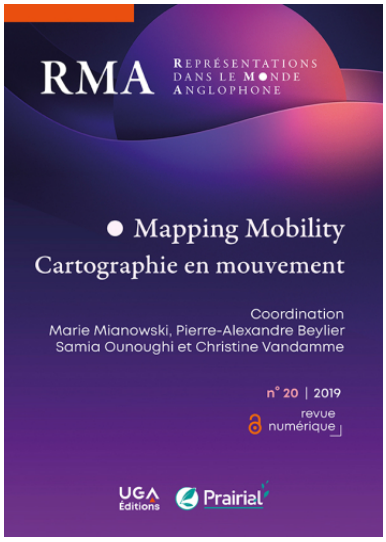


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# Mapping Mobility

*Cartographies en mouvement*

**Edited by Marie Mianowski, Pierre-Alexandre Beylier, Samia Ounoughi and Christine Vandamme**

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# INTRODUCTION

This collection of essays on mapping mobility aims at questioning how changing relationships to land, place and landscape challenge authors and artists in representing otherness ethically, depending on the various histories of colonial power and postcolonial empowerment of the territories whose stories are being narrated. As Shameem Black notes in *Fiction Across Borders: Imagining the Lives of Others in Late Twentieth-Century Novels*, "because fiction conventionally calls attention to the texture of experiential life through emplotted action, the novel almost always participates in one form or another of social border crossing" (8). The articles that follow discuss the ways in which geographical border crossings and social border crossings are enmeshed, and how this entanglement is represented in various discourses and in literature and the arts. In this volume, "ethics" is understood in the way Shameem Black defines it, as "the ethos of responsibility to one's object of inquiry, responsibility opposed to hegemonic domination and representational violence" (3). This volume questions the ethics of representation when discussing and representing human border crossings and places of belonging, whether in legal discourse or in literature and the arts.

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# Mapping Mobility: Representing Places and People Ethically

*Cartographier la mobilité : représenter les lieux et les personnes de manière éthique*

**Marie Mianowski**

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## TEXT

***Acknowledgements***
*We owe thanks to the colleagues from Aix-Marseille Université (LERMA) and Montpellier 3 (EMMA), Matthew Graves, Gilles Teulié and Claire Omhovère for initiating the itinerant seminar "Geographies of displacement" in 2015, which later became the "Critical Geographies" seminar. It gave us the opportunity to welcome one of those seminars at Grenoble Alpes University in November 2018, the proceedings of which are collected in this volume.*
*We owe a debt of gratitude to Dina Nayeri for generously permitting the publication of her interview by Jessica Small.*
*We also owe abundant thanks to CEMRA, ILCEA4 and the staff who guaranteed that the whole project went ahead smoothly.*

1 This collection of essays on mapping mobility aims at questioning how changing relationships to land, place and landscape challenge authors and artists in representing otherness ethically, depending on the various histories of colonial power and postcolonial empowerment of the territories whose stories are being narrated. As Shameem Black notes in *Fiction Across Borders: Imagining the Lives of Others in Late Twentieth-Century Novels*, "because fiction conventionally calls attention to the texture of experiential life through emplotted action, the novel almost always participates in one form or another of social border crossing" (8). The articles that follow discuss the ways in which geographical border crossings and social border crossings are enmeshed, and how this entanglement is represented in various discourses and in literature and the arts. In this volume, "ethics" is understood in the way Shameem Black defines it, as "the ethos of responsibility to one's object of inquiry,

responsibility opposed to hegemonic domination and representational violence" (3).

2 As Anne-Laure Amilhat Szary argues in "The Geographies of Migration and Mobility in a Globalizing World", mapping contemporary moving patterns has become very difficult, because moving patterns do not correspond anymore to arrows tracing direct trajectories from one point to another ("The Geographies of Migration and Mobility"). Similarly, Sarah Mekdjian foregrounds in a chapter about mapping borders and mobility (Amilhat-Szary, *Borderities and the Politics of Contemporary Mobile Borders*), that although borders are as much mobile as people, mapping should not be limited to being an instrument of governmentality, but ought to be critiqued by experts on contemporary borders and apparatus of surveillance. Sarah Mekdjian describes and analyzes several counter-cartography projects which have involved the production of alternative visual narratives of borders (Amilhat-Szary; Mekdjian, "*This Is Not an Atlas*"), questioning and deconstructing traditional maps. In a similar way, the chapters in this volume question the ethics of representation when discussing and representing human border crossings and places of belonging, whether in legal discourse or in literature and the arts.

3 Borders, like places, change over time, for geopolitical reasons, but also for human or practical reasons, to the point that they may become nearly invisible. On the other hand, borders are erected every year in parts of the world where there were none before (Papin; Tertrais; Zajec). And yet, the mutability of borders and places does not necessarily match the mobility of people. Borders usually deter and impede mobility, when they do not altogether prevent people from crossing, trespassing or transgressing. Those words, however, all denote the passing over as well as the forbidden status of the passage. The changing nature of borders and places therefore raises issues of representation, according to point of views and ideological perspectives. In fact, traditional mapping is usually deprived of human representation. As Tim Ingold, a British anthropologist, explains in his book *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description*,

> the map was not arrived at by any process of observation and measurement but through a visionary experience of revelation. Rather than surveying the opaque, outer surfaces of the world, the visionary—in whose eyes these surfaces were rendered transparent—would see *into* it whereupon was revealed to his mind an inner reality of which the world's outward, visible forms were appearances. One rendering of this all-encompassing vision was the *mappa mundi* or world map. (199)

As Ingold reminds us, the *mappa mundi* was not so much descriptive as prescriptive. He suggests that geometric paintings in the style of Kandinsky for example, are the precise counterpart of the medieval *mappa mundi* and serve the same purpose of summoning the theme of meditative recollection. Tim Ingold's work emphasizes the fact that the world represented on a map is usually one deprived of its inhabitants: "No one is there; nothing moves or makes any sound. Now in just the same way the journeys of the inhabitants are eliminated from the cartographic map, the voices of the past are eliminated from the printed text" (*Lines*, 24). In the same spirit, in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau showed that modern maps eliminated all trace of the practices that produced them, creating the impression that the structure of the map sprang directly from the structure of the world (quoted in Ingold, *Lines*, 24). In other words, maps are almost always disembodied and even, one could say, dispirited—if not dispiriting.

4 And yet, fundamentally, the story of human people has been about migration and changing places since the beginning of time, and that story is not restricted to certain parts of the world. Such movements affect the communities migrants leave, as much as the communities that receive these migrants. They also impact communities along the route of transit. And therefore mapping involves not only the nomadic journey of people from one point to another point, but also the way those people make new homes, the way they embody the tremendous changes taking place in their lives. Mapping also involves the potentially transformative impact of their presence on the places where they stop, stay or settle.

5 In Mohsin Hamid's novel *Exit West* published in 2017 and written by an author born in Pakistan and now a British citizen, Nadia and

Saeed, the main protagonists, have decided to flee their city. The city itself is described, without being named, as "swollen by refugees but still mostly at peace, or at least not yet openly at war" (1). Nadia and Saeed decide to migrate when they hear that strange black doors are being opened throughout the city, giving access to places like London, San Francisco, Greece or Dubai:

> [Nadia] approached the door, and drawing close she was struck by its darkness, its opacity, the way that it did not reveal what was on the other side, also did not reflect what was on this side, and so felt equally like a beginning and an end, and she turned to Saeed and found him staring at her, and his face was full of worry, and sorrow, and she took his hands in hers and held them tight, and then, releasing them, and without a word, she stepped through. (97–98)

The moment of setting off is depicted as one when usual referential landmarks are utterly upset. The perception of space and time is altered, as space lacks depth and transparency, and time is suspended. All sense of perspective is absent, either spatially or time-wise. The action of going away is described not with the adverb "along", or "across", but with the adverb "through", denoting a radical jump, because Nadia is literally leaping into the unknown. The paragraph is indeed followed by a typographical blank on the page. In this paragraph, affects are represented and acknowledged by the narrator ("worry", "sorrow") and the bodies of Nadia and Saeed connect just before she leaves, as she "took his hands in hers and held them tight, and then, releasing them, and without a word, she stepped through." Looks and gestures have replaced words in that moment of intense emotion, when Nadia steps through, with the comma inserted before the last three words, emphasizing both the effort and the impetus. In that decisive instant, just before she leaves, her gaze only finds opacity in the space around her. She turns towards Saeed and only in his eyes and the emotions they carry is she able to reclaim the dynamics of movement.

6 That example shows the way fiction can represent displacement from one place to another in terms of embodied spaces. Because emotions and affects dominate moments of departure and definitive journeys away from what was considered home, words can become useless and silence then prevails. But the event that is taking place is

nonetheless embodied, as if imprinted in bodily perceptions and memories. What dominates this mode of representation is therefore not so much the precision of the journey (the doors are ordinary doors and the adverb "through" is vague enough), but the density of what is experienced emotionally. Hamid's craft is to focus our attention as readers on what makes this scene human. The emigration process can be represented in bland almost mechanical terms, but Hamid shows that the human experience is every time unique for those who, like Nadia and Saeed, flee their homes. In Hamid's novel, places are nameless, but the fate of the protagonists is what matters. He highlights the personal and inter-personal revolutions in the minds and bodies that the process of migrating has triggered. As Shameem Black argues, "border-crossing novels themselves suggest that the political and philosophical problems they raise will never be fully resolved" (4). It is the case with Hamid's novel, which also draws attention to the ethics of representing the other in a context of global human migrating movements, emphasizing personal strategies of place-making and questioning the individual sense of belonging, issues that all the chapters in this volume share in different ways.

