections with local community representatives and organisations as well as having some conceptual input as an artist and community development worker. Sabsabi describes himself as a Lebanese-Australian video, installation and sound artist whose work crosses over from the gallery to the community space. Western Sydney has been central to Sabsabi’s work and his development as an artist over almost two decades. He had lived and worked around south-western Sydney since the late 1980s working in community cultural development (Sabsabi, 2007). What started as making hip hop music with local neighbourhood kids became a long term practice in collaborative community cultural development. Sabsabi started to perform in local community theatre. From there he moved into installation work and later into video and sound work – his primary passion. Despite the range of different media he works in, and the diverse settings – schools, prisons, galleries, migrant resource centres, health services – Sabsabi’s work continues to address similar themes and issues. A central concern has been in addressing “(mis)representations of Arabic culture” within the mainstream Australian media (2009b). Refill involved Indigenous as well as Arabic-speaking young people; it addressed issues of disenfranchisement, social isolation and relating to place. Nevertheless, some of the most
memorable and compelling work to come out of the project involved the “self-representation” (2009b) of Arabic-speaking students, and their response to the marginalisation they felt they experience within contemporary multicultural Australia. In this sense, the project reflected many of the issues and ideas that have been a strong feature of Sabsabi’s work throughout his artistic career.

Sabsabi and Aroha Groves, a participating Indigenous artist, started building the project from the ground up, using their own knowledge and local contacts, working with and learning from the agencies, institutions, service providers, local personalities and neighbourhood groups through whose work, a diverse set of needs and experiences become legible as community:

We had a strategy for it – a lot of people don’t like the words ‘grass-roots workers’ and that sort of thing, or connecting or working in direct consultation with the grass roots, but that’s the way we work – myself and Aroha. We set out by identifying first of all the services that exist in the 2168 area, and that are active. At the time, PCYC wasn’t even set up as yet. The building was there, the structure, but it wasn’t operational as such; as yet there was no program. So we looked at other possibilities. This is why we came up with the West Side Youth Centre at the time. It was for the simple reason that it’s based in Green Valley, it is in the 2168 area, the youth worker is of Arabic origin, and the other thing is that young people access his centre. The cultural background is quite diverse – he was accessing the Aboriginal kids, the Arabic kids, the Asian kids etc. It seemed like a good move to hook up with him and put the idea out there.

From there it developed – I was working at the Liverpool Migrant Resource Centre (LMRC) and LMRC has a youth worker position here. So we hooked up with that position, consulted with them – Naomi Kemmerer and we put the project out there, because she was quite active and well-known in the area as a champion youth worker. She has great communication with the youth inter-agencies etc. So that provided an intro into the inter-agencies for us. So we went in to them, presented the idea, and through recommendations we decided that we needed to do some community consultation processes. This was part of it – consulting with the youth workers inter-agency in
Liverpool. From there we met other youth workers, other people etc…

From the outset, we were looking at not just doing another CCD project. We had the luxury of doing a 3-year project, so we were looking at developing other ways of working, other structures and bringing our own experiences into it, as artists and cultural workers. (Sabsabi, 2007)

Refill distilled from these open-ended exchanges – that ‘the two groups most at risk are the Aboriginal and Arabic kids. This was really clear’ (Sabsabi, 2008); that the years 12 to 15 are the crucial years for retaining their interest in education while they are still supported by a network of school and out-of-school care; that the project should be integrated within the school curriculum where its value was apparent to the students, their teachers and their parents, for whom art in this ‘sportsland’ (Atkins, 2009) was not a viable or valued pursuit.

Sabsabi and Groves enact a lively process in their work, quite literally, full of life and energy, full of perceiving, discovering, encountering. This is the role of the artist, Sabsabi says: ‘roaming around and you’re all ears and you’re listening to everything and you take stuff in’ (Sabsabi, 2007). This process of ‘listening’, ‘roaming’ consulting with the ‘grass roots’ activates a particular way of knowing place. It is a way of knowing very different to the transcendent way of knowing practised by ‘the master planner’ who, in Lesley Johnson’s terms, ‘reduces the knowledge of the city as a whole to a totalising perspective’ (Johnson, 1997, 60). Sabsabi and Groves repeatedly emphasised their deep personal knowledge of this area and its history. Sababi was aware of:

…how it’s developed, how it’s developing…Where they’re at now, and where they’ve come from. I think it’s important that it’s not just data. You’ve got to have a personal account of the area, to feel the area. As an artist, you’ve got to be able to do that, you’ve got to make those connections. (Sabsabi, 2007)
Groves had a connection with many of the locals:

I know a lot of those young people. I actually know them personally. I know their families. It’s very important – also it’s trust. Also people get a little bit suspicious when you bring someone from somewhere else. It’s like ‘what would you know and how would you know what the problems are?’ Well I’ve lived in the thick of it. I see it. (Groves, 2007)

Sabsabi and Groves privilege a phenomenological, ‘personal’ way of knowing place – embodied, subjective, sensory – over an abstract knowing based on ‘data’ or experts from ‘somewhere else’. Through this kind of knowing, or being ‘in the thick of it’, place becomes more complex, more textured, more nuanced, than the reductive ‘surface’ produced through the knowledge techniques of some transcendent authority (Johnson, 1997, 62). Drawing on a diverse set of perspectives, professionals and institutions – youth workers, migrant resource centres, community groups – Sabsabi and Aroha assemble place as a multifaceted and layered set of practices and experiences. Despite the wide number of people consulted, the locals who know this area, who understand the community, who are experts in their own field, no single person or collective articulated the problem *Refill* should address. And no single person or collective posed a solution or response. And yet, something does happen here. Something genuinely collective materialises out of these micro-knowledges, these minor networks, trajectories, engagements and connections. Place assembles, temporarily, provisionally through this ‘grass roots’, embodied process of knowing, and an agentive kind of power is mobilised to make something happen in a way that exceeds the inherent capacities or perspectives of any of the individual actors.

This way of knowing enacts a particular kind of politics. Both Lesley Johnson and Diane Powell illustrate the ways in which the vast bodies of knowledge on western Sydney accumulated by researchers, academics, government departments and welfare bodies, have compounded rather than alleviated the ‘disadvantage’ and marginalisation of this place (Powell, 1993, 16; Johnson, 1997, 62). Melissa Sweet’s more current portrait of Miller also identifies the way expert knowledge and ‘top-down’ policy approaches to social problems
have further stereotyped locals as inherently deficient (Sweet, 2011, 5). As artists working for the state – members of the ‘culturestate’ – Sabsabi and Groves are conscripts in this knowledge work and the relations of power it articulates. Mae Shaw argues that the politics of this kind of work falls politically between ‘adaptive approaches’, which maintain ‘existing relations of power’ and more ‘radical’ approaches ‘concerned with exposing and transforming those structures and relations of power which systematically marginalise and exclude’ (Shaw, 2007, 27). Sabsabi and Grove work against the discursive and technical practices that marginalise the constituency they seek to address. But their practice cannot be characterised as a ‘radical’ exposure of structures of inequality. They don’t pursue a ‘disruptive’ or ‘painfully complicated’ art of social critique from outside these relations of power (Bishop, 2006). They are insiders, with a long history of involvement in the organisations, institutions, agencies and communities through which the governance of ‘disadvantage’ takes place. It is through mobilising their multiple perspectives – their role as artists, their personal investment in place, their responsibility to government – that the unique politics of their work manifests itself. Working from this unique location of culture, lives rendered continually outside the norms of the city and the nation (Powell, 1993; Johnson, 1997), ‘outside the spaces of modernity’ (Symonds, 1997), are considered on their own terms. Even as Sabsabi (2007) recognises their difficulties and their challenges, these lives are framed as trajectories of possibility rather than in the discourse of ‘lack, passivity and victimisation’ that Powell (1993, 10) identifies. This is a politics of social transformation in minor terms.

But the politics of Refill can also be characterised in more conservative terms. In his foreword to the notes for the Refill exhibition held at the Casula Powerhouse from July-October 2009, Sabsabi situates the project within a discourse of ‘community sustainability’. He talks about the way Refill has ‘nurtured’ the talents of the young participants and the way the project ‘celebrates the dynamism and energy of young people’ (Sabsabi, 2009, 4). He also strongly emphasises that the project ‘has generated tangible social outcomes’ including ‘the development of career opportunities, lifelong learning and further education options’ (Sabsabi, 2009, 4). These ‘tangible’ outcomes complement the intangible outcomes of
developing the participants’ ‘insight into identity, community, culture’ and providing ‘an avenue for encouraging positive interactions between communities, age groups and different cultural demographics’ (Sabsabi, 2009, 4).

Other practitioners involved in Refill frame the project more overtly in terms of a discourse of moral reform. In interviews with Phil Tolhurst and Kon Gouriotis, it becomes clear that child truancy encodes a larger, less distinct problem: the problem of Miller itself, with its need, its social deficiencies, its failure to conduct itself through the recognised codes of the mainstream. For Kon Gouriotis, addressing child truancy through art is about transforming Miller into a ‘more civil city’ (Tolhurst & Gouriotis, 2007). This is echoed by Phil Tolhurst, who wants to see improvements in the ‘lifestyle’ of the people, and who measures this through perceptive improvements in ‘cleanliness’ and ‘attitude’ (Tolhurst & Gouriotis, 2007).

Such fragmentary comments recall the civilising discourse which reclaimed the colonial frontier for settlement. These comments also invoke a notion of governance that, Nikolas Rose argues, is conceived around a ‘society of control’ (Rose, 1999, 246).

In this conception of governance, social problems are framed ‘in terms of risk’ (Rose, 1999, 247) and the ‘logic of prediction comes to replace the logic of diagnosis’ (Rose, 1999, 261):

Control workers, whether they be police or psychiatrists, thus have a new administrative function – the administration of the marginalia, ensuring community protection through the identification of the riskiness of individuals, actions, forms of life and territories. Hence the increasing emphasis on case conferences, multi-disciplinary teams, sharing information, keeping records, making plans, setting targets, establishing networks for the surveillance and documentation of the potentially risky individual on the territory of the community. (Rose, 1999, 263)

For Refill, the status of ‘youth’ became the measure of the vulnerability and potential of this social world; young people became the crucial site of risk to ‘the territory of the community’. One of the mentors to the students, the Arabic-speaking Indigenous hip hop artist, Sie-1
(Simon Menzies), suggests the way these multidisciplinary techniques for managing risk might shape the future governance of young people:

Looking at the results of programs such as Refill reveals a range of undisputed benefits, but these programs are a last resort attempt to re-engage young people. Each of us can play a role in stopping a young person from reaching this stage at all. The need for these programs can be reduced by the way we work with young people on a daily basis and through their involvement with teachers, social workers and parents. (Menzies, 2009, 15)

Consistent with Rose’s characterisation of a governing through community, Simon Menzies advocates that those most proximate to the problematic subject should become the instruments for their moral reform. This governing through ‘involvement with teachers, social workers and parents’ will, in Rose’s terms, ‘achieve the remoralisation that eluded the professional welfare worker’ (Rose, 1999, 265).

Governing through community conscripts the very lives and experiences of diverse social actors and deploys their unique situatedness in the service of a larger social project. More than this, governing through community is a governance of intimacy; it is about inhabiting the very living space of the beings to be governed, so much so that the rationalities of governance become almost imperceptible. ‘These contemporary ethico-political arguments’ Rose says, ‘infuse community with vectors of moral authority that tend to reduce, rather than enhance, the contestability of powers and judgements over conducts and forms of life’ (Rose, 1999, 265). In this sense, the ‘social outcomes’ that Sabsabi emphasises in his foreword, outcomes that conform to dominant social norms of productivity, self-sufficiency and upward social mobility, seem to lack any counter-discourse. Exercised through the kinds of quotidian regimes of care, guidance and moral authority which Simon Menzies advocates, a particular form of life, the life of virtue, is conflated with life itself – with life lived freely. It is difficult to recognise coercion or control and indeed resistance in these kinds of contexts because government is at the centre of these lives.
Simon Menzies in particular bears this ambiguous power. Though not from the Liverpool area he was recruited for *Refill* because of his unique positioning as an Indigenous musician who also speaks Arabic – which he learned at university while living in Africa for four years (Menzies, 2008). He became a successful hip hop musician at 17 when he wrote an album for a popular tv soap character after being discovered at a hip hop contest. Menzies recognised early on that he could use his experience to show other young people “who have got that sort of passion, to direct them, and show them you can actually do something with this” (Menzies, 2008). As successful, edgy, and the “only [Arabic-speaking Aboriginal] in the country” (Menzies, 2008), he seemed particularly conscious of his capacity, to instrumentalise his life history, his persona, his very presence, in the moral reform of the *Refill* participants:

I have this effect with kids where they look up to me and see me as some sort of role model, and they will listen to what I say rather than listening to what the teachers say. But I keep them all in line, I keep them under the rules and regulations that they are supposed to be following…Because kids these days are looking up to thugs and rappers and gangsters. They think these sorts of things are cool. So I thought ‘they think I am that’, so I can use this sort of persona to change their thinking and make them realise that I’m a family man, I’m a good man, whatever I have done in the past was my past. Now I look at the future, and trying to make a future for myself. When they see you are actually there for them in that concept, they really grab on to you. (Menzies, 2008)

The discourse of risk and moral reform alluded to by Simon Menzies, Phil Tolhurst and Kon Gouriotis takes on a certain poignancy in the presence of photographs of the students’ early work and extracts of their skit comedy displayed at the Casula Powerhouse exhibition. In these images and video fragments, the participants are children – cheeky, playful and seemingly unselfconscious. They are encouraged to try out different personas and characters, as though practising for the multiple roles they will assume in their adult lives. Watching this play and experimentation, sensing a sense of the possibility in multiple possible selves, one cannot forget how these subjects have been problematised by a dominant culture in ways that constrain their potential ways of being. As subjects ‘at risk’ these children’s futures have,
to some degree, been preceded and captured by the discourse of criminalisation and ‘othering’ identified by Poynting and his co-writers (Poynting et al., 2004). This discourse places certain pressures and constraints on the students’ possibilities for ‘becoming’. It also heightens attention to the ways in which they display their ‘becoming’ in public. *Refill* is a project that demands a certain form of public display from its young participants, a display in which the degree of their ‘moral reform’ is to be judged and measured. They perform for those they are closest to. But, in many cases, this intimate gaze intersects with the reforming eye of the state. This too is a source of the project’s political ambivalence: it satisfies the need of a dominant culture in affirming the marginal belonging of its subordinate subjects, at the same time that it allows these subjects a space for identity-building and ‘dissent’ (Shaw, 2007, 33).

‘…INTRODUCING INVENTIO INTO EXISTENCE…’

At the end of 2009 participants in *Refill* attended the Regenerating Community Conference in Melbourne. I was in the audience and was surprised by how many people were on stage. Compared to other presentations at the conference where a single author and expert stood up to present their work, here was a full chorus line of people: Sally Atkins the art teacher from Miller Tech, Khalid Sabsabi, Simon Menzies, Elias Nohra who was the artistic director of Curious Works,13 and finally, a sample of some of the students themselves.

In her conference address, Sally Atkins listed in comprehensive and repetitive detail the students’ achievements. She conveyed a sense of the elaborate, highly stratified structural ecology of the secondary school world with its internal systems for recognition and accomplishment, its competitions, forums, leadership positions and assemblies, its imbrications in regional and national structures with their forums and benchmarks of success. Her students had moved through all these registers, learning to make their work resonate far beyond the immediate context of the classroom. Sally Atkins’s attention to these details emphasised that for her, the students were both the creative agents in and the objects

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13 CuriousWorks is a young theatre company which ran theatre and multimedia workshops with the *Refill* kids.
of the project. They had been exposed to new places, inspiring people and unexpected opportunities and, through these, had found capacities in themselves that surprised them. The students also recognised themselves as the objects of this work. They were surprised by the unlikely friendships they had formed. The Indigenous and Arabic students were known to be of opposite character – the Arabic, mostly Lebanese, students were described as disruptive and sometimes aggressive, the Indigenous students often shy and introverted (Menzies, 2008). Friendships between the two, as individuals and as marked members of distinct groups, breached some of the codes of the stratified caste-like system of the high school social environment. Some students said Refill helped them discover things they were good at. One boy said he’d been inspired in so many ways. Refill had allowed him to perform. It had given him the confidence ‘to express myself in public through the mass media, and I hope I never want to go back to the shy boy I once was’.

Hunched and awkward at the side of the stage, three of the Miller boys were there to perform a hip hop song they had written as part of Refill. Reincarnated as the MEB Boys, or Middle Eastern Brotherhood, they stood up, assuming a pulsing buoyancy far removed from the nervous shrugs and nods of their non-performing selves.

Hangin out with my MEB crew
I do my raps with ease
I come from overseas

But here I remain
We came on the plane

Side by Side, from the same valley
We never hide – we’re ready, to rally.

The truth, that is my weapon
Education is the real lesson.

Say what you want to say
Coming to you live from down under

Got my brothers on my side,
Like a forty-five
Lebs in Australia keeping hip hop alive.

This is where I reside
But they try to keep me quiet
Ever since the days of the Cronulla riots.

Born in the same year, got nothing to fear –
Except god up above. He shows us love,

Unlike the media, always trying to bring us down.
They won’t be happy ‘til we’re six feet underground.

Think about the media telling lies.
What about all the little children in Palestine?

Everyday they die – and we cry.
But your eyes stay dry. Ha
And you wonder why.

Hip hop has a genius for compressing shifting subject positions and disjunctive spatialities into an impossibly hybrid, personalised narration. Like most hip hop, this song is a weave of narratives and generic tropes. There is the heroising narrative of the group’s formation, a bonding through birth or origins, ‘from the same valley’, but also a bonding in the present – ‘we were made from lunchtime to lunchtime’ – interposed within the intimate rituals of school. There is a personal story of migration from ‘overseas’ to ‘down under’, always amplified by a more abstract diasporic narrative of the subjugated confronting the gatekeepers to power. And all this interspersed with fragmentary observations, media critique, local references and stories evoking the specific texture and tenor of the boys’ experience. The boys seem acutely aware of the discourse of ‘moral panic’ surrounding them. They seem aware also that this discourse has a global spatiality, conscripting distant and proximate others into a narrative of ‘us’ and ‘them’.