7 The present volume opens with two chapters focusing on Australia and how the denial of the presence of the Aboriginal Other produced a paradoxical mapping of immobility both in legal discourse and in fiction. Virginie C. Bernard's article addresses the antagonistic representations of space between the Aboriginal Noongars of the South West of Western Australia and the Australian State in the context of the Noongars' native title claims, both in Courts and through a negotiation process. She describes how the long negotiations brought to light the inextricable link between the Aboriginal Noongars and the descendants of settlers and immigrants, and how, if they were to have a common future, the Australian State needed to take into account the peculiarities and the specific needs of the Aborigines, revising its vision of space, and consolidating its legitimacy while comforting its national history. In her article "Mapping Mobility in Australia: from the Bush to the Desert and the Ghostly Place", Christine Vandamme examines Australia's relationship to the land in fiction. In particular, she focuses on the recurrent and paradoxical immobility, as well as on the absence of a frontier myth,

showing how it was until recently both a symptom of Australia's relation to its colonial history and of the obliteration of its Indigenous population. Christine Vandamme's paper analyses the difficulties non-Indigenous Australians have had from the very beginning of settlement in mapping out the iconic national bush and its modern avatar, the desert, both literally and figuratively. She also addresses issues of spectrality and how spectrality reflects deeper political and cultural dynamics. The third article, by Anne-Sophie Letessier, focuses on recent fiction produced in Canada. She examines the relationship between place and text and how Aritha van Herk's *Places Far from Ellesmere* is informed by the opposed dynamics of the centripetal forces of "emplacement" as "entextment", in an attempt to outrule textual and territorial enclosure. In her paper, Anne-Sophie Letessier shows how Aritha van Herk plays with the mobility of artistic representation, shifting the traditional definition of place in order to write what she calls "unmappable, unfixed and unfixing *geografictione*". Moving on to South Asia, the fourth article, by Maëlle Jeanniard du Dot, offers a study of Nadeem Aslam's fourth novel *The Blind Man's Garden*, in which the representation of the border is central. It is represented as a prism, allowing the story to shed a poetic light on discourses obscured by the globalization of media. While the physical border is threatened by war and violence, the symbolical border reveals Aslam's poetics of confluence. The border becomes the place of spatial and historical continuity rather than a limiting boundary. In the fifth article, the paradigm shifts somewhat, focusing on an example of geopoetic mapping of the West coast of Ireland. Nessa Cronin's article shifts the reading from fiction to cultural geography, as she describes and analyzes the status of the Tim Robinson Archive, emphasizing Tim Robinson's unique relationship to place and map-making in the West of Ireland from the 1970s to 2014 when he donated his archive to the National University of Ireland, Galway. Her paper explores the archive of Tim Robinson through an artist-in-the-archive research project, *Iarsma: Fragments from an Archive*, based on Robinson's maps and writings. Artistic visual mapping is also the subject of Lisa Fitzgerald's article as she studies the visible glitches in examples of Google Street View digital mapping. Her purpose is to ask to what extent street views might be read as documenting early 21st century social life. In enabling the user to zoom down from the traditional cartographic bird's-eye view

to an immersive 360° street level environment, Google Street View creates unsettling moments. Lisa Fitzgerald argues that artists have begun to appropriate these images in their own work, building on a history of street photography as seen in the works of Paul Strand, Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, Robert Frank, but also emphasising how place is represented by contemporary artists and the repercussions it bears for the aesthetics of space. Finally, Jessica Small's interview of Iranian-American author Dina Nayeri is a valuable addition to the volume as a variation on the theme of representing mobility and mapping border-crossing. Jessica Small introduces Dina Nayeri whose writing maps and explores the notion of home, as well as its metamorphoses. She shows through the words of a young novelist born in Iran and raised in the United States, how the notion of home is rendered more complex through displacement, stressing how the question of mapping and representing mobility needs to be all the more subtle in a context where people experience displacement continually.

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## INDEX

**Mots-clés**
carte, frontière, place, migration, représentation

**Keywords**
map, border, place, migration, representation

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# Antagonistic Representations of Space between the Aboriginal Noongars and the Australian State

*Représentations antagonistes de l'espace entre les aborigènes Noongars et l'État australien*

**Virginie Bernard**

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## OUTLINE

The native title definition of society: the confrontation of two competing representations of space
The Noongar claimants: society as a flexible social and territorial entity
The Australian State: society as a rigid social territorial entity
The building up of a recognisable Noongar space
The bureaucratisation of the Noongar social and territorial organisation
A conception of space still "traditional"
Conclusion

## TEXT

1 Since the customary land rights and interests of the indigenous Australians [1] were translated and enshrined in the Australian legislative system in 1993 by the *Native Title Act* (NTA), [2] the Aboriginal Noongars of the South West of Western Australia have been seeking legal recognition of their native title over their territory. [3] Between 1994 and 2000, 78 overlapping and intersecting native title claims were initiated by various Noongar families (Bradfield). The South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council (SWALSC)—the regional organisation officially recognised by the Federal State to represent the Noongars' land claims—worked to bring them together into a single native title claim. SWALSC proceeded in stages, initially registering six intermediate claims with the Federal Court. Then, in September 2003, the organisation

filed the *Single Noongar Claim* (SNC) on behalf of all the Noongars. This unique claim was intended to cover the Noongar territory, an area of nearly 200,000 km$^2$ comprising a Noongar population of approximately 27,000 people divided in 21 family groups (Bradfield). However, it was never officially registered because the Federal Court considered that SWALSC had not obtained permission from the entire Noongar community. It therefore remained composed of the six intermediate claims.

2 At the request of the State of Western Australia and the Federal State, who were their main opponents, the *Metro Claim* (*Bennell v Western Australia* 2006)—the claim corresponding to the Perth metropolitan area—was judged before the Federal Court, separately from the rest of the SNC. In his verdict of 19 September 2006, Justice Wilcox rendered a decision in favour of the Noongars. He recognised eight Noongar native title rights, the details of which were to be specified later. In April 2007, the State of Western Australia and the Federal State appealed this decision to the Full Federal Court (*Bodney v Bennell* 2008). On 23 April 2008, the judges of the Full Federal Court rendered their verdict in which they found errors in the interpretation of the NTA legislation and ruled that the *Metro Claim* should be retried before another federal judge.

3 After consulting the Noongar claimants, SWALSC decided not to appeal, but urged the State of Western Australia to resolve the SNC through a formal negotiation process. At the end of 2014, SWALSC and the State of Western Australia reached a definitive agreement consisting of six Indigenous Land Use Agreements (ILUAs), one per intermediate region covered by the SNC (South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council "Quick Guide"). These ILUAs aim to regulate exchanges between the Noongars and their interlocutors as to how the territory will be used and the resources exploited in each region concerned. From January to March 2015, SWALSC organised six authorisation meetings at which the Noongars voted in favour of the ILUAs and thus validated the agreement of which they are the backbone. SWALSC and the State of Western Australia have begun to work on its implementation, but it will not be formalised until all legal remedies have been settled. [4]

4 This article seeks to account for the antagonistic representations of space between the Noongars and the Australian State in the context of these native title claims, which took place in Courts and then through a negotiation process.

5 My interest will first lie on how the Noongars and the State fought around the concept of society, which the native title legislation imposes. We will see that, contrary to the anthropological approach of the concept of society as a group of people sharing common cultural traits, the legislation defines it as a fixed entity whose members are united by the observation of the same laws and customs. What the law requires and the facts it establishes are not anthropological realities, but interpretations shaped by the legal context and the trials before the judges.

6 In the face of the often recalcitrant Australian State, and their various other opponents (among which several local governments and private companies), the Aboriginal claimants seek the recognition of some of their customary land rights and interests. Indeed, the NTA does not grant a land title but a bundle of rights that must be individually demonstrated to be recognised (Glaskin, Strelein "Compromised Jurisprudence"). This interpretation implies a weakening of native title. For Katie Glaskin,

> The notion of partial extinguishment relies on the characterisation of native title as a bundle of rights and interests that can be separately identified, conceptually and legally separated, and found to be extinguished or extant. […] This is clearly not what one could call a holistic view of aboriginal title. The bundle of rights and interests model contrasts with a view of native title in which the connection with, and right to, the land is that from which other rights flow […]. (71–72)

7 This codification of Aboriginal land rights and the notion of partial extinguishment do not reflect the character of the relationships that the Aborigines have with their environment. As Deborah Bird Rose points out (7–8, 11), the different Aboriginal groups consider their "country", their land, as:

> […] a living entity with a yesterday, today and tomorrow, with a consciousness, and a will toward life. […] Country is multi-

> dimensional—it consists of people, animals, plants, Dreamings; [5] underground, earth, soils, minerals and waters, surface water, and air. [...] Country is the key, the matrix, the essential heart of life.

Humans, as well as all elements of their environment, are incarnations of their land. They are made of the same essence. Their ancestral lands are inalienable, contrary to the fact that the NTA considers that their relations with them can be partially or even completely extinguished. The Noongars had to comply with the requirements of the law to be recognised, but faced with the rigid legal approach of the concept of society defended by their opponents, they sought to soften its definition to reflect the flexibility and dynamism that characterises their conception of space and of their social and territorial organisation.

8 I will then focus my attention on the negotiations between the Noongar claimants, represented by SWALSC, and the State of Western Australia. SWALSC sought to lead the Noongars beyond the simple resolution of their land claims and to enable them to resolve the difficulties they face. More than a symbolic recognition of a set of land rights over a limited number of parcels, the negotiations could offer concrete land assets, but also economic, social, financial and political opportunities. In order to resist the State of Western Australia and stand as a strong partner, SWALSC undertook to concretise the idea of a Noongar nation by strengthening the Noongars' sense of belonging, which had begun to emerge through the creation of the SNC. The modern nation reflects, as Patrice Canivez defines it, "[a] historic community characterised by a culture of its own, a collective consciousness and a claim to political sovereignty" (27). Thanks to this strategic political tool, we will see that SWALSC undertook to rationalise the Noongars' social and territorial organisation in a need for transparency and efficiency. This formalisation was essential to the establishment of a system of governance that could allow the Noongar community to remain united, to function and prosper, but also to be recognised by the State and thus gain a certain amount of autonomy.

# The native title definition of society: the confrontation of two competing representations of space

9 The legal field of native title is the scene of multiple clashes. First, it gives rise to a confrontation between the indigenous claimants for the recognition of their native title and the Australian State. It also triggers a clash between disciplines—such as anthropology and history—as well as conflicts within these disciplines. Indeed, during trials, each party employs social scientists on whose arguments they rely. The claimants seek the recognition of their native title, while their diverse opponents strive to eliminate the threat that such a recognition represents to them for the integrity of the Australian nation-state and its territory (Attwood). These clashes are not trivial. They have considerable scientific, but above all social, economic and political consequences (Dousset and Glaskin).

10 In an article entitled "The Assymetry of Recognition", Katie Glaskin and Laurent Dousset apply the double asymmetry of the philosopher Paul Ricœur's concept of recognition to the case of native title claims in Australia. They explain that, to the extent that they hope to be recognised through this process, the indigenous claimants assume the "passive" role, or the "weak" role, while the representatives of the native title legislation have the "active" role of those who have the power and ability to recognise. In addition, they do not recognise the claimants in their entirety. They select particular elements that remind them of elements of their own structure, which they know and therefore recognise, from which they reconstruct the claimants who wish to be recognised.

11 The indigenous claimants thus engage in a long and difficult process requiring them to provide the necessary evidence for their recognition. They have to justify their request, to demonstrate their legitimacy and to seek recognition by the State. They must establish that, at the time of the acquisition of sovereignty by the British Crown, they constituted a society whose normative system produced

laws and customs governing the occupation and use of land over the entire area they claim (for the Noongars, this date corresponds to 1829). They also have to prove that they still form the same society and that these laws and customs have since been continuously observed. The indigenous claimant societies shall not have fundamentally changed since their precolonial state. Precolonial societies are, in this context, considered as "authentic" societies; they embody the models that the claimants must meet to be recognised as "traditional" [6] and claim some of their customary land rights and interests.

12 In practice, the native title legislation has focused on reducing the category of the "genuine" Aborigines to deny recognition of their native title to a greater number of Aborigines. The way in which the claimants are defined by their opponents, the state governments, the Federal State, and the judges fits into what Patrick Wolfe (163–214) describes as an ongoing strategy of elimination implemented by the Australian State. The strategic tool of this "logic of elimination" is what he calls "repressive authenticity": the State has created an ideal Aboriginality, and Aborigines who cannot conform to it are considered unauthentic and eliminated from the category.

13 The SNC is emblematic of the way this strategy operates. Strongly impacted by colonisation, the Noongar claimants were far removed from the referential of the "traditional" Aboriginal on which the legislation is based and their native title was considered to be virtually extinguished. In order not to be "eliminated" and to gain recognition, they were well prepared to meet the mandatory legal requirements and to face the Australian State. The definition of a society was thus at the heart of their confrontations.

14 While the anthropological research has since highlighted more dynamic and diverse social and territorial organisations, the model of local descent groups, owners and users of a particular territory, established by classical anthropology, has been included in the legislative apparatus of land claims and introduced into the legal language of native title as "society". It was familiar, understandable and recognisable by the judges because it corresponded to their vision of an ideal and authentic Aboriginality.

15 For most anthropologists, a society has become a set of social relations; it can have different shapes and it changes over time. On the contrary, for the jurists—and the anthropologists intervening as experts for the opponents of a native title claim—a society is an object, a stable and immutable entity, detached from any intercultural context. Their members are united by the observation of the same normative and sustainable system whose internal rules can be highlighted and analysed in an objective and unambiguous way (Glaskin and Dousset). The role of the social scientists thus becomes paramount. The judges will recognise the claimant group as constituting a society only if the concept of society presented to them contains elements that are intelligible and familiar to them. Glaskin and Dousset summarise this as follows:

> The basis of the recognition of what constitutes a society then is the re-cognizing (re = repetition; cognizing = understanding) of a part of that thing that is being recognized according to one's own knowledge and truth (for example, such as a system of land tenure) and the extrapolation of that to a whole (a larger society). (145)

16 During the *Metro Claim* and the appeal process, to establish the existence of a Noongar society at the time of the acquisition of the British sovereignty in the South West in 1829, then the existence of a contemporary Noongar society and finally an uninterrupted continuity between these two societies, several constitutive elements of a society were studied in detail: the language, the customs and beliefs, the social interaction but especially, the social and territorial organisation of the Noongars. The arguments deployed around this issue are emblematic of the representations of space that oppose the Noongars and the Australian State.

## The Noongar claimants: society as a flexible social and territorial entity

17 The absence of landowners and borders determined by rigid principles, such as the hereditary principle, made the Noongar case particularly difficult to interpret within the framework of the legal concept of society. The Noongar claimants' experts and lawyers, however, succeeded in translating their precolonial social and

territorial organisation to make it understandable and recognisable to Justice Wilcox. They attached importance to the land, rather than to its borders, and compared these customary rights to the land tenure of private property without interpreting them.

18 Kingsley Palmer, their expert anthropologist, emphasised the flexibility and dynamism of the Noongars' social and territorial organisation. Palmer came to the following conclusion: "[It] is an error to consider the land-holding system, as it is reported, as comprising a series of hermetic and self-contained land units (estates) over which individuals exercised exclusive rights" (53). He added that "mapping territory hides the complexity of the relationships between individuals and the implications that these relationships might have had for the exercise of rights to country in practice" (39). He described a Noongar society divided into social entities of varying sizes, but stated that the relevant entity regarding the Noongar customary land rights and interests was the subgroup.

19 These subgroups had, in a more or less delimited territory, rights and interests in land. Palmer found that these rights were not exclusive in nature: a person could have rights over several regions and many people could have rights over the same region. He referred to the anthropological debates about how to acquire these rights and the insistence on a legitimisation based on patrilineal descent. Referring to more recent work on the subject and his own findings, Palmer stated: "[It] is unlikely that precontact systems were as rigid and fixed as may have been supposed. [It] is clear that rights to country, as well as their exercise and legitimation, were complex matters that required the exercise of a range of social relationships rather than reliance on a singular principle" (52), at least in some areas. This was the case in the South West where customary land rights could be acquired by other means than descent.

20 Questioned by the lawyers of the State of Western Australia and Federal State, Palmer admitted that there was a strong inclination for patrilineal descent in the Perth area at the time of the acquisition of sovereignty, but declared that the transmission by matrifiliation was also running. He reiterated, however, that descent was not the only way to acquire land rights, places of birth and residence or knowledge of a region were also essential. It was a social process that

allowed the affirmation and realisation of certain potential rights at the expense of others. He did not establish a hierarchy between rights acquired by descent and those acquired in the context of a social process, all were for him of a proprietary nature.

21 This brings us back to the question of the inalienability of the land previously mentioned. The concept of Noongar ownership is comparable to that of the Ngaatjatjarra Aborigines of the Western Desert. Dousset shows that for the Ngaatjatjarra the land is not a commodity, a possession, but that, as a social object, it is a characteristic of the individual. Their territories, he explains, are not horizontal surfaces delimited by borders but are constituted by sacred sites conceived as vertical spaces where different semantic layers are piled up. Dousset writes that "[the] sites which dot the Western Desert are […] places fixed at creation times, referring to mythical figures and their morphologies and adventures, to the origins of the rules and human and social conduct, just as they are cartographic markers of the travels, whether mythical or human" (121), and to this must be added the history and experience of real human individuals. Individuals are cosubstantial of the places to which they identify and are responsible for. As Palmer defended in the case of the Noongars, Dousset shows that, for the Ngaatjatjarra, "[territorial] affiliation is a question of evaluation, identification, discussion and negotiation: of process" (122).

22 A contemporary social and territorial organisation, similar to that of 1829, was also portrayed by the Noongar witnesses interviewed for the trial and by Palmer. The claimants defended the idea of a substantial continuity of their society, a positioning implying that it did not change in substance, that is to say that certain formal elements were modified while the contents that define it have not been transformed. From this point of view, without these adaptations, they could not have remained "traditional" and apply for the recognition of their native title.

## The Australian State: society as a rigid social territorial entity

23 The land laws and customs of the Noongar society described by the claimants did not correspond to the conception of space and private

property shared by the State of Western Australia and the Federal State and, therefore, were not recognisable by them. They did not attempt to translate the Noongar land system, they interpreted it in the light of their own conceptions. They relied on the report by their expert anthropologist Ron Brunton, who, unlike Palmer, had a rigid and fixed conception of the Noongars' social and territorial organisation and conceived their territories as horizontal delimited spaces governed by immutable laws.

24 The subgroup was also for Brunton the land entity but, unlike Palmer, he assigned a defined territory to it. He also advocated the existence of a larger group from which the normative system producing the laws and customs respected by the subgroups would have emerged. However, he did not identify this group as the entire Noongar claimant community whose existence he rebutted as a society. He defended rather the idea of several smaller societies, without nevertheless being able to identify them.

25 Brunton recognised the existence of other means of belonging to the subgroup, but continued to insist on patrilineal descent as a normative rule. He accepted that individuals could have rights in more than one region, but he disagreed with Palmer's claims by declaring that they were not rights of the same order. He drew a distinction between exclusive property rights obtained by patrilineal descent and usufructuary rights derived from secondary relations. He referred to the distinction made by the anthropologist Peter Sutton between "core rights"—"which [enable] a person to claim a certain area as their own 'main place', their own 'proper' or 'real' country, and thus to assert a fundamental proprietary relationship to it" (14)—and "contingent rights". The "contingent rights" come from "core rights", they are temporarily acquired and are not transferable. For Brunton, the Noongars who possessed "core rights", property rights in their own territory, also held "contingent rights" that allowed them to exploit it economically. Those who did not have property rights in a territory could only have usufructuary rights, dependent on kinship relations with persons having, for example, these property rights. To access a territory—what Brunton conceived of in the sense of penetrating boundaries—and using the resources, they needed permission from their owners.

26 Christos Mantziaris and David Martin (64) recall that Sutton's distinction is a translation of the Aborigines' relationships with their physical environment for the purpose of recognising native title. Yet Brunton applied this distinction between rights of a different nature as a direct description of the Noongars' customary land tenure system. Unlike Palmer, who sought to translate this system by describing a complex web of land rights and interests based on both descent and social process, Brunton overinterpreted and codified it. He established a hierarchy between property rights, transmissible by patrilineal descent, and temporary usufructuary rights, acquired by relations considered secondary.

27 The State of Western Australia and the Federal State also sought to establish that the Noongars could no longer be "traditional" and had interrupted adherence to the practice of their laws and customs because colonisation had been too devastating in the South West. Instead of focusing on a substantial continuity of the Noongars' laws and customs, they defended the idea of a fundamental transformation of their society. Their assumption was, contrary to what the claimants were advancing, that there was no longer any normative system governing the Noongars' rights and interests. According to them, even if the situation described could have been qualified as a normative system, it could not have been considered as "traditional" anymore.

28 Justice Wilcox favoured the claimants' anthropological approach of the concept of society, whose members are united by shared ways of doing and thinking. To distance himself from the misunderstandings and confusions it generates, he preferred using the term "community" in his judgment. He recognised that the notion could apply to social entities of varying sizes and that it was not easy to identify them. However, he considered that the Noongars formed a single society attached to a territory and united by a strong social interaction, the use of the same language and respect for customs and beliefs, including land laws and customs. This contemporary society was issued from, and maintained a cultural continuity with, the Noongar society observed during the acquisition of sovereignty by the British Crown. As a result, he rendered a verdict in favour of the claimants and identified eight native title rights that could be recognised and whose terms should be later specified.

29 The State of Western Australia and the Federal State nevertheless appealed against this decision. The representation they had of the concept of society—a fixed and durable social and territorial entity—was re-established by the judges of the Full Federal Court during this second trial and the Noongar society was redevised into several social and territorial subentities. It was again reified by exogenous actors giving themselves the ability to analyse and define it in the light of their own concepts.

# The building up of a recognisable Noongar space

## The bureaucratisation of the Noongar social and territorial organisation

30 In view of the Australian State's refusal to consider them as true "traditional" Aborigines and to recognise their native title rights, the Noongars had to behave like "modern" Australian citizens, just like the rest of the population of the country. Located outside the legal process itself, the negotiations between the State of Western Australia and the Noongars represented by SWALSC is a space of engagement between the two parties giving the Noongars a greater margin of manoeuvre. SWALSC used "modern" technologies, bureaucratic procedures, to assert the sovereignty and autonomy of the Noongar nation that it builds and to overcome oppositions, both within the Noongar community itself and from the State of Western Australia.

31 The negotiations were based on the six claims that underpinned the SNC. When I interviewed him, Glen Kelly, then chief executive officer of SWALSC, told me he did not know how the boundaries of these six underlying claims had been drawn. According to him, they did not correspond exactly to the cultural boundaries, some were too broad and could have been further divided. However, this division proved to be an asset to negotiate because the specificities of each of the regions could thus be respected.

32 SWALSC undertook genealogical research—through archives, historical documents and testimonies from Noongar claimants—to establish the list of ancestors of these six claims. It was, for each region, to identify the Noongars who lived there at the time of the acquisition of sovereignty by the British Crown in 1829. The claimants' genealogies were drawn up to determine the ancestors to whom they may trace their descent, and thus the claims to which they were connected. These data were used to map the runs of each Noongar family (the segments of land where they own and exercise customary land rights). This research was also intended to clarify and formalise the "speaking for country" process (the right to make decisions about a territory and to disclose cultural or spiritual information relative to it) as all persons with land rights in a region are not allowed to do so.