In the video to this song posted on a video sharing internet site, the boys are emblazoned with the street-wear logos of African American rappers. They look like children, but these
markers carry connotations for many in south-western Sydney, especially the local media, of gangs, crime, delinquency (Poynting et al., 2004, 108). I wondered why they had called themselves Middle Eastern and had literally dressed in the stereotypes of commercial police dramas and talkback radio. Poynting and his co-writers note that the term Middle Eastern is a construction of ‘the geopolitics of Western colonialism’ (Poynting et al., 2004, 33). It has been used in Australia and elsewhere by media commentators and conservative politicians to conflate disparate issues – migration, refugees, terrorists, kids in the western suburbs – into an essential and threatening otherness (Poynting et al., 2004, 108).

The boys talk back to the repressive forces they are up against. But they also inhabit a racist construction of themselves – and I don’t think that occupying this stereotype necessarily means they are appropriating it. Hip hop has become a popular form of alternate pedagogy employed by the state to assist ‘kids who have fallen through the cracks in the education system’ (Sabsabi, 2008; Farid, 2009) and bring them back into the mainstream. Like all of the arts of Refill it is an embodied pedagogy involving experimentation, tactility, laughter and improvisation. Perhaps its appeal is its promise of a space for the expression of a kind of truth, a highly localised, playful and performative truth, made in the moment of its expression. Hip hop is a form of urban storytelling, a way of gathering different registers of the social and emplacing the self as both product and agent in this polyphony of voices. Gillian Cowlishaw talks about the importance of storytelling in the lives of people who are ‘marginal to the world of those that produce the news and public knowledge, yet whose lives become the subject of news when their public violence or misery is glimpsed on TV’ (Cowlishaw, 2009, 161). Part of the value of Refill for these boys was to open up spaces for articulating the normality of lives rendered invisible unless they are transgressive. Hip hop performed under the controlled guidance of the educational institution becomes a zone of normative transgression. Its codes – dress and linguistic – enable the performance of identities and subject positions that are immediately recognisable as a performance, and thus rendered unthreatening. It is the performance that is praised in these encounters, not the communication of any resistant or politically dissenting message.
And yet, in the midst of their performance, I was reminded of Franz Fanon:

As soon as I desire I am asking to be considered. I am not merely here-and-now, sealed into thingness. I am for somewhere else and for something else. I demand that notice be taken of my negating activity…

I should constantly remind myself that the real leap consists in introducing invention into existence. In the world in which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself. (Fanon in Bhabha, 1997, 8)

Even in its globally recognisable dress codes and symbols, its generic tropes and signifiers, hip hop always indigenises or reinvents the universal themes it employs. The boys were able to inhabit these conventions to mark out both local and global identifications and affiliations. Their leap beyond themselves is also a leap beyond the nation from within the very forms of governmentality designed to bring them into the nation, to bring about the ‘more civil city’, the more docile and integrated community. But this inventive activity is not simply an escape from authority. The boys use the language of hip hop to speak of themselves, their families, their feelings, with a confidence in the authority and legibility of their medium. In this sense, they exercise a certain self-regulation and self-knowledge, even as they rail against dominant modes of social control. So in this polyphonic language and these derivative modalities of performance, the students exhibit this other aspect of the power of these kinds of projects: the affective power of embodiment, being capable, being different from the way they have been coded and marked. They do not express their identities so much as they expand the potential space for being themselves. In this way the project deflects our desire – as outsiders, witnesses, viewers, researchers – to know the truth, or the reality of these (marginal, misrepresented) subjects and encourages us instead simply to celebrate their virtuosity and their obvious delight in this work.
**EPILOGUE**

At the end of July 2009, in the final months of the project, *Refill* was exhibited at Casula Powerhouse, an arts centre representing south-western Sydney and funded through Liverpool City Council. Casula Powerhouse was once a power station, imported as a complete ‘kit’ from the General Electric Corporation in the United States. It was assembled here in 1953 before being decommissioned only 23 years later. Renovated as an arts space in 1994, the site retains its industrial infrastructure – its chimney stack, its cylindrical storage tanks. These drums, striking in their scale, have become legal graffiti walls, their rusted surface now rimmed around the base by a haze of bubblegum coloured tags – loud, playful monosyllables sprayed by suburban kids who know the area. The main building, the gallery where *Refill* and the other exhibitions are located, decked with long, vaguely Soviet-style pennants, has an instant authority and presence.

Casula Powerhouse sits in a lull in the residential landscape on a large open space between the Georges River and the south-western rail line. It is close to Miller but in its scale and solitude seems distant from the hum of suburban life. On the day I visited, there were many separate exhibitions on show. Concurrent with *Refill*, the gallery had an exhibition by Danny Huynh, a photographer theatrically exploring his memories of Shanghai through staged recreations of peoples’ postures, clothes, expressions, set against the contemporary city. There was an exhibition of Indigenous artists exploring the theme ‘Elders Knowing – Elders Showing’ featuring a wide variety of different artistic styles and methods. The Annual Liverpool Art Society Exhibition was on display, asking artists to respond to the question ‘What is Asia?’ This elicited an extraordinary array of different styles, different inflections of what Asia signifies and how to engage with it both aesthetically and culturally.

I finally found *Refill* at the far corner of the building, down a dark, narrow corridor. Trying to discern something of the students’ artwork in this darkness I wondered whether the dim lighting was meant to add an underground, transgressive tone to the work, like a club perhaps. But after attempting to switch on a few blank video screens I realised that the
The gallery had forgotten to turn on the power here. The students’ work, their short films and animation, their virtual graffiti wall, a video of their skits and improvised theatre, was dead. I felt that, even though they were in the confines of this institution, being exhibited as the successful outcome of a governmental program of moral reform, they were here on the edge, slipping out.

Interpreting state power through a theory of governmentality is to refuse the pull of Nietzsche’s singular ‘monstre froid’ and to replace it instead with a set of diverse assemblages of agents, techniques, institutions, which act on people’s ‘desires, aspirations, interests and beliefs’ in a multitude of open-ended and unpredictable ways (Dean, 1999, 11). Governmentality describes very faithfully the processes and rationalities involved in the making of community art. But this theory does not take into account the social, governmental and subjective effects of this plurality of rationalities operating between and within assembled parts of the system. The creativity of a project like Refill is in the way it disrupts the illusion of government as a rational, consistent and constant form of power. There are lulls, lapses, dead ends in the field of governmental assemblages where people, both governors and the governed, persist as themselves even as they are enmeshed within others’ demands, expectations and aspirations. This is true for both the artists negotiating a complex terrain between the rationale of government and the ethics of their own practice, and the young people for whom the state is both nurturer and normaliser. Being involved in this kind of work is a way in which lives rendered continually accessible to government might momentarily reconfigure relations of power in their own terms.
Chapter Six

LIVING TOGETHER

It’s really odd that as we’ve emerged from the village into the big society, the big cities, the desire is to rethink the village values, where the village took responsibility for its realm, to actually understand itself and understand the problems. We’re starting to put increased precedence on those sorts of questions. Maybe it’s a bigger village we’re talking about now, but we’re trying to understand how we can actually work together, how we can live together and how we can show respect to each other. I think that underscores this sort of project. (Nicholas Tsoutas, 2007)

In *The West Welcomes Refugees*, *The Weaving Lands* and *Refill* chapters, I illustrated how the place-making work of these projects cannot be contained by the governmental rationalities that gave rise to them. Through opening up the complexity and richness of the case studies, I want to build up a particular vantage from which to frame place. As the conceptualising of place emerges, place assembles through an overlapping and interlacing of multiple registers and processes. Crucially, one of the distinguishing features of reading place through community art is the inseparability of everyday practices from multiple forms of mediation. So, what Paul Carter would call ‘designs on place’ – political discourse and its narratives of the nation; media and the identities and folklore it trades in; policy regimes and their programs for social management; institutions and their values; urban forms and their filtering of activity and energy; public art and its poetic associations – all of these are being negotiated in people’s inhabitation of the everyday. All of these registers are invoked in the place-making work of community art. Community art makes visible this multiregistered terrain of place. And in making this terrain visible, it opens up a space for consideration, a space of ‘interpretive possibility’ as Amanda Wise and Sevaraj Velayatham (2009) might say. Within

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14 See Nicholas Tsoutas & Kon Gouriotis Interview Transcript, 2007. Nicholas Tsoutas was the Artistic Director of Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre. He made this comment in the context of working on the *Refill* project.
In this chapter, I argue that this terrain of place has bearing on how we understand living together with difference. In Australia, understandings of the way we live together in social diversity have coalesced around the state-centric discourse of multiculturalism. Since its adoption as an official government policy in 1972, multiculturalism has always been contested in political terms. But it has also been contested theoretically for undermining the very principles of cultural diversity and social equality it claims to support. Theoretical responses to multiculturalism critique it for being essentialist: for reducing difference to a mosaic of irreducibly separate and static ethnic groups (Gunew 1994; Ahmed, 2000; Noble, 2011); for celebrating cultural difference while retaining white hegemony in the nation (Hage, 2000); and for being a more subtle form of assimilation whereby difference is absorbed into the nation and divested of its political and social challenge to prevailing norms and values (Gertsakis, 1994; Ahmed, 2000; Hage, 2000).