33 This process of bureaucratisation allowed SWALSC to consolidate the Western Australian State's confidence in ensuring that, for each of the six regions, it negotiated with the "right" people, that is, the claimants who were legitimately attached to it. However, this cannot be summarised as a bureaucracy imposed from above and suffered by the Noongar community (Hibou). SWALSC designed this system to represent the interests of the community. The organisation also responded to the Noongars' many requests to put an end to the recurring family conflicts that prevented them from achieving positive progress.

34 SWALSC was then able to superimpose an administrative layer on this social and territorial organisation approved by a majority of Noongars. The Noongar community is marked by internal conflicts and their demands are not unanimous. This formalisation was seen by the organisation as essential to the establishment of a governance system that would enable the Noongar community to unite, to function and prosper (for what follows, cf. South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council "Quick Guide" and "Transition Program").

35 Until then, SWALSC was organised around fourteen administrative entities called wards. In 2007, SWALSC adopted a new constitution that reduced their number to six in order to align their boundaries with those of the six claims. These six wards will become the foundation upon which the Noongar governance system would rest.

The Noongars are required to join a ward when completing the application form to become SWALSC members. They may be genealogically attached to several "traditional" regions but must select the ward that they deem to be most appropriate to them and provide details to support their statement. Once their candidacy is validated by the organisation, they can participate in the elections of their ward.

36 At the same time, SWALSC undertook to review and update the composition and functioning of the six working groups (the groups consisting of Noongars who, for each region, represent the families who have interests and responsibilities in them). They were endowed with a form of constitution and a code of conduct, to which their members gave their assent. The objective of the organisation was to ensure the consultation, information and representation of all families, but also the respect for good governance practices, by the working groups. Their formalisation was essential because they were at the heart of the negotiation process: members of each of the six groups were part of the SWALSC negotiation team, along with staff of the organisation. This team was also supported by lawyers.

37 In addition, the working groups will become the Noongars' six official representative bodies if the negotiated agreement is finally ratified. SWALSC prepared the groups to take full responsibility for their operation and decision-making process in this eventuality. They will convert into six regional corporations, supported by a central corporation in financial, administrative and legal terms. This will form a governance on the model of a hub and spoke system that will concretise the gathering of the Noongars in a nation. According to Glen Kelly, this structure would give the regions real independence, while guaranteeing that they work together for the development of this nation.

38 The Noongars' participation can be carried out to different degrees. They are already members, according to their ancestry, of one of the six ILUAs. In theory, this concerns all Noongars, with the exception of a minority of them who have openly refused to join the agreement. Members of the ILUAs may also apply to become members of the regional corporations and the central corporation. Many elements remain to be specified but the members of each regional corporation

will have to elect four directors to represent them, who will then appoint two expert directors. These “experts”, lawyers or accountants for example, will be selected according to the specific qualifications and expertise that the corporations feel they need.

39 The members of the central corporation will elect six directors of its board, who will also appoint two expert directors. The elections of the directors of these seven Noongar corporations will be by postal vote under the supervision of an independent verification body. In order to prevent a small group or family from gaining control of one or more corporations, directors can only be elected for two consecutive terms and become directors of only one corporation at a time. In addition, a limit on family representation on a corporation board will be set: when a person is elected, his/her parents, siblings, husband/wife and children will not be able to sit on it. The chief executive officers of each corporation will, in turn, be selected by an independent recruitment company, based on the criteria defined by the corporation boards.

40 For SWALSC, this governance system would aim to limit conflicts of interest, allow for the widest possible involvement and ensure that the Noongars’ assets are managed in a safe and efficient manner and that they are indeed the beneficiaries. This system also appears as a means for the organisation to present to the State a familiar and reassuring structure that it could recognise and approve. The Noongars could thus, according to SWALSC, take their future in hand and be able to manage their financial and land assets and develop cultural, social and economic programs according to their vision.

## A conception of space still “traditional”

41 Despite its concern not to become bureaucratic and to include a majority of Noongars in the governance system, the structure developed by SWALSC is both fundamentally bureaucratic and hierarchical. This is due to the very nature of the organisation. Its status as a corporation, responding to demands for profitability, efficiency and transparency, contradicts the nature of its official discourse and the vision many Noongars have of their destiny. However, this bureaucratic governance is accepted and validated because, in the eyes of my Noongar interlocutors [7] it would at the

same time prevent the risk of conflict of interest, corruption, clientelism or takeover by some Noongar families. Its formal structure ultimately addresses concerns they share with the Australian State.

42 It is through the use of elements thought to be "traditional" that the dichotomy between the structure adopted and the discourse circulated by SWALSC is attenuated and justified. As part of the negotiations, SWALSC also focused on affirming the Noongars' existence as a historic community and community of culture with its own territory, which the State of Western Australia had opposed during the trials. Through various media—documents (e.g. "Introduction", "Connection", "Living"), website ("Kaartdijin Noongar"), Facebook page ("South West")—SWALSC emphasised that the Noongars' territory is interdependent with all aspects of indigenous life, and not only with laws and customs. The organisation defined the territory and the internal structure of the Noongar nation as the Noongar "country". SWALSC insists on this connection and on its spatial, but also temporal, dimensions. The Noongars are described as being divided into fourteen linguistic groups, each associated with a geographical area and with specific but complementary ecological characteristics. These groups form a society, a nation, attached to its territory as a whole and whose duration is unlimited.

43 This structuring into linguistic subgroups, while many Noongars do not speak their language fluently, is used by the organisation to legitimise the bureaucratic order inspired by the Australian administration. It is part of a cultural polishing that helps to round off its angles and erase its roughness, making it more representative and familiar to the Noongars. This also gives it an indigenous specificity. This "Noongarised" bureaucratic governance system thus meets both the aspirations of the Noongars and the expectations of the State. SWALSC ("Transition Program" 2) mentions, for example, that members of the ILUAs may become members of several regional corporations, which was not the case with the wards. This multiple attachment refers to a "traditional" logic expected by the Noongars, who think their social and territorial organisation as fluid and flexible and possess land rights and interests in several regions. This flexibility, as mentioned, was not possible under the native title legislation, which requires a fixed and identifiable system. With the

establishment of a partial Noongar sovereignty within the Australian nation, some so-called "traditional" elements are tolerated by the State only because they rely on a system of bureaucratic governance that it can recognise.

44 Similarly, the executive committees of each regional corporation will have to develop a Cultural Advice Policy to define the procedures and mechanisms that will enable them to make decisions for their respective regions and to obtain the advice of people with cultural authority and the right to "speak for country" among the ILUA members they represent (South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council "Transition Program" 5). The central corporation will put in place a Cultural Consultation Policy to define how it will also refer to the "appropriate" people. These measures put forward the idea of "tradition". By respecting the Noongar processes and hierarchy of decision-making, SWALSC strives to demonstrate its respect for the "traditional" conception of space and social and territorial organisation. It aims to demonstrate that this conception has not been neglected in the design of its system of governance, but that it rather consolidates and validates it.

# Conclusion

45 The study of the antagonistic representations of space and social and territorial organisation between the Noongars and the Australian State brings to light not only the challenges faced but also the integrations and the strategic and creative revisions made by the Noongars. The analysis of the concept of society, as articulated in native title claims, shows that it is based on a play of interpretation and on the ability of the actors in competition to assert the contents that they attribute to it. The Noongar claimants managed to overcome the difficulties that this legal concept confronted them with and to obtain the recognition of a contemporary Noongar society, stemming from the precolonial Noongar society. In so doing, they opened and extended the strict definition of the native title legislation and succeeded in asserting the way they conceived of their territory and, as far as possible, occupied it. New requirements were then demanded and put in place by the State of Western Australia, the Federal State and judges of the Full Federal Court to

restore the legal definition of a society and maintain their vision of space in order to preserve the legislation. This positioning makes it possible to maintain the capacity of State actors to reject the Aborigines who, like the Noongars, do not correspond to their idealised vision of Aboriginality and whose native title rights they do not wish to recognise.

46 Through the negotiations, SWALSC sought to bypass the limitations of the native title, while building on what it stands for, namely the recognition of the distinct identity of Aboriginal peoples and the special place they occupy (Strelein "Symbolism"). Beyond a simple symbolic recognition, SWALSC intended to reach an agreement comprising a set of concrete measures that would allow the Noongars to improve their situation and decide their future. The interest of the concept of nation that SWALSC resorted to resides in its political definition, which allowed the organisation to reshape the national image of an idealised Aboriginality by placing it in the Noongars' contemporary reality. The organisation did not advocate absolute sovereignty, unlike some of its Noongar opponents, but defended the idea of a Noongar nation embedded in the "modern" Australian nation. For this reason, it was essential for the Noongars to adopt a form of government and organisation which, in order to be seen as functional and effective, and thus be accepted by their State interlocutors, was to satisfy both the aspirations of the Noongars and the technocratic and managerial requirements of the State.

47 SWALSC and the State of Western Australia brought their perspectives and objectives closer together during the negotiation process. SWALSC overcame the feeling of resentment felt by the Noongars against their colonial oppressor. The State was ready to trust them as soon as elements of governance and objectives of economic development were deployed. This approach is part of what Patrick Sullivan describes as a "consolidated approach". On the one hand, it takes into account the peculiarities and the specific needs of the Aborigines. On the other hand, it stresses that their future, as that of the descendants of settlers and immigrants, is inextricably linked. "Consolidation", writes Sullivan, "requires recognizing what is shared, and what is distinctive" (17). The State of Western Australia agreed to revise its vision of space. It challenged the nation-state relationship by recognising the Noongars' anchoring in the

contemporary Australian nation and granting them some autonomy. In doing so, it also consolidated its legitimacy and comforted its national history.

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## NOTES

1 Australia counts two indigenous peoples: the Aborigines (a multitude of groups including the Noongars) and the Torres Strait Islanders. To the extent that this article focuses on the Noongars, it will be mainly referred below to the Aborigines.

2 The legal native land claim process in Australia started in the 1970s. The decisive step was the case Mabo v Queensland [No. 2] when, in 1992, the High Court recognised the existence of indigenous land rights.

3 While recognising the existence of indigenous land rights, the NTA confirmed the non-indigenous land rights granted prior to 1993, and private property is excluded from native title claims.

4 For more information on native title, the *Single Noongar Claim* and the negotiation process, see my PhD thesis (Bernard) on which this article is

based. See also South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council, Website "South West".

5 "Dreaming" is a generic term for all religious beliefs and practices of Aboriginal peoples in Australia. It does, however, reflect a multitude of local concepts (e.g. Nyitting for the Noongars), applying to mythico-ritual complexes that admit significant differences beyond their similarities (hence the use of the plural in this quote) (De Largy Healy et al.).

6 I use "tradition" and "modernity" in quotation marks to emphasise that they are not universal scientific concepts that can be clearly and objectively applied. Rather, I address them as discursive realities that need to be analysed in the ethnographic contexts in which they are produced and articulated. In this case, the focus is on the discourses on "tradition" and "modernity" produced by the Australian State, the conditions of their emergence and their effects.

7 During my fieldwork in the South West of Western Australia, I interviewed a wide range of Noongar people, including some occupying official positions (Bernard 89–157).

## ABSTRACTS

**English**

This article seeks to account for the antagonistic representations of space between the Aboriginal Noongars of the South West of Western Australia and the Australian State (which includes the Commonwealth of Australia and the State of Western Australia) in the context of the Noongars' native title claims, both in Courts and through a negotiation process. First, during the trials, the Noongars faced the State of Western Australia and the Federal State around the concept of society, which the native title legislation imposes. The Noongars had to comply with the requirements of the law, but faced with the rigid legal approach of the concept of society defended by their opponents, they sought to soften its definition to reflect the flexibility and dynamism that characterizes their conception of space and their social and territorial organisation.

The Noongars then negotiated with the State of Western Australia to resolve their land claims and obtain a comprehensive economic, social, financial and political agreement. The Noongars and the State of Western Australia brought their perspectives closer together during this negotiation process. The Noongars' conception of space and social and territorial organisation was rationalized through the establishment of a system of governance, the political basis of the Noongar nation in the making. This formalization was asked for by a majority of Noongars as it would allow

them to remain united, to function and prosper, but also to be recognized by the State and thus gain a certain amount of autonomy.

**Français**
Cet article cherche à rendre compte des représentations antagonistes de l'espace entre les aborigènes Noongars du sud-ouest de l'Australie Occidentale et l'État australien dans le contexte des revendications foncières engagées par les Noongars, à la fois devant les tribunaux et par le biais d'un processus de négociation. Premièrement, au cours des procès, les Noongars affrontèrent l'État d'Australie Occidentale et l'État Fédéral autour du concept de société, que la législation des revendications foncières autochtones impose. Les Noongars devaient se conformer aux exigences de la loi, mais devant l'approche juridique rigide du concept de société défendue par leurs adversaires, ils cherchèrent à en assouplir la définition afin de refléter la flexibilité et le dynamisme qui caractérisent leur conception de l'espace et leur organisation sociale et territoriale.
Les Noongars ont ensuite négocié avec l'État d'Australie Occidentale pour résoudre leurs revendications territoriales et obtenir un accord économique, social, financier et politique global. Les Noongars et l'État d'Australie Occidentale rapprochèrent leurs points de vue au cours de ce processus de négociation. La conception des Noongars en matière d'espace et d'organisation sociale et territoriale fut rationalisée au travers de la mise en place d'un système de gouvernance, base politique de la nation Noongar en devenir. Cette formalisation était demandée par une majorité de Noongars car elle leur permettrait de rester unis, de fonctionner et de prospérer, mais également d'être reconnus par l'État et de gagner ainsi une certaine autonomie.

## INDEX

**Mots-clés**
Australie (sud-ouest), aborigènes d'Australie (Noongars), relations avec l'État, revendications foncières autochtones, représentations de l'espace, organisation sociale et territoriale

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# Mapping Mobility in Australia: From the Bush to the Desert and the Ghostly Place

*Cartographie de la mobilité en Australie : l'imagerie du bush cède le pas au désert ou encore à l'espace mental*

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## TEXT

1 The question of the representation of place and mobility in Australia is a particularly complex and tangled one. Australians' relation to the land is difficult for three main reasons: the unavowed conflict with the rightful owners of the land (the Aborigines), the convict stain of the first days of settlement, and the aridity of most of its landmass. Thus, right from the start, there was a sense of estrangement from the sense of place which is usually so central in the setting up of the major founding myths of a settler colony trying to define itself in opposition to the mother country.

2 The most striking paradox in the construction of Australian national identity is a form of relation to the land which is both one of undeniable fetishization on the one hand, and complete denial and erasure on the other. The other main dilemma is that national identity is not associated with mobility as is the case for many settler colonies and the United States in particular, one of its major cultural contestants. The American dream is based on the founding myth of the Frontier, the imaginary line separating wilderness from civilisation, native Americans from settlers and pioneers going west. In the *Australian Legend* as defined by historian Russel Ward, there is no Frontier progressing west, no mobility strictly speaking but a sort of theatrical stage for the Anglo-Celtic Australian to prove his Australianness.[1] This predominant impression of immobility has been prevalent in fiction, painting and films until recently.

3 In Australian national representations and discourses, mapping and mobility are presented as problematic and often superseded by the establishment of imaginary boundaries which are both spectral and gothic, and yet essential in defining Australianness. Such a fraught relation to space and place which tends to replace mapping with myth-making and the setting up of arbitrary frontiers, will have to be fully assessed to try and account for the recurring motifs and tropes of haunting and a sense of loss. Not only does the Australian continent often elude and resist cartography but its bush mythology mostly rests on the idea of an almost immobile or circular journey ending in disaster. In more recent and contemporary works, the question of mobility has been further complexified by the issue of shifting borders and boundaries whose spectrality remains prevalent.

4 Two major scholarly studies have been dedicated to the issue of cartography: Simon Ryan's *The Cartographic Eye. How Explorers Saw Australia* (1996) and Roslynn Haynes's *Seeking the Centre. The Australian Desert in Literature, Art and Film* (1998). In both cases, the critics underline a paradox: cartography is not so much used as a scientific and accurate description of the geographical features of the place but more as an ideological tool in the characterisation of the explorer figure and more generally of the imperial venture and its legitimacy. Later on, mapping out the bush was instrumentalised as a means to define Australianness and the individual's relation to the land. As Simon Ryan puts it, "the map acts as a semiotic space":

> [… maps] are ideological tools, rather than simply reflections of a given reality. Examining them as ideological constructs, rather than 'accurate' representations, enables the tracing of their particular geographies of centre and margin, plenitude and emptiness through time, as a way of showing their effectiveness as constructions. (10)

5 As far as Australia is concerned, one of the most obvious cartographic tropes is to represent the desert as a blank space, a "*terra nullius*" where the very attempt at drawing lines and finding traces of significant features is constantly defeated. Another one, which is closely linked to the first one, is that of the *tabula rasa*. And Simon Ryan draws an interesting parallel between two opposite perceptions of the land: one by an almost complete stranger to the land, famous English novelist D. H. Lawrence, and another by an Aborigine. Here is

Lawrence's final verdict about Australia after visiting the country for three months only:

> The soft, blue, humanless sky of Australia, the pale, white unwritten atmosphere of Australia. *Tabula rasa*. The world a new leaf. And on the new leaf, nothing. The wide clarity of the Australian, fragile atmosphere. Without a mark, without a record. (D. H. Lawrence, *Kangaroo*, qted in Ryan 126)

6 The ethnocentric perception of Lawrence is almost a caricature that Western readers have been accustomed to since the famous claim by Joseph Conrad and then his favourite character narrator Marlow that the whole of South America, or Africa, or Australia were "blank spaces of the earth":

> Now when I was a little chap I had a passion for maps. I would look for hours at South America, or Africa, or Australia, and lose myself in all the glories of exploration. At that time there were many blank spaces on the earth, and when I saw one that looked particularly inviting on a map (but they all look that) I would put my finger on it and say, When I grow up I will go there. (*Heart of Darkness*, 142)

7 And yet the Eurocentric trope of the "blank space" or blank page is easy to deconstruct and contrast with the reverse view Aboriginal people unanimously share of the land as three-dimensional contrary to the two-dimensional page or map. This is what the following passage from the essay "Ordering the landscape", written by eminent archaeologist Rhys Jones, makes clear. In this short excerpt he describes the reactions of an Aborigine when he first saw Canberra, the federal capital city:

> The idea of buying and selling land like any other commodity and of attachment to the land only as a matter of transient convenience was totally alien to Gurrmanamana, and he regarded it with a mixture of suspended belief and with some mild revulsion, as if there were something deeply wrong with this state of affairs. Here was a land empty of religious affiliation; there were no wells, no names of the totemic ancestors, no immutable links between land, people and the

> rest of the natural and supernatural worlds. Here was just a vast *tabula rasa*, cauterized of meaning. (Qted in Ryan 127)

8 The reason why such determining doctrines as *terra nullius* or *tabula rasa* must be fully scrutinised, recontextualised and also questioned is that they have had a major impact on the way the land has been represented from the first days of British settlement up till now, all the more as the *terra nullius* doctrine was only declared invalid legally speaking in 1992 with the Mabo decision.

9 The second main reason why it is complicated for Australian identity to define itself along the lines of its topography and cartography is that the first settlers were mostly convicts and there has been an attempt to overlay this first inscription with more heroic ones. The very idea of inscription, what Lawrence calls "mark" or "record" is taboo because it is related to a form of original sin, the settlement of the place as a jail. The first European settlers' footsteps on this unknown continent were those of convicts and thus associated to the moral stain of sin. This is what historian Robert Hughes wrote in his best-selling historical account *The Fatal Shore* (1987):

> Would Australians have done anything differently if the country had not been settled as the jail of infinite space? Certainly they would. They would have remembered more of their own history. The obsessive cultural enterprise of Australians a hundred years ago was to forget it entirely, to sublimate it, to drive it down into unconsulted recesses. This affected all Australian culture, from political rhetoric to the perception of space, of landscape itself. Space, in America, had always been optimistic; the more that you faced, the freer you were —"Go West, young man!" In Australian terms, to go West was to die, and space itself was the jail. (596)

10 And this is the second point that needs addressing, the absence of any equivalent to the American Frontier, the absence of any mythical boundary that could be used to define Australian identity. Australians defined themselves precisely in their problematic and arduous relation to a hostile land, the bush, a place resisting cartography. The bush had become a measuring stick of the Australianness of its new British inhabitants through self-sacrifice, heroism and endurance.

11 Contrary to other settler nations such as the United States for example, there was no celebration of an imaginary line progressing in the same direction as civilisation, the Frontier. The trouble was that in Australia, mapping out the unknown central parts of the continent was extremely difficult. Most of the country being made up of hostile arid land, exploring expeditions were often unsuccessful.

12 If anything, as Roslynn Haynes puts it in her book on the representation of the Australian desert, *Seeking the centre*, maps often only served colonial interests in placing the explorer figure in the centre and glorifying his extraordinary qualities. What interested the general public was not so much any precise cartography of the place or scientific record of discovery but the narrative of an epic journey. What journalists, readers, writers and artists remembered about the famous exploring expeditions of the 19th century was the discrepancy between, on the one hand, the objectives that heroic leaders had set themselves, finding an inland sea, a reliable river system, geographical features that would secure the development of pastoralism, and, on the other hand, the mythical type of land and place they actually discovered: a hellish, ghostly and haunted place resisting settlement (Haynes 58–84).

13 If we take a look at a map of the most significant exploring expeditions that took place between the mid-nineteenth century and the end of the century, the overall impression is one of lines stopping short once they reach the interior or only encircling the core of the continent. Most expeditions in the mid-19th century started from the south east in many different directions to the north, to the north-west, to the west and such explorations often ended up in failure and disaster with the death of most of the exploring expedition members.