Both *The Weaving Lands* and *Refill* can be interpreted within these critiques of multiculturalism. The projects could be said to be a form of cosmetic celebration of difference without addressing the more substantive structural reasons for unequal qualities of belonging in the nation. Or they could be said to reflect a managerialist response to cultural difference, attempting to contain the threat of otherness to mainstream interests and sensibilities. But thinking about these projects only within these critiques of multiculturalism forecloses some of the more ambivalent ways of relating that they engender. Located as they are at the level of meta-narrative – national policy discourse – critiques of multiculturalism also foreclose some of the tensions and discontinuities that exist between the abstraction of nationalist discourses and the placed practices that go on in the everyday social life of the
nation. A potentially different orientation to power (and to theories of effects of power) opens up in considering place in all its richness and complexity.

In the last ten years, a different response to multiculturalism has emerged shifting the locus of analysis from the discursive to the lived. These analyses attend to the embodied everyday interactions and negotiations that take place in contexts of social diversity (Wise & Velayutham, 2009; Noble, 2011; Duruz et al., 2011). This work provides a useful context for considering the place-making work of community art as lived practising of Australia’s multiculture, practising which not only reflect the meta-discourse of official multiculturalism, but also contribute to and unsettle this discourse. Doreen Massey suggests that place has a particularly unique role in creating new ways of relating. ‘Places’ she says, ‘pose in particular form the question of our living together. And this question…is the central question of the political. The combination of order and chance, intrinsic to space and here encapsulated in material place, is crucial’ (Massey, 2005, 151, my emphasis). In this chapter, drawing on Massey and the particular politics which she claims for place, I am interested in the perspective on living together that the place-making work of community art opens up. How is living together configured in the place-making work of community art? And also, how can we understand Australia’s multiculturalism differently if we locate our study in this particular location of culture? An emphasis on ‘making’ and not just the politics of place is crucial to addressing these questions. It is through attending to the myriad of ways in which place is made through both ‘order and chance’ that living together can be construed as a political act – neither the outcome of an official state narrative, nor the unmediated, instinctive interactions of located individuals.

**Multiculturalism and its critics**

Studies of multiculturalism have been concerned with how the nation imagines itself. They have been concerned with how discourses of multiculturalism shape belonging in the nation – who belongs, how they belong and who has the authority to manage and regulate belonging. Concerned with these meta-narratives of belonging, these studies are indebted to
Benedict Anderson’s theorisation of the nation as ‘imagined community’, imagined ‘because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion’ (Anderson, 2006, 6). Where other canonical theorists of the nation and nationalism theorise its ontology, the definition of the nation,\textsuperscript{15} Anderson invites the reader into the intimate enactments through which the nation becomes an inhabitable, shared time and space and a site of deep personal attachment. For Anderson, in 1983, before the fragmentation of the media brought about by the internet, the exemplary enactment of collective imagining is the shared daily ritual of reading the newspaper:

\begin{quote}

It is performed in silent privacy, the lair of the skull. Yet each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion. Furthermore, this ceremony is incessantly repeated at daily or half-daily intervals throughout the calendar. What more vivid figure for the secular, historically clocked, imagined community can be envisioned? At the same time, the newspaper reader, observing exact replicas of his own paper being consumed by his subway, barbershop, or residential neighbours, is continually reassured that the imagined world is visibly rooted in everyday life…fiction seeps quietly and continuously into reality, creating that remarkable confidence of community in anonymity which is the hallmark of modern nations. (Anderson, 2006, 35-6)
\end{quote}

Anderson’s conception of the nation is most compelling not as a history of how the nation emerged out of empire, feudalism and Christendom, but in this vivid exposition of the space of imagining itself. The newspaper is a textual space. It sustains the nation not so much through the detail of its content but by positioning the reader through a repeated practice and a recurring set of conventions demarcating a shared time and space. The daily ritual of reading links the citizen with fellow citizens. The date at the top of the page and the concentration of articles on local matters and interests of the state, create a ‘here’ from which

\textsuperscript{15} I am thinking here of work by Ernest Gellner and Eric Hobsbawn
the nation addresses its others and a ‘now’ of ‘homogenous empty time’ carrying all its citizens along in a single inexorable flow (Anderson, 2006, 33).

Anderson’s understanding of this framing, orienting capacity of text, or discourse, supports Sarah Ahmed’s detailed critique of two governmental documents outlining Australian multiculturalism: the National Agenda for Multicultural Australia from 1989 and Multicultural Australia: The Way Forward from 1997. Ahmed approaches these documents as illustrative of ‘official ‘responses’ to cultural diversity in Australia’ (Ahmed, 2000, 102). She is concerned with the way that these federal documents constitute a re-imagining of the nation in Anderson’s terms – not only because they are the master texts guiding funding decisions and policy development, but because, in their very ‘grammar’ (2000, 102), they construct an imagined collective and its relation to difference. Like Anderson’s newspaper reader, these texts conscript the reader into identifying with the ‘we’ of the culturally diverse nation. They are locations from which the nation is re-imagined from monocultural to multicultural. Both examples have been superseded by the agendas of successive Australian governments. What interests me here is not their currency, but the way Ahmed emphasises the active quality of these documents in constructing the multicultural nation rather than simply describing or responding to it (Ahmed, 2000, 102). Through her detailed analysis of the grammar of these documents, their positioning of the ‘we’ of the nation against the ‘others’ whom it incorporates, Ahmed argues that official multiculturalism re-imagines the nation as incorporating ethnic diversity while simultaneously recognising ethnic others as ‘others’ and thus distinct from the ‘us’ of the nation (Ahmed, 2000, 95). At the same time, cultural diversity is reduced to mere ‘outward appearance’ (Ahmed, 2000, 105), whereby these different-looking others in the nation prove to be ‘real Australians’ underneath (Ahmed, 2000, 106). In this sense, the official celebration of the cultural diversity of multicultural Australia in these documents masks a national imaginary that is actually homogenous at its core.
Ahmed’s work on the official discourse of multiculturalism is nested within her broader study of the discursive productions of the stranger. Ahmed (2000) questions the ‘ontology of strangers’ which inflects discourses of everyday life: fear of the stranger in neighbourhood watch programs; consumption of the stranger through food and ‘exotic’ products; management of strangers in government policy. She ‘attempts to question the assumption that we can have an ontology of strangers, that it is possible to simply be a stranger, or to face a stranger in the street. To avoid such an ontology, we must refuse to take for granted the stranger’s status as a figure’ (Ahmed, 2000, 3). Ahmed argues that both exclusion and celebration of the stranger are a form of fetishisation in which the stranger is assumed to have an innate being, an ontology. This assumption conceals the way the stranger and strangeness are effects of various social, cultural and theoretical discourses. For Ahmed, there is no stranger as such, just various modes of recognition and classification – realised or activated within the liveness of any social encounter – which produce an-other being as strange, foreign. Fetishisation of the stranger also conceals the way that some others are less ‘other’ than other others; that is, strangeness is attributed more readily to some types of others than other types of others. This essentialising of the stranger as either fetishised object or feared other, has bearing on the imagining of difference constituting the multicultural nation. In Ahmed’s critique of Australian multiculturalism, she discerns this same essentialising of the other: first, a failure to engage with the terms – social, historical, discursive – through which ‘others’ are constituted as ‘others’; and second, a failure to include others in the nation whose difference challenges the norms of the consensual national ‘we’ – differences that are more than skin deep. The effects of this multicultural discourse are apparent in the discourse of ‘self-criminalisation’ practiced by Muslim and Lebanese community leaders in western Sydney as discussed by Poynting and his co-writers. These leaders retained the ‘recognition of the state’ through accepting the essentialised difference of their community, and by doing so, failed to challenge the limited terms for their own national inclusion (Poynting et al., 2004, 209).
Where Ahmed’s critique of multiculturalism is located in official government discourse, other prominent critiques are more ambiguously located. In quite different disciplinary contexts, the sociologist Jennifer Rutherford and the anthropologist Ghassan Hage locate their critique of multiculturalism on the surface level of culture where consistent modes of perception and reception are distilled out of a myriad social and cultural forms and their interaction. But, while their work appears to engage with the micro-politics of everyday interactions with difference, they do so from a vantage that is never explicitly placed. Rutherford and Hage draw from a spectrum of medial and normative cultural expressions – often collated under the rubric of ‘the everyday’ – in which the nation represents and recognises itself as ordinary and basically good. They inject a sense of malignancy in these common cultural locations where the vicissitudes of Australian everyday life are rendered in ideal terms. Tellingly, both use the term fantasy to describe the mode through which Australia’s national imaginary resists the cultural diversity that makes up the living currency of everyday life in the nation. By doing so they locate their work within a psychoanalytic framework rather than a linguistic or semiotic one. They seek to isolate, analyse and critique the means through which a resistance to difference inheres within the national psyche – because, although fantasy is expressed in shared signs, in speech, writing, gestures, images, it is experienced individually and collectively as an internal structure of feeling in the form of attitudes, perceptions and judgments. And from this abstract location in the mind of the individual, they reveal the workings of the national psyche, shifting from the micro-sphere of the lived everyday to the macro-sphere of national discourse in one fluid movement.