14 If there is one major imaginary and ideological line, boundary or frontier, that defines Australian character, it does not correspond to any geographical feature. And such a boundary defines the typical Australian as a resourceful and courageous survivor in a hostile environment, the desert or the bush, a man who also has to count on his mates' support in order to survive. Such a foregrounding of mateship and egalitarianism in the bush legend also has a lot in common with what is known by cultural historians as the digger myth

(Denoon 140–142). [2] Here is the type of nationalist narrative that the goldfield legend and the emblematic Eureka Rebellion in 1854 gave rise to:

> In this narrative, Eureka stood for democracy, anti-authoritarianism, independence, anti-imperialism, republicanism, protest against economic hardship and inequality, egalitarianism, and anticapitalism. (Denoon 145)

15 Similarly the emblematic Anzac soldier features prominently in the pantheon of representative Australian heroes. The Anzac legend helped solidify and further confirm the myth of bush qualities naturally inherited by all Australians.

> The story […] lives in our national histories and collective memories. For Anzac is not merely about loss it is about courage, and endurance, in duty, and love of country, and mateship, and good humour in the survival of a sense of self-worth and decency in the face of dreadful odds. (Deane [3] in Denoon 267)

16 The moral attributes they all share is the endurance and courage of a man when placed in a hostile environment and his stoic acceptance of the possibility of failure and self-sacrifice. Whether explorer, drover, or digger, they are all racked by the same anguish about the risk of extinction and the land as possibly cursed and hellish. This is particularly striking in a canonical Australian work, Henry Handel Richardson's *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*. The title of the first volume of this three-volume saga is deliberately programmatic and antiphrastic, *Australia Felix*, and its incipit sets a grim and funeral tone right from the first line:

> In a shaft on the Gravel Pits, a man had been buried alive. At work in a deep wet hole, he had recklessly omitted to slab the walls of a drive; uprights and tailors yielded under the lateral pressure, and the rotten earth collapsed, bringing down the roof in its train. The digger fell forward on his face, his ribs jammed across his pick, his arms pinned to his sides, nose and mouth pressed into the sticky mud as into a mask; and over his defenceless body, with a roar that burst his ear-drums, broke stupendous masses of earth. (1–2)

17 The first impression the reader gets is that of a hostile land and earth that man cannot subdue or dominate but that will most surely absorb him. There is no progression west or in any horizontal direction but a vertical plunge into the bowels of the earth where the ultimate and swift destination is that of a muddy engulfing hole, gobbling you up in one piece. The narrator contrasts such a fate with the dreams and yarns the diggers had indulged in, of a quick burglary in the colony and then a prompt flight back to the old world:

> And the intention of all alike had been: to snatch a golden fortune from the earth and then, hey, presto! for the old world again. But they were reckoning without their host: only too many of those who entered the country went out no more. They became prisoners to the soil. […]

> Such were the fates of those who succumbed to the "unholy hunger". It was like a form of revenge taken on them, for their loveless schemes of robbing and fleeing; a revenge contrived by the ancient, barbaric country they had so lightly invaded. Now, she held them captive—without chains; ensorcelled—without witchcraft; and, lying stretched like some primeval monster in the sun, her breasts freely bared, she watched, with a malignant eye, the efforts made by these puny mortals to tear their lips away. (7–8)

18 And as is often the case with the representation of the Australian bush or desert, no boundaries can be either detected or drawn as the place is not one for pastoralism or cultivation, only for ruthless exploitation of the local minerals here:

> Under a sky so pure and luminous that it seemed like a thinly drawn veil of blueness, which ought to have been transparent, stretched what, from a short way off, resembled a desert of pale clay. No patch of green offered rest to the eye; not a tree, hardly a stunted bush had been left standing, either on the bottom of the vast shallow basin itself, or on the several hillocks that dotted it and formed its sides. (5)

19 Whether "desert of pale clay" for the digger or ominous bush for the drover, Australia's soil is often presented as infertile and inhospitable. A very similar description is offered in Henry Lawson's iconic short story "The Drover's Wife", one of the most well-known Australian

short stories in the nationalist canon. It features a courageous wife trying to protect her children from the snake that has slid under the house and could attack them through cracks in the walls at any time. She is on her own as her husband, a drover, has gone droving for weeks and nobody knows when he will be back. And as in Richardson's *Australia Felix*, the term that characterises the place is the *stunted* state of everything that grows there:

> Bush all round—bush with no horizon, for the country is flat. No ranges in the distance. The bush consists of *stunted*, rotten native apple-trees. No undergrowth. Nothing to relieve the eye save the darker green of a few she-oaks which are sighing above the narrow, almost waterless creek. Nineteen miles to the nearest sign of civilization—a shanty on the main road. (Lawson 238, my emphasis)

The bush, like the desert, is a place where no growth is possible. Only survival is an option. As McAuley once said in his poem "Australia", the existential and national challenge is not to *live* but only to *survive*.[4] The bush is thus both a place of national identification and a blank space where no inscription, no horizon, no lines can be drawn.

20 The recurrent feature concerning such places is absence and one of the most recurrent ones, the absence of children who get lost in them. Peter Pierce wrote a fascinating critical book on such a recurrent motif: *The Country of Lost Children: An Australian Anxiety* (1999).[5] According to him, the reason why such a motif is so obsessively recurrent is that it reflects the adults' own anxieties and repressed guilt about endangering their offspring in bringing them to such hostile territory. They also come to realise, with their disappearance, that this might be seen as a warning the bush will always resist settlement (Pierce 6). The lost child is just one particularly gruesome and deeply emotional variant of what another scholar, Elspeth Tilley, has identified as the "white vanishing trope".[6] Australian painting has used this trope extensively, especially Nolan and Drysdale. The disappearing explorer figure is a favorite topic of Sydney Nolan, the most well-known and internationally acclaimed Australian painter. He has repeatedly presented the explorer figure as either dying or on the point of dissolving into the landscape (see for example *Perished*, 1949, *Burke Lay Dying*, 1950, *Burke and Wills Expedition IV*, 1975). Burke and Wills were real explorers and they

both died in their last expedition; only one member of the expedition came back alive. As to surrealist Australian painter Drysdale, he gave his own uncanny interpretation of Lawson's iconic short story *The Drover's Wife* [7] in having the drover more or less vanish from our view: once again the wife occupies centre stage but this time she looks clumsy and slightly unreal. The drover himself only appears in the background, a very much reduced figure in a sort of ironic reinterpretation of the pioneer legend. As a drover he should be surrounded by his cattle but there is none to be seen anywhere, only his two horses and his wagon. Both in Drysdale's and Nolan's representation of the land, the non-Indigenous figure either dies, or vanishes or seems on the point of becoming unreal and ghostly and motionlessness prevails.

21 In most cases the bush or the desert are also unreadable to the newcomers. The land is either portrayed as a dense piece of woodland with no distinctive lines or boundaries that could direct the viewer's gaze or as a monotonous desert with endlessly repeated lines that cannot serve as boundaries. Among the most well-known and revealing examples are Frederick McCubbin's *Bush Study* (1902), Sydney Nolan's *Inland Australia* (1950) and Russell Drysdale's *Desert Landscape* (1952). What is striking in such paintings is not only the absence of man or his complete motionlessness, but their uncanny dimension. Instead of foregrounding mobility, frontiers or boundaries, they elicit a metaphysical reflection on man's helplessness in a hostile place and are infused with eerie and absurdist undertones. The most emblematic one as to a sense of disconnection from the bare features of the bush environment is Drysdale's *Grandma's Sunday Walk* (1972) which sold for nearly three million dollars at an auction in Adelaide. [8] The painting can be interpreted as an ironic revision of the pioneering spirit as the move west is almost parodic: the main protagonist is an elderly woman, a grandmother. What is glaringly obvious is the absence of any robust or convincing pioneer or bushman figure. There is movement but of a mechanical and ritual nature: the weekly Sunday walk of the grandmother with her grandchildren with no adult figures around.

22 As to boundaries, lines or borders, one should note that in more contemporary works, they are often presented as purely arbitrary and verging on nonsense and sheer imposition of one's power. Two

major works can be taken to illustrate such a tendency, a short story and a novel which play with postmodern codes: Carey's "Windmill in the West" which is a parodic and absurdist rewriting of the American dream and the Frontier, and *The Lost Dog* which is a variation on Bush stories. In both cases, lines and boundaries are central but they are presented as purely contingent, arbitrary, and exclusionary. And in the two works they are also presented as shifting and even spectral.

23 One of the most incisive indictments of the imposition of borders and their lack of any social or geopolitical validity is Peter Carey's "Windmill in the West" (1972). Lines are omnipresent and keep proliferating in the story but they do not make any sense. They are not even sufficient for the main protagonist to be able to differentiate East from West. The first few lines tell us of an anonymous American soldier who has been dropped in the Australian desert and was asked to guard a mysterious "electrified fence" dividing Australia from an American-controlled area in which no intruder is allowed to penetrate without permission. The tale is full of irony as the soldier is very rapidly unsure as to which side is supposed to belong to America and which side to Australia.

24 As is often the case in Australian literature and art, the desert is devoid of any distinctive feature per se. The only element that helps the soldier identify the American part of the desert is an incongruous windmill which is no longer in use and which appears completely grotesque in the middle of nowhere with nothing growing, not even grass:

> No matter which way you point that door the view doesn't alter. All that changes is the amount of fence you see. Because there is nothing else—no mountains, no grass, nothing but a windmill on the western side of the line. (Carey 51)

Such a passage is a deliberate deconstruction of Jefferson's agrarian ideal based on pastoralism and its virtues. In a desert without grass or water, nothing will grow and the windmill thus appears superfluous and almost grotesque. The only lines or boundaries the American soldier traces are little squares in the sand where he systematically exterminates all the scorpions he tricks into getting out: he first attracts them with water down the hole he has just been

digging in the middle of the square, then scoops them up and chucks them into a bucket before scorching them alive in pouring down boiling water into it:

> To the north of the road he marked out a rough grid. Each square of this grid (its interstices marked with empty bottles and beer cans) can be calculated to contain approximately one bucket of scorpions. His plan, a new plan, developed only yesterday, is to rid the desert of a bucket full for each day he is here. (Carey 52)

25 Such a passage points to the underlying violence that the imposition of arbitrary lines, borders or grids can lead to. It thus castigates American arrogance and imperialist ways but in so doing, it also points to a vexed debate in Australian historiography, a question which is still very much at the core of history wars in Australia, namely the issue of the type of contact between Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people. [9] Tasmania could be a perfect example of a systematic eradication of all the natives: the last surviving Aboriginal Tasmanians being lured to accept a transportation to an unknown place where they all died like the scorpions in their bucket. On top of gratuitous violence, what is underlined is the arbitrariness and the nonsense of such fabricated lines: “He had been instructed to keep intruders on the outside but he is no longer clear as to what ‘outside’ could mean. If they had taken the trouble to inform him of what lay inside he would be able to evaluate the seriousness of his position” (Carey 55). In the end, and just before the American soldier shoots a passing pilot, just in case he was on the wrong side of the fence, the motif of the line is taken up again by the narrator but from an existential and metaphysical point of view. The reader is given the narrative of a dream the soldier has just had: “A long line of silk thread spun out of his navel, and he, the spinner, could not halt the spinning. He can still taste the emptiness in his stomach. It is not the emptiness of hunger but something more, as if the silk has taken something precious from him” (Carey 55). The reader is made to read between the lines that the soldier has lost his humanity in contributing to mapping out a place which results in the exclusion and extermination of any intruder, here the scorpions or any man or woman who would try and cross the boundary fence. The image of the umbilical cord spinning out of his navel and his inability to relate to either his

mother or any relative, to his hierarchy or any man or woman, is a sign of his dehumanisation.

26 In the end, in a last parodic twist, the soldier shoots the plane of a passing pilot not even being sure whether the pilot was on the right or wrong side of the fence. Such an absurdist story *emptying* out the very substance and meaning of a line, a dividing-line, a boundary, is here indicting the geopolitical games both Australia and America have been playing on other people's lands in appropriating them with not even the slightest doubt or questioning about the legitimacy of such an appropriation. The scorpions the American soldier kills methodically are quite similar to the Aborigines the Anglo-Celtic settlers themselves systematically exterminated in Tasmania. And the choice of an American soldier is also a veiled allusion to American secret military bases on Australian soil.

27 But the motif of the line or boundary can be less literal and more figurative as is the case in Michelle de Kretser's *Lost Dog*. The author was born in Sri Lanka and she offers with this novel a reflection on Australianness and the post-modern games performing an identity can lead to. To that extent the line or boundary lies between "ethnicities" or origins which are supposed to be watertight and incompatible categories.

28 The main protagonist, Tom Loxley, is in love with a young artist, a painter and photographer, Nelly Zhang. Nelly's lineage is mixed: her father is Chinese but her mother is Scottish and yet she feels she has to present herself as mostly Chinese Australian as this is the way she is perceived in Australia. As to Tom Loxley, his father is English but his mother is said to be Asian Australian.

29 One of the main issues in the novel is spectrality and the uncanny as related to identity and the bush. Tom Loxley is a scholar who has been working on Henry James and the uncanny. In his own family lineage, there is a lot that escapes any type of quick categorisation: the mother who used to live in India and then emigrated to Australia, is actually no Asian Australian even though she was perceived as such. Her own mother used to be a native American, a Crow, and her father was a Portuguese. But in the eyes of a white Australian she has to be Asian Australian. In the whole novel there are such games on misleading boundaries, false appearances and a general presentation

of Australian identity as a fragile and flimsy simulacrum only constructed so as to better exclude the Other.

30 Another point of interest in the novel is the parodic reinterpretation it gives of the lost child motif identified by Peter Pierce as one of the most recurrent ones in Australian literature (cf. *supra*). But here, the lost child has been superseded by a lost dog, an intertextual reference which is both postmodern and comical. The dog is also presented as a substitute for a child, thus pointing to the underlying anxiety the recurrent lost child motif is symptomatic of, the foreboding that non-Indigenous people might never successfully connect with the land (Pierce 6). Tom is searching for his identity all along the novel just as he is looking for his dog gone missing in the bush. Similarly he is on a quest for love, for the love of Nelly Zhang, whose own identity keeps eluding everyone. As an artist she loves to play with the myth of origin and systematically questions the concept of purity that is sometimes granted to works of art as both original and unadulterated. She once made a series of paintings representing the Australian landscape, made photographs of them and then pretended they had disappeared and were destroyed. As a result, the series became very famous and gained her a lot of publicity. More importantly, it connects several thematic threads of the novel: origin, identity and sameness. It is in accepting Nelly's difference and otherness from the prototypical white national type that Tom finally accepts his own mixed heritage and the fact that more generally, Australia itself has always been built on imaginary lines and boundaries inherited from what Elspeth Tilley calls "meta-narratives of exclusion and difference" (202).

31 At the end of the story, Tom Loxley finds his dog and starts a real relationship with Nelly, realising he will never know what happened to the dog and why it went missing for so long. Along the same lines, the reason why Nelly's first husband went missing and was never found again will remain a matter of endless conjectures. It is as if in an ultimate rewriting of yet another bush gothic tale, the spectral mystery of the place as being haunted by the past was put to rest. This is the conclusion Marie Herbillon comes to in a thought-provoking article on *The Lost Dog*. She shows that it is just as important nowadays to reckon with the ghosts of the past as it is to accommodate the spectrality new members of the nation bring with

them in being co-present to both Australia and their place of origin: "Only a recognition of the historical obliterations that the bush […] appears to metaphorize will allow for the development of cultural paradigms that incorporate otherness instead of discarding it" (51).

32 In conclusion, mapping mobility in Australia has been elusive from the outset as repeated myth-making around the bush and bush values foregrounded images of heroic self-sacrifice and ultimate vanishing into the abstract *terra nullius*, the wild outback, the hostile desert, an empty and desolate core an Australian had to confront and die for as a sort of rite of passage. Even when the *dead heart* of the bush gave way to the *red centre* of the desert, to use Roslynn Haynes's terms (143–160), spectrality remained but of a different nature: spiritual revelation and reconnection with the land replaced self-sacrifice.

33 In more recent representations of either the desert as in Carey's "The Windmill in the West" or the bush as in De Kretser's *The Lost Dog*, the emphasis is not so much on the near impossibility to inscribe the landscape or push a Frontier even further but on the arbitrary and shifting nature of boundaries. At the core of traditional lost-in-the bush stories, boundaries are dangerous frontier zones demarcating clearly delineated and opposed spaces, domesticated space and wild space. The tragic outcome for lost children was a form of punishment for transgressing such a dividing line. But the obliterated tragic fate of the Indigenous populations having to quit the growing and encroaching white settled space is also what contributes to the partly unconscious guilt dynamics of such texts. The recurrent spectral mode characterising such type of fiction has to do with both settler perspective (his sense of danger and feelings of fear) and settler guilt (mostly unavowed and unconscious). Both Carey's "Windmill in the West" and De Kretser's *Lost Dog* castigate such dynamics of exclusion at the heart of white settlement and lost-in-the bush stories.

34 *The Lost Dog* is a particularly interesting case in point as it both belongs to the genre and deconstructs its ideological agenda. It suggests another way of using spectrality: instead of repressing the ghosts of past historic violence and replacing them with the ghosts of white victimhood in a Gothic vein, the author offers an alternative way of relating to one's country and landscapes. Her artist figure

Nelly Zhang promotes an acceptance of the present and the past as they come to you. Leaving the lost-in-the-bush paradigm behind, Tom and Nelly are ready for another conception of personal and national identity: one that does not fetishize or fossilize old dividing lines as the white-vanishing trope did, but one that enables endless inscriptions, reinscriptions and erasures. The narrator mentions one of Tom's favorite toys as a child, a wax slate, and this could be a metaphor of what De Kretser tries to achieve with national representations through the landscape. She seems to imply through her narrator's voice that Australia's national iconic places such as the bush or the desert have to give way to more inclusive spaces. The city is one such place where mobility is rendered possible again and where multicultural spectral selves can both circulate and leave a mark of their own, however ephemeral or non-representative of anyone else than themselves: a "palimpsest", a "ruin", "layered like memory" (221), shimmering spectrally.

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## NOTES

1 Famous Australian historian Russel Ward wrote a very influential work on Australian character called *The Australian Legend* in 1958 which became an instant bestseller and which saw in the bush and life in the outback, a defining element of Australian identity. He even spoke of a “national

mystique" deriving from such bush experience (Ward 179). What he emphasizes in this writing though is not so much the idea of mobility or the Frontier as the very nature of bush experience itself: that of the common man sticking to his mates and being able to "endure stoically" rather than "ac[t] busily" (179). His prototypical national representatives are the ex-convict bush-workers, the bushrangers, the "nomadic" pastoral workers ("the outback employees, the semi-nomadic drovers, shepherds, shearers, bullock-drivers, stockmen", 180). He underlines their "extreme mobility" (184) but more as a symptom of their precarious living conditions than as a form of "manifest destiny" of a people with a mission and an ultimate destination in view. He contrasts such a figure with the "typical American frontiersman" that is a "small individualist agricultural proprietor or farm labourer, not a cow-boy or ranch-hand" (187).

2 This is a point that Denoon, Mein-Smith and Wyndham have convincingly argued in their *History of Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific* (140–142).

3 Those are the words of Governor-General Sir William Deane on Anzac Day in 1999. What is striking to note is that such an official celebration of national character should have taken place elsewhere than on Australian soil, in Anzac Cove (Turkey) where so many died for their country.

4 James McAuley presents a nation where aridity prevails and the only river that flows nurtures stupidity. With such caustic sarcasm he pointedly debunks the Australian legend as incredibly limiting for a country to fully develop as a sane organism:

Her rivers of water drown among inland sands,
The river of her immense stupidity
Floods her monotonous tribes from Cairns to Perth.
In them at last the ultimate men arrive
Whose boast is not "we live" but "we survive",
A type who will inhabit the dying earth. ("Australia" 311)

5 Two of the most famous paintings illustrating the lost child motif would certainly be Frederick McCubbin's two *Lost* paintings, as Peter Pierce indicates (54). The first one painted in 1886 features a lost girl and the second, dating from 1907, a boy. In both cases, what is striking is the sense of mute emotional charge with a child figure looking down, away from the viewer and already partly engulfed by the intricate and entangled undergrowth.

6 Here is how Elspeth Tilley defines the "white-vanishing trope": "recurrent stories about white Australians who become lost or disappear into the landscape" (Tilley, 1). Among the most well-known variants of the white vanishing trope two very representative pieces should be mentioned, one in fiction and one in film: Nobel prize winner Patrick White's *Voss*, featuring a tragic exploring expedition and the disappearance and death of Voss, their leader, who was originally based on a real historic figure, Ludwig Leichhardt, but also Peter Weir's film *Picnic at Hanging Rock* featuring a group of girls going missing with one of their teachers.

7 The drover is an essential national figure in Australia and he was made famous by Lawson's bestselling short story *The Drover's Wife* (1892). In Australia, a drover is a man who drives cattle from one place to another, the equivalent of the American cowboy. In Lawson's short story though, as in successive rewritings of the original tale, the drover is far from romantic and inspiring. His wife is in the limelight and she is the one portrayed as having all the prerequisite bush qualities to serve as a national icon (see for an enlightening analysis of the successive rewritings of the story John Thieme's "Drovers' Wives" and Christine Vandamme's "'The Drover's Wife': Celebrating or Demystifying Bush Mythology?").

8 Such an incredible amount is the fifth-highest price paid for any Australian artwork at an auction (see Lauren Waldhuter, "Russell Drysdale's outback painting *Grandma's Sunday Walk* sells for $3m at auction", <www.abc.net.au/news/2017-06-25/artist-russell-drysdales-outback-painting-sells-for-3m/8650364> accessed 3 March 2019).

9 The "history wars" in Australia is a term referring to a fierce controversy between conservative and progressive historians as to the degree of violence and brutality British colonisation of Australia entailed. It started in the 1970s when Australian historian Henry Reynolds started investigating about frontier conflict between Aborigines and British settlers. In 2003 Stuart Mcintyre and Anna Clark published a book *The History Wars*, presenting the contrasted claims of each side of the heated debate.