Hage and Rutherford concentrate Australia’s resistance to difference in the shorthand, ‘white Australia’. This is an allusion to the ideology of the White Australia policy, which preceded official multiculturalism, and also, to the way Australian nationalism continues to be centred on Anglo-Celtic norms and values. Rutherford, in particular, tries to give voice to the oppressive qualities of the fantasy of white Australia, endeavouring to account for its powerful hold over other possibilities for envisioning the nation. In *The Gauche Intruder*, she says:
Despite its plethora of cultures and cultural forms, its seeming polyvalency and multiplicity of cultural voices, Australian culture continues to sustain collectively held fantasies of nation and national character that regulate subjectivity at the level of the quotidian, the micro-gesture, and the policing of the self....(After the election of John Howard) indeed few could not dispute the entrenched nature of an aggressive Australian nationalism, of Australian racism and xenophobia, and the continued power of the fantasies that have underpinned disparate notions of nation and identity during the two hundred years of colonisation. (Rutherford, 2000, 12-13)

Rutherford locates these contemporary fantasies in a psychoanalytic study of Australian colonial fiction, arguing that the fantasies of national character inscribed there have persisted and continue to dominate ideals of nationhood despite Australia’s multicultural reality. I am less interested in the content of her psychoanalysis than I am in the way she renders whiteness in the form of particular kind of spatiality. Further in *The Gauche Intruder* she says:

I focus on continuities in fantasy that frame everyday life in Australia and that filter meaning at the level of its public reception...what I seek to understand is what is in play as soon as one walks down a street in Australia, buys the newspaper or catches the bus. How is this experience framed by distinctly white Australian codes that classify certain modalities of behaviour and speech as transgressive?...I ask what forms of collectivisation exist and are enacted at the level of the quotidian, despite Australia’s obvious multicultural diversity....In other words, I focus on homogeneity, on dominant fantasies of nation and on cultural law in order to expand the symbolic space for alterity. (Rutherford, 2000, 14-15, my emphasis)

Here Rutherford siphons whiteness out of the ether and suffuses it everywhere, both pervasive and evasive. Whiteness pervades the space between sites and states, between bodies on the street, between actions and intentions, between everyday interactions and symbolic constructions in cultural law. There is no place of or for whiteness; rather the multiple spatial registers that constitute ‘everyday life in Australia’ are saturated with it, porous, permeated by this psychical state of whiteness that infuses all forms of conduct,
modes of feeling and ways of making meaning (both quotidian and academic) in the nation. Rutherford here seems to be trying to ventilate two forms of resistance to non-white codes of being Australian: first an active and conscious resistance of individuals to those they perceive as different and transgressive; and second, a more insidious and unconscious resistance embedded in ‘forms of collectivisation’ outside the will of specific individuals in the nation.

Like Rutherford, Ghassan Hage also focuses on the fantasy of whiteness that frames ‘everyday life in Australia’. Where for Rutherford this fantasy underlies her interpretation and analysis of a set of colonial literary texts, for Hage the fantasy itself constitutes the very pith of his work. Hage’s argument is simple, convincing and seminal within Australian theoretical writings on multiculturalism. He argues that discourses of racism and tolerance in Australia are two sides of the same coin of a fantasy of white Australian nationalism.

If ‘racist violence’ is better understood as a nationalist practice of exclusion, ‘tolerance’, in much the same way, can be understood as a nationalist practice of inclusion. Both, however, are practices confirming an image of the White Australian as a manager of national space. (Hage, 2000, 90-91)

In this argument the White Australia policy and multiculturalism do not oppose each other; they are different inflections of a performance of white supremacy in which white subjects are empowered to either include or exclude non-white subjects from the nation. In a discussion on the discourse of tolerance as espoused by multiculturalists, Hage says:

It is this discourse of limits that makes clear that those who tolerate imagine themselves to be in a position of spatial power. Likewise, the tolerated others are imagined by definition to be present within ‘our sphere of influence’. They are part of ‘our’ nation, but only in so far as ‘we’ accept them. Their belonging to the national environment in which they come to exist is always a precarious one, for they never exist, they are allowed to exist. That is, the tolerated are never just present, they are positioned. (Hage, 2000, 89-90)
Hage is explicit in framing white supremacy as a mode of national spatiality and spatialisation. For white Australians, their vision of themselves looms large, literally larger than life on the national horizon; they perceive themselves as central, even ubiquitous in the nation, the agents through which all other objects are spatially ‘positioned’ towards each other. In fact, ‘supremacy’ is a misleading descriptor of the fantasy. In Hage’s argument white fantasists do not necessarily fantasise that white people are ontologically superior to other peoples. Rather, they hold an unquestioned, perhaps even unconscious, assumption, that whiteness is both a normative and privileged condition of the national citizen. As normative and privileged, white subjects are empowered (and perhaps even burdened) with the task – often framed as a problem – of measuring, judging and managing all non-white subjects according to white tastes and values. In this sense, the fantasy of white supremacy that Hage clinically examines is perhaps more accurately a fantasy of white centrality.

True to his psychoanalytic paradigm, Hage contrasts this fantasy with its ‘real’. He embarks on an expansive description of mundane, everyday life in Australia in which mixed social encounters occur independently, without tribulation and without the worried interventions of White Australia:

There is nothing newsworthy about everyday events such as an Australian woman of British background giving her children breakfast in the morning, then picking up the children of her Indian neighbour to take them to school; Lebanese and Anglo parents chatting while their children are taking part in a sports event; a Vietnamese woman picking up her Italian friend and meeting up with an Anglo friend at the swimming pool for an exercise session, or elderly Australians of all backgrounds playing bingo together...Such realities are never emphasised within the dominant discourses of White Australia. I want to argue that there is more to their suppression than their lack of newsworthiness. They are also suppressed because the dominant White fantasy that structures White Australian society cannot cope with such ordinariness. (Hage, 2000, 233-34)

White centrality thrives off continually casting ‘others’ in the nation as anomalous and problematic while at the same time is reinforced and renewed through the persistent work of
defining, arbitrating and managing this problem (Hage, 2000, 233). If migrants or people from non-white backgrounds were considered an ordinary and benign presence in the nation, White Australia would lose its privileged managerialist role and its spatial centrality would be eroded. So the White Australia fantasy deflects anxieties about the place and presence of non-white people in the nation. It is also a deflection of a much deeper and particularly current anxiety in the face of the kinds of structural shifts identified by Roger Rouse. The unanchoring of the ‘comforting modern imagery of nation-states and national languages, of coherent communities and consistent subjectivities, of dominant centres and distant margins’ makes changes to national culture outside of the control of national governments (Rouse, 2002, 157). Hage makes the point that the multicultural policy did not encourage or produce social diversity in the nation. Rather, multiculturalism was the state’s response to this diversity that ‘had already become an entrenched part of a social reality’ in Australia (Hage, 2000, 236-37) and needed a discursive and policy framework in order to be governable.

Australia’s multicultural policy enacted an instrumentalisation of an altered, but as yet undefined, social, cultural and political landscape; and it involved no less than the re-imagining of the national population – from monocultural to multicultural. But it is worth returning to Ghassan Hage’s critique of multiculturalism in order to get a sense of the rationality of such an instrumentalisation in the social and historical context beyond Australia’s immediate political imperatives. In its entrenched conservatism, its consolidation of white privilege and cultural dominance, its constraint rather than embrace of cultural difference, this policy expresses something of the nation negating its altered governmental capacities in a time of increasing social mobility, political fragmentation and the dispersal of cultural communities across national borders. These globalising processes have material effects on the capacity of nations to define and culturally reproduce themselves. Some theorists have interpreted these changes (along with the transnationalism of capital and commerce and the rapid proliferation and expansion of communication technologies) as portents of the waning dominance of the nation-state.16

16 I am thinking of work by Saskia Sassen, Arjun Appadurai and Manfred Steger.
But, even as it is the case under the conditions of globalisation that contemporary forms of governance are limited in their capacities to order and reproduce nationalised forms of cultural and social life, one reaction to these limits is to heighten rather than diminish programs of national consolidation and protectionism. In Australia, this has assumed various forms: an increased vigilance over national borders, the mandatory detention and implicit criminalisation of asylum seekers and refugees, and the ‘moral panic’ around Muslim and Arabic-speaking ‘others’ in the nation. It is manifest in the development of a national educational curriculum including a uniform national history component. It is evident also in a swelling popular and official reverence for stories of national military sacrifice, both past and present, and the official commemoration of these events. And it is evident in the state-centric deployment of multiculturalism as a discourse for managing cultural diversity and social difference by relegating endemic demographic realities to the periphery of Australia’s national imaginary. These measures reaffirm, in governmental and symbolic terms, an atavistic and nostalgic conception of the nation as bounded, homogenous and defined through a predominantly white or Anglo-European culture.

As Rutherford has argued, many of these qualities are testament to the ‘continued power of the fantasies that have underpinned disparate notions of nation and identity during the two hundred years of colonisation’ – fantasies emanating from the nation’s past. It may also be true that these defensive postures of nation and nationalism (not exclusive to Australia) are reactions to the condition of the state of the nation more generically, to perceived instabilities caused by structural transitions in the present and future. If we are in the midst of an epochal shift from national to global structures of social organisation, I am interested here in the discursive strategies through which, internal to this shift, the category of the national continues to reproduce itself as a politically dominant frame of reference and site of cultural meaning. The abstract but national location of culture assumed (almost unquestioningly) by Hage and Rutherford, make theory and theorising part of the story of this reproduction. As Rutherford and Hage argue, the symbolic limits of the discursive reproduction of the nation...
has significant social effects on the national inclusion and participation of non-white people. As Poynting and his co-writers argue, it constrains their sense of belonging (Poynting et al., 2004, 209). But as I indicated above, also significant is the way the national form itself persists as a site of unquestioned allegiance, identification and ordering – and this includes academic critiques of Australian culture.

Hage’s depiction of Australia’s ‘real’ spreads the canvass of an ordinary, multicultural reality where women and children (conspicuously mostly women and children) of different backgrounds happily engage in quotidian domestic life together. He opens up a space for a kind of normative multiculturalism, of social worlds unfolding and revolving around their own centres, neither in the shadow of White Australia nor a threat. It is not only that these sites and social practices avoid the managerialist intervention of White Australia; they also do so because they circumvent or fall beneath the register of the national, both symbolically and governmentally.

In this context, Rutherford, in the limited extract I have cited, herself projects a fantasy of the centrality, indeed, ubiquity of a white consciousness in multicultural Australia. That at the micro-level of the social, practices like walking down the street, buying a newspaper or catching the bus – the same kind of quotidian ‘reality’ depicted by Hage – are not necessarily ‘framed by distinctly white Australian codes’ because, embedded in particular places, in particular instantiations of community, these practices are not necessarily framed by a national spatial imaginary. In Rutherford’s fantasy, the register of the national intrudes everywhere equally; and because the nation is defined through white symbolic terms, the classificatory codes of whiteness pervade every instance of social life. In her fantasy, the threatening and malignant classifying modality of whiteness pervading Australian culture is replaced by the white intellectual who perceives whiteness everywhere – because she sees the nation everywhere. Rutherford’s fantasy is a fantasy of legibility and critique; she ascribes herself the role of recognising and diagnosing the suffocating cultural codes that surround and degrade her compatriots. The counterpart to this fantasy – as alluded to by Hage – is
that there are other sites, other locations of culture framed by forms of collectivisation and identification other than the nation. And from these locations of culture, perhaps it is not in the purview of the intellectual or cultural critic to *expand the symbolic space for alterity* (Rutherford, 2000, 14-15). Rather, it is her role to struggle to find an interpretive frame for this expression, or simply to be present to an experience of alterity without the ready orienting coordinates of a coherent (national) spatial imaginary; to be present as witness and scribe.

But in opening up this space of ordinary multicultural activity, the ‘real’ conditions of Australians’ everyday civic lives, Hage exposes an analytical aporia. Where is the place in the nation where the symbolic centrality of White Australia is disabled or illegible or absent or irrelevant? Is this *placed* space of alterity limited to only the most quotidian, micro-social, unmediated and unrepresented register of the social? That is, are there any social encounters and experiences completely unmediated by the signifying codes of the national or outside of any kind of symbolic spatiality? Both Hage’s and Rutherford’s fantasies of the white nation revolve around an explicitly abstract spatiality. Hage, in particular, draws from a diffuse array of discursive sites – the newspaper, vernacular popular speech and gesture, advertising images, the language of politicians – to distil (or perhaps diagnose) a national psychical will. The nation space is assembled out of these fragments as an abstract but coherent discursive sphere that people in the nation try to control with signs. From these signs Hage identifies a singular unifying logic. This is why his interpretation of Australia’s multicultural discourse is so attractive and persuasive. Out of an array of diffuse materials – official governmental discourse, vernacular speech, popular media representation – where most commentators might identify an array of conflicting rationalities, Hage distinguishes only one: a white will to manage the spatiality of the nation both symbolically and in a literal material sense. As useful as this interpretation is for reading a wide variety of utterances abstracted through a national public sphere, this singular rationality does not adequately inform an understanding of *lived* place and the many kinds of practices – like the governmental, place-making work of community art – through which place is made. Such a theory does not accommodate the
practices of Khaled Sabsabi or Kiri Dewes, whose work involves ordering and reconfiguring the way life is lived in the micro-sphere of social life, while also being deeply imbricated in a national discursive sphere of governmental structures and policy rationales.

My complaint against Rutherford is that she assumes a national vantage from which to read a myriad of different lived interactions and negotiations. From this vantage, she has an omniscient position from which everything is visible and interpretable. And from this vantage every act expresses the same system of relating or is governed by the same internal order. This vantage avoids the complexity and partiality of a more immersive engagement with place found through an ethnographic rather than a semiotic approach. In Ahmed’s terms, Rutherford also assumes an ontology of difference. She represses the performative nature of the social encounter in which identities and subject positions, ways of relating and narratives of belonging, are actively and repeatedly (re)constructed in the moment of contact; they do not simply play out a predetermined script written at the national level. This kind of theoretical approach retreats from an ethics of decolonisation as someone like Deborah Bird Rose would see it. Even as she tries to ‘expand the symbolic space for alterity’, from this omniscient vantage, Rutherford evades pursuing the messy pluralities, the ‘noisy and unruly processes’ that open up a more ethical kind of relating in a settler-colonial context (Rose, 2004, 21). Hage’s vantage is equally omniscient. Even as he swoops to the ground level of everyday encounters, where women of different cultures help each other out and old people enjoy each other’s company, he celebrates an authentic everydayness precisely because it is benign and does not interfere with the values and norms scripted from a national level above. In being innocuous and minor, these interactions are invisible, and implicitly, inconsequential to the nation and the state and to the narratives that sustain unequal forms of belonging within them.

In later research based on interviews with the Lebanese boys who provoked the Cronulla riots, Hage does address a more visible and challenging kind of everydayness:
But what is striking about the boys was not their working/under class hybrid culture but how at ease they were with their working/under class hybridity: they shamelessly exhibited it. They were at ease on the beach being sexist, being macho, being vulgar and being aggressive; they were really very much at home. It is in this that they placed themselves outside the multicultural-monocultural field. They did not represent a culture that one can be multicultural about, they were looking neither for ‘recognition’ nor for ‘valorisation’ and they were certainly not looking for ‘toleration’. No Anglo multiculturalist looked at them and thought: ‘I am enriched by your presence in my country’, but they, on the other hand, couldn’t care less anyway. (Hage, 2009, 258)

The macho posturing of these boys disturbed the comforts of place Anglo-Australian beach-goers had assumed was their right to enjoy. But more than this, Hage argues that such conduct disturbed the national narrative of multiculturalism itself whereby difference is tolerated only when this difference ‘enriches’, does not challenge, the centrality and normativity of White Australia. For Hage, it is the boys’ ease and comfort with themselves, their disdain for the opinions and comforts of others that was so shocking and intolerable. The immediate local and national over-reaction to this behaviour revealed the assimilationist fantasy at the centre of Australia’s official multiculturalism that Ahmed (2000) identifies. Behind ‘the monocultural assimilationist claims that the Lebanese boys were unintegrated’, Hage says, ‘was the fear that they seemed over-integrated. Too integrated for their own good: no sense of their assumed marginality: arrogant’ (Hage, 2009, 258).

Hage’s, Ahmed’s and Rutherford’s critique of multiculturalism suggests a frustration with its inflexibility – its resistance to genuine engagement with the political, cultural and social perspectives of others and the changes these perspectives would inevitably bring to ways of being in and belonging to the nation. Their critique echoes the views of other cultural research on Australian cultural politics.17 As I have argued, I think part of this frustration relates to the place from which these writers mount their critique. In Bhabha’s terms this critique of multiculturalism assumes the stability and homogeneity of the nation and the

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17 For example, work by Sneja Gunew, Fazal Rizvi, Sophie Watson, Irene Watson and Paul Carter.
national ‘as the paradigmatic place of departure’ (Bhabha, 1997, 21). I want to contrast this ‘place of departure’, this location of culture, with a place of departure which compromises the stability of this vantage. I shift here from Hage’s, Ahmed’s and Rutherford’s emphasis on the meta-discourses shaping (and containing) belonging in the nation, to the lived everyday encounters with difference that Amanda Wise and Selvaraj Velayutham (2009) have called ‘everyday multiculturalism’. In Bhabha’s words again, I see this other place of departure as one that, in its heterogeneity, indeterminacy, complexity and sheer messiness, ‘confounds any profound or “authentic” sense of a “national” culture’ (Bhabha, 1997, 21), in productive ways.

**Everyday Multiculturalism**

Studies of everyday multiculturalism\(^\text{18}\) are literally and explicitly *placed* studies. As placed, they reveal the kinds of tensions and negotiations that, Massey argues, make place and the making of place, innately political. The vantage of place brings more than just a shift from the macro-field of official national discourse to the micro-field of everyday practices. It brings first the possibility of disruption and challenge to the prevailing order of things – or what Massey (2005, 154) has called the ‘co-presence of a multiplicity of trajectories’. Second, it brings something lost in Hage’s framing of the everyday: recognition of the thickly mediated context of embodied social encounters, and the production of broader social identities and narratives of belonging being negotiated and contested in these encounters. The emerging field of studies on everyday multiculturalism draws upon an eclectic range of social domains, practices and geographic locations. Work on body-building at a culturally diverse Brooklyn gym rubs up against a study of locals fishing on the Georges River in western Sydney (Sherman, 2009; Goodall *et al*., 2009). Work on everyday forms of social cooperation – from an Asian rubbish collection team in New Zealand to acts of hospitality and neighbourliness between Anglo-Celtic, second and first generation migrants in a NSW country town – (Sherman, 2009; Wise, 2009) are counterposed by studies of everyday racism and hostility (Velayutham, 2009; Noble & Poynting, 2010). Studies on food and culinary landscapes

\(^\text{18}\) This work is also referred to as ‘everyday cosmopolitanism’, or ‘ordinary’ or ‘vernacular cosmopolitanism’.
comprise a rich subset of work in this field: shopping centres in inner city and suburban Sydney, the history of a food market in Cairns, hawker centres in Malaysia and Singapore, the historical and geographic trail of the laksa...all fertile sites of social and cultural mingling where national, popular and colonial discourses play out and are played with on a micro-scale (Wise & Velayutham, 2009; Duruz, 2011; Law, 2011; Noble, 2011).

In an introduction to their anthology of the same name, Wise and Velayutham situate everyday multiculturalism against the more common ‘top-down’ approaches ‘dominated by macro-theoretical approaches to multicultural citizenship, the recognition of groups and distribution of groups rights...and theories of border-making and identity construction’ (Wise & Velayutham, 2009, 2). They situate the work of this collection in an emerging field in Australia and internationally. This emerging field includes work on expanding the understanding of cosmopolitanism from an urban, elite disposition towards cultural consumption, to the everyday or ‘ordinary’ efforts to bridge difference in working class and migrant communities. It involves work on urban and public space and the interaction between planning policies and the social inclusiveness of the modern city (Watson, 2009; Jacobs 1996). It also includes work on everyday racism, thinking about racism outside of extreme acts of racial vilification, to the more ‘mundane practices by nature so embedded in routine and everyday practice that it is experienced as amorphous and difficult to explicitly identify’ (Essed in Wise & Velayutham, 2009, 8; Noble & Poynting, 2010). This work reveals the complexity and diversity of the domain of the ‘everyday’ and the multitude of practices through which encounters with difference are enacted and negotiated.

Unlike the more diagnostic and argumentative style of Ahmed and Hage, work on everyday multiculturalism tends towards a more immersive and open-ended style of inquiry. Assuming the vantage of place, these writers endeavour to draw out the nuance and complexity of a social milieu rather than reduce a context to a single argument or central polemic. Jean Duruz makes this explicit in her article, ‘Following the laksa trail in Katong,

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19 Wise and Velayutham cite Pnina Werbner, 1999 and Lamont and Aksartova, 2002 as examples.
Singapore’, in which she journeys, historically and geographically, through the intersecting stories constituting this culinary site:

Several notes of warning, however, before we start this journey. In this article, the use of ‘story’ employs a certain looseness of meaning. The intention is not to create an oral history of the neighbourhood, with its own ‘authentic’ voices clamouring for attention in the soundscape of white noise from government policy, media discourse, or the dictates of town planning. Instead, narrative fragments – whether of policy makers, advertisers, shop owners, remembering residents, tourist guides, tourists – jostle together to form an intriguing collage of analytical possibilities. In this sense, ‘Katong’, as palpable experience of walked-on place becomes a prompt for reflection and speculation rather than a source of empirical ‘evidence’. (Duruz, 2011, 607)

Lisa Law (2011) assembles a similarly textured account of place in her excavation of the ‘past(s) of Rusty’s Market in tropical Cairns’. Using the metaphor of palimpsest she delves beneath an ethnographic immersion in the contemporary market by exploring the layers of its cosmopolitan pasts (Law, 2011). An archaeological report reveals the ‘ruins of the old Chinatown, a history all but erased in the current landscape’ (Law, 2011, 669). This colonial history dating back before the White Australia policy has been overlaid by a popular history celebrating the market’s thirty years as a ‘fantasy of “white multiculturalism”’. Here, a linear narrative of progress, from the hippy whiteness of the 1970s to the multicultural diversity of the present, erases the Chinese origins of the market’s past (Law, 2011, 675). Like Ross Gibson, Law reveals the active processes of forgetting – forgetting the cosmopolitan workforce that settled Australia’s far north, forgetting the interactions between Indigenous, Islander and South East Asian peoples before and after colonisation20– preceding the narrative of Australian multiculturalism.

Duruz and Law differ from Hage in that they insist on the mediated nature of place. For Duruz, mediations take the form of ‘policy makers, advertisers, shop-owners…tourist

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20 See also Peta Stephenson’s *The Outsiders Within*, 2007.
guides’. For Law place is mediated by policy discourses (like the White Australia policy), popular history, media and touristic narratives (Law, 2011, 673). These mediations are not distortions of the everyday; they are part of the authenticity of the vernacular ‘narrative fragments’ from which the everyday is composed. Such ‘designs on place’ shape the interactions and exchanges of living together in this cosmopolitan environment. They also shape imaginaries – national, diasporic, colonial – which orient everyday exchanges and situate living together within a meaningful context. This layered approach to place uncovers multiple narratives and perspectives coexisting within a single site; it refuses explaining social and cultural dynamics from one single vantage. In this sense, there is a partiality to the ‘interpretive possibility’ (Wise & Velayutham, 2009, 2) opened up here, a partiality of perceiving and interpreting very different from the theoretical clarity possible from the omniscient theoretical vantage of Hage.

Doreen Massey and Deborah Bird Rose imply that accepting partiality is part of a more ethical being in the world. They promote engaging with open-ended multiplicity and plurality as an ethical response to the reductive logic of dominant meta-narratives like capitalist modernity or settler colonialism. Such an approach could be critiqued for reifying complexity at the expense of argumentative clarity (Ang, 2011). But in the work of everyday multiculturalists like Duruz and Law, I see an engagement with multiplicity which makes a productive contribution to thinking about living together outside of the (often dualistic) parameters of multiculturalism. Attending to the co-presences of place (to traces of presence), they reconfigure living together from a polarity between a dominant culture and its others (White Australia and migrants, for example), to a more decentralised, multifaceted set of relations. So for Duruz, the innate hybridity of the laksa belies a simple search for origins and so resists being modelled upon notions of cultural authenticity. Within the ‘bounded intimacy’ of a Katong market, the laksa’s mythical home ‘itself comes to signify an “authentic” place of “borrowings”’ (Duruz, 2011, 610). The boundaries of home and the purity of national culture are impossibly mottled here. And from the vantage of this mottled terrain, an acclimation to living together with difference as a cultural norm becomes the basis
rather than mutation of culture. These are the ‘shifting margins of cultural displacement’ – marked by cultural exchange, fluidity and fusion – which Bhabha claims as the grounds for cultural research (Bhabha, 1997, 21).

Duruz’s and Law’s approach to place are of consequence for reconsidering both theoretical and governmental approaches to living together. Identifying a similar cultural complexity and hybridity in Australia’s culturally diverse suburbias, Greg Noble argues that:

(W)e are now seeing a diversification and intermingling which unsettles the common assumptions of multiculturalism. Cultural complexity is much more than the sum of nationally defined ‘culture’, and it goes well beyond an awareness of the degree of differentiation within and across those nationally defined cultures; it must also be seen in the multiple forms of adaptation and mixing that mark the process of settlement, intermarriage, intergenerational change and the plural social contexts in which difference is negotiated. This is rarely captured in analyses of intercultural relations and is often absent from policy programs servicing diversity. (Noble, 2011, 827-28)

Noble illustrates this complexity through an ethnographic study of everyday transactions in a Sydney suburb, transformed from its Anglo-Australian origins by significant immigration, mostly from China and south-east Asia (Noble, 2011). He argues that multiculturalism needs to be reassessed from this more placed, or grounded location of culture (Noble, 2011, 838) if it is to be transformed from the reductive and ossifying paradigm identified by Hage and Ahmed. He sees this shift in perspective as important to policy as well as academic responses to social diversity. Attending to grounded interactions in their plurality, uncertainty and pragmatism, reshapes the imaginary coherence of the nation and the way the nation addresses its ‘others’. Like Ahmed, Noble suggests that the limits of multicultural policy inhere in the very grammar of the national address. This address ‘configures the “clients” of multiculturalism, those whose needs are to be “serviced” and “tolerated”, and those who do the tolerating’ (Noble, 2011, 838).
Noble suggests that reconfiguring the terms for living together cannot happen simply by changing the official discourse of multiculturalism and hoping that this filters down to policy and practice below. In a passage at first glance reminiscent of Hage’s panorama of mundane everyday encounters with difference, Noble (2011, 830) emphasises the active makings, the strategies and performances, which stabilise living together in a context of ‘hyperdiversity’:

As Anglo and Chinese children play near a fountain, for example, their mothers exchange pleasantries around the shared experience of motherhood. Elsewhere, an elderly Anglo couple stop to ask a young Chinese couple about their newborn baby and make conventional conversation. These exchanges may be short and banal but they involve exploratory gestures which seek affinities. They may lead to exchanges about cultural background, place of living, language, or the weather – points of connection (of sameness and commensurable difference) that entail a sense of shared life. (Noble, 2011, 837)

Noble argues that these gestures and exchanges are not just incidental because they are brief and peripheral to the real connectivities of people’s social lives. Rather, they are ‘consequential’ acts through which, over time, people learn to find accommodation within ‘complex spaces shaped by the routine world of strangers’ (Noble, 2011, 838). What interests me here is the pedagogic and performative nature of these exchanges. Rather than unmediated instances of people getting along, Noble suggests that, in such circumstances, people are subtly displaced from themselves and assume a more conscious kind of being-in-the-world in public. People perform acts of curiosity, friendliness, helpfulness in an active, ‘exploratory’ effort to stabilise a more comfortable kind of dwelling in place. I would argue further that these deliberate efforts take place in the presence (or shadow) of a national discourse of multiculturalism and against popular and governmental discourses of racism and xenophobia. That is, they make place in the presence of already produced knowledges (governmental, official, popular and otherwise) of what social harmony, or indeed, xenophobia, look like. The making of place in Noble’s quotidian setting is not separate from these more abstract discourses, but neither should it be considered subordinate to them.
In this sense, the comforts (and discomforts) of place are actively made, not just spontaneously lived. It is a slight distinction, but it has implications for how community arts, as a place-making practice, can be interpreted, and the domains of cultural enquiry upon which it can have some purchase. I think the place-based social engagements of Anne Kershaw and Khaled Sabsabi are deeply invested in and attuned to Massey’s ‘question of our living together’. As agents of governance, they are also conscripted into managing living together as a problem of (national) cultural cohesion and community identity. Living together, Massey argues, forces forms of engagement, negotiation, change and compromise on us. And as Noble argues, these kinds of everyday competencies might ‘inform policies and programs much better than moral injunctions to “respect difference”’ (Noble, 2011, 838). Massey entitles her chapter on place ‘Throwntogetherness: the politics of the event of place’. She emphasising the spontaneous, unpredictable qualities of being placed in the world (Massey, 2005, 149). But ‘throwntogetherness’ evokes too casual, too immediate, a sense of place. What Sabsabi’s work (and the work of community arts practitioners more broadly) illustrates is the multiple, intersecting forms of conscious and repeated mediation – of planning, intervening, allocating, shaping, designing, connecting, teaching, guiding, remembering, sensing – through which place happens, and the inevitable deviations and accidents that ensue from all this.

In his poetic and technical critique of place-making, Paul Carter argues for giving expression to what Doreen Massey calls both the ‘order and chance’ of place. His purpose in Dark Writing is to expose the creative or restless possibilities of place. He intends his work to be of practical value: to affect the way we make designs upon place, and in making different designs, to make way for a more inclusive, more equitable kind of belonging (Carter, 2009, 15). Carter, like Noble, considers placed practices to be the grounds from which broader structural change might be envisaged and enacted. For Carter, places do not necessarily change when they are overlaid by a new metanarrative – for example, the way multicultural Australia replaced White Australia. Places change when they are practised differently, when

21 Greg Noble’s ‘Bumping into alterity’ emphasises a similar sense of spontaneity and unpredictability in sharing place together.
their designs are more responsive to the liveliness of the lives being lived within them. This is the dark writing of place.

How might attending to the ‘order and chance’ of living together with difference have implications for thinking about settler-colonial belonging? For Ross Gibson and Deborah Bird Rose, accessing the ‘dark writing’ of place invokes the bad feeling still resonating through two centuries of colonial settlement. Where Noble celebrates a kind of creative and inventive making of place together, Rose and Gibson might see attempts – conscious and unconscious – at productively acknowledging the mixed feelings which accompany living together in the ‘wild’ present of the settler-colonial nation. That is, Rose and Gibson would see the conscious effort of contemporary place-making through the lens of the more enduring problem of what it means to live with settlement. Noble, himself, alludes to the presence of mixed feelings in the ‘banal entanglements’ of living with difference (Noble, 2011, 838). Labouring to make place together is about accepting living within a ‘routine world of strangers’ and such labour invokes ‘tensions’ and ‘deep ambivalence’ (Noble, 2011, 838). The presence and persistence of these feelings indicates the making of an inhabitable place in the absence of the insular safety of home. Rose and Gibson might suggest that these feelings should not be denied or displaced, that learning to accept and negotiate ‘failings and futilities’ (Gibson, 2002, 179) is how an ethical settler-colonial belonging begins to take shape. This is some of the un-settling work that community art can do.

UNSETTLED, UNSETTLING...

Throughout this thesis I have referred to the idea of unsettling or unsettlement. My intention has been for this idea to invoke a number of different contexts and to intimate the ways in which they might be connected. Being unsettled brings to mind, most immediately, a state of feeling, a feeling of being disturbed, anxious or uneasy. Such a state of feeling attends the unanchoring of people, culture and place in the upheavals of neoliberal modernity. These are the ‘confusing’ (Rouse, 2002, 157) conditions that necessitate other methods of understanding contemporary social life in both theoretical and lived terms.
Unsettlement refers more directly to a postcolonial argument about the way the effects of colonisation continue to shape our inhabitation of the present. Colonial settlement is inherently unsettling because it demands a repression or denial of bad feelings and memories, and a confinement of these bad feelings within tangible and manageable boundaries. The excluded place, the marginalised constituency, bears the material and metaphysical externalities of settlement.

Unsettlement and unsettling also refers to the material and poetic labour of place-making and the way that place-making is intrinsically linked to the ambivalence of a settler-colonial sense of place. The place-making work of community arts can be considered unsettling work, work that counteracts the limited terms of settler-colonial belonging, in that it expands the possible ways of dwelling in place. Like Paul Carter, I think of this work as democratising place; it enables different people and different social narratives to have a claim upon place. The expanded possibilities for the ‘performances of everyday life’ can, says Carter, ‘themselves produce historical change’ (Carter, 209, 9).

Provoking and directing feeling is a large part of this place-making work. *The West Welcomes Refugees* prompts recognition of the mixed feelings transmitted in the giving and receiving of ‘welcome’ to new arrivals. *The Weaving Lands* is in part, an attempt to stem social unease through the transformative power of art. And *Refill* betrays both a fear of the ‘Arab Other’, and provides an outlet for the feelings of the young people whose social identities are constrained by this very fear. The presence of these feelings marks an intersection between the material and governmental work of place-making, and the psychical work of the ‘narrative thing’ sustaining colonial settlement.

I employ the idea of unsettling and unsettlement in yet one more sense, and this meaning pertains to the researcher. I think of community arts as a fertile location of culture because of the ways in which it unsettles the grounds, the presumptions, the terms and classifications circumscribing cultural research. Critiques of community art tend to assume the coherence
of the ‘thing’ they address. In these critiques, community art reflects either an instrumental rationality or an aesthetic one; it addresses an audience as ‘disadvantaged’ or as ‘different’; community art projects are initiated to gentrify place or to empower local communities. By drawing out the complexity of this location of culture – both its textual and interpretive unruliness – I am trying to suggest the way this ‘thing’ resists settling neatly into recognised terms and categories. I am proposing that engaging more productively with this work might mean deviating from the impulse to stabilise the ‘thing’, to settle it within the familiar theoretical grooves that make such forms of interpretation, evaluation and judgement possible.

Respecting the unsettled nature of this ‘thing’ broaches a practical challenge for the researcher. In each of my case studies, I have made an account of how these projects might be encountered in everyday life. These objects, these ‘words and a picture’ are rarely at the bustling centres of the everyday spaces in which they appear. They are given, at best, secondary status in spaces of official culture – the museum, the gallery, the public foyer. After the initial celebration or the exhibition opening, these works slip into the margins and the life they address disperses and goes on somewhere else. Researching these projects depends upon a belated encounter with the ‘thing’ under investigation, and usually, partial access to the myriad processes through which it was produced. The durability and accessibility of any cultural form impacts on the ways it might be used and interpreted in the future. Broader theoretical accounts of community arts will, to some degree, depend upon this work surviving in more concrete ways in archives, histories and catalogues. And this will itself require methodological inventiveness: incorporating this under-theorised, poorly historicised, often undocumented cultural form into some kind of historical record, while still being faithful to its inherent unruliness and transience.
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