## ABSTRACTS

**English**

The article examines the motif of mobility in Australian literature and history and points to a recurrent and paradoxical immobility and the absence of a frontier myth as symptomatic of Australia's relation to the land,

its colonial history and the obliteration of its Indigenous population up until the end of the 20th century. It analyses the difficulty non-Indigenous Australians have had from the very beginning of settlement in mapping out both literally and figuratively the iconic national Bush and its modern avatar, the desert. The spectrality to be found in early works gains an even more problematic and critical dimension after the Second World War with the advent of postmodern parodies and more recently still, the development of multicultural perspectives on such aesthetic issues reflecting deeper political and cultural dynamics.

**Français**
Cet article s'intéresse au motif de la mobilité dans la littérature et l'histoire australiennes, et montre qu'une immobilité récurrente et paradoxale, ainsi que l'absence d'un mythe de la frontière, sont symptomatiques de la relation de l'Australie à la terre, de son histoire coloniale et de l'oblitération de la population indigène jusqu'à la fin du XX$^{e}$ siècle. Il analyse les difficultés qu'ont eues dès le début les Australiens non indigènes à cartographier à la fois littéralement et figurativement l'iconique bush national et son avatar moderne, le désert. La spectralité qu'on trouve dans les premières œuvres acquiert une dimension encore plus problématique et critique après la Seconde Guerre mondiale avec l'arrivée de parodies postmodernes, et plus récemment encore avec le développement d'approches multiculturelles sur ces questions esthétiques qui reflètent une dynamique politique et culturelle plus profonde.

## INDEX

**Mots-clés**
bush australien, mobilité, frontières, trope de la disparition, spectralité

**Keywords**
bush, mobility, boundaries, white vanishing trope, spectrality

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# Unfixed/Unfixing *Geografictione* in Aritha van Herk's *Places Far from Ellesmere* (1990)

*La géographie non fixée/défixante dans* Places Far from Ellesmere *(1990) d'Aritha van Herk*

**Anne-Sophie Letessier**

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## OUTLINE

"Written into place": origins and destinations
"Home is a movement": un/reading place
"Between habitations": dis-locating language

## TEXT

1 While Aritha van Herk's writings "do not conform to tidy labels", the Canadian author choosing to "tak[e] up liminal positions that explode totalizing categories" (Goldman, "Go North" 32), a trademark of her work has been her interest in cartography. With *Places Far from Ellesmere* (1990),[1] her "genre-bending prose" (Neuman 221) goes a step further than the parodic "picaresque rootlessness" (Thieme 47) of her previous novels, *The Tent Peg* (1981) and *No Fixed Address* (1986) which already give pride of place to map-making and the fascination it exerts on their irreverent female protagonists.

2 *Places Far from Ellesmere* is structured into four "explorations on site": Edberg where van Herk grew up, Edmonton where she studied, Calgary where she now resides and the island of Ellesmere where the narrator embarks on a feminist revisionist reading of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*. Perhaps unsurprisingly since she defines genre as "the coffin that contains form" (*In Visible* 17), van Herk refuses the label autobiography and, throughout the text, the narrator uses the second person singular to address her self, a pronoun which functions "almost [as] an audiential address" showing "the multiplicity

of possibilities for the reader and the writer, who are the same and different" (van Herk, "Shifting Form" 87). Likewise, if the self-conscious use of the term "exploration" in the subtitle cannot but call to mind the expeditions and cartographers who mapped what was to become Canada—J. B. Tyrell (*Places* 14) and David Thompson (*Places* 66) to name but a few of those whom van Herk includes in her book—, the text is less driven by the forward impetus of discovery than by the "mutual implication of geography and fiction" (Helmes 69) indexed in van Herk's coinage: *geografictione*. The term refers at once to a style of writing and to place, the reversibility of the components—"A fiction of geography/geography of fiction" (*Places* 40) —underscoring the impossibility of dissociating the latter from its inscription in a discursive process (Ashcroft 155).

3 The cover illustration by Scott Barham [2] proposes to the reader a visual interpretation of a *geografictione* which "establishes cartography as a first framework for reading" (Heim 139) and disrupts the very model it proposes. The collage is indeed composed of several layers of maps, different scales and different viewpoints coexisting on the same page. A black and white map where toponyms are hardly legible serves as the background to a brightly coloured insert. Within its frame, a female-shaped island faces south towards a landmass which is cleft into two by a river. East of this divide, the artist has inscribed the figures 1, 2, 3, the latter superimposed on a grid map of Calgary. Fragments of maps of the Arctic Ocean and of the northern half of the globe have been pasted in the top and bottom left-hand corners. The collage's playful non-referentiality is a reminder that cartography does not reproduce an existing form: it functions as a modelization whose graphic language creates a space in which to locate new representations—what Christian Jacob calls "the impossible mimesis" (quoted in Besse 157). The way the collage subverts the symbolic contract of cartography as an ordering of topography providing orientation and positional information further elucidates van Herk's own reading of *Places Far from Ellesmere* as "a book masquerading as a map, or more accurately, a map masquerading as a book" ("Map" 129). A paradoxical map if there is, since it "refuse[s] the epistemic classification of cartography" (van Herk, "Map" 130), yet uses the cartographic model to examine the notion of place as "transportable" (van Herk, "Shifting Form" 90).

Reversing the traditional relation that posits place as the object of exploration, van Herk indeed proposes to see it as the agent of its own exploring, therefore "unfixed, unmappable" ("Map" 130).

4 Van Herk's reflection, in that regard, is attuned to the contemporary reassessment of the notion of place in the humanities, notably in cultural geography and post-colonial studies (Thieme 1–3). Although *Places Far from Ellesmere* is informed by the contrary dynamics of the centripetal forces of "emplacement" as "entextment", and the centrifugal drive of dis-location striving to eschew "the boundaries of page or place, their constraints" (*Places* 119), it does not do away with place. The narrator's assertion about Edberg—"This is place, inescapable" (*Places* 23)—bespeaks more than a sense of claustrophobia related to childhood experience; it evinces the primacy and inevitability of place, the persistence of its inscription on the writing/reading self. The excess of positional information which cartography may provide—"Canada, the West, prairie, Alberta, the south, Calgary: a house northwest, room" (*Places* 57)—demonstrates that to ponder this persistence, one should see place as something other than a circumscribed point on a map, or a static landmark. Underlying the narrator's efforts to locate a home which would accommodate her restlessness is the idea that place can no longer be envisaged solely as "a pause in movement" (Tuan 6). Van Herk's critical and poetic investigation of the "mobility" of the concept (Massey, *Space* 1) unsettles the limits of its definition as "a site of authenticity, singular, fixed and unproblematic in its identity" (Massey 1994, 5) to write unfixed and unfixing *geografictione*.

# "Written into place": origins and destinations

5 1, 2, 3: the figures which feature prominently on the cover map appear to record the sequence of explorations, the overall structure of the book seemingly resting on a trajectory in time and space with each section corresponding to a stage in the narrator's life. Yet, in keeping with its blatant refusal of cartographic ordering, the figures thwart the reader's expectation for orientation.[3] Likewise, the text's "self-conscious avoidance of plot" (Goldman, "Earth-Quaking" 31) means that origins and destinations can longer be taken as the two

polarities between which the narrative unfolds: defining "originary moments of departure" and locating "a definitive moment of perfect arrival" (Thieme 3 and 11) prove to be equally problematic. Faced with the difficulty of finding a circumscribed point of origin whose stability and solidity would allow her to "launch" herself and her explorations (*Places* 33), the narrator turns to the fixity and permanence of the burial ground, and looks for possible sites for her future grave in all four locations:

> Engravement then. The home of the spirit? To dare to stay here to die, to dare to stay after death, to implant yourself firmly and say 'Here I stay, let those who look for a record come here.' (*Places* 61)

6 The pun on "engravement"—the inscription and the burying of the body—conjoined with the insistence on the deictic calls to mind Pogue-Harrison's reflection on the deictic gesture of the grave marker ("here lies") which "appropriates the ground of indication", making it the foundational gesture of emplacement (397) and the paradigmatic example of "writ[ing] into place" (*Places* 39). In the narrative, the phrase always coalesces discursive process (writing into being) and textual assignation (writing into position) for van Herk's use of the term engravement hinges on an analogy between the burial plot, the plotting of place and the plotting of fiction (Goldman, "Earth-Quaking" 31).

7 The reader is ushered into the meditation on Edberg as a first possible site of engravement by a series of clauses which reads as a diffident attempt to define it:

> Home: what you visit and abandon: too much forgotten/too much remembered. An asylum for your origins, your launchings and departures, the derivations of your dream geographies. […] Always and unrelentingly (home) even after it is too late to be or to revert to (home), even after it pre/occupies the past tense. (*Places* 13)

What prevails in the succession of parallel phrases is the awareness that writing about Edberg cannot bring it to an end, the parentheses which disrupt the syntax indexing the need to engage with this impossibility. If memory is *preoccupied* by the past, the slash which cleaves the word in the passage re-inscribes both the temporal and

the spatial. Exploring Edberg is not an anamnesis nor is the town a repository of memory waiting to be "happily retrieved" (*Places* 38). As the narrator forcefully asserts, it is "without a time limit", its exploration made up of "uneasy souviences" since it "insists on a reference, influence, empreinte" (*Places* 15). The irruption of foreign words upsets the assumptions of stability, fixity and durability frequently associated with the idea of imprint. Edberg as *empreinte* is evidence simultaneously of the contact of loss and the loss of contact (Didi-Huberman 18) in which the past, far from being foreclosed, ceaselessly works and transforms the substratum it imprinted (Didi-Huberman 14). Van Herk's "mnemonic reading" of her childhood place ("Map" 130–131) registers "a site effacing itself, a town dis/appearing" (*Places* 29), the second phrase contradicting the clichés underlying the first. Although the narrator gathers evidence of the dereliction and dissolution of a small town and agricultural community forgotten by the march of modernity (*Places* 29, 34), loss is not experienced as a continuous progress towards erasure and absence: the double movement textually marked by the slash points to a simultaneity which makes Edberg anachronistic.

8 The reflection on the town dis/appearance serves as a counterpoint to the long list of "remainders", what remains (the traces of the past in the present) and serves as a reminder (a presence which points to the future of remembering). [4] When the narrator enumerates the "disappearing locations of appearances"—the cart trail, the creamery, the barbershop, the Chinese café (*Places* 29–32)—, more is at stake than bemoaning regrets measuring what is left in the light of what has gone. The whole section pieces together personal anecdotes, historical references to explorers and settlers, and considerations on religious differences among Edberg's population. These snippets, however, never quite aggregate into a coherent whole. In a similar fashion, when the narrator adopts a bird's eye view to offer a description of the town, the text flaunts its disregard for topographic charting through the insistent use of disjunctive slashes: "the school/houses/Erickson's store/a blank-face building? shed?/the hotel/another dusty storefront with a tabby sleeping in its window/the Co-op store/across the street Nick Radomsky's hardware and the garage" (*Places* 22). This resistance to ordering space and time in such a way as to allow summation is premised on

the notion that memory cannot take hold of place, that the memory of Edberg cannot take place: the town does not fulfill the role of the Aristotelian *periechon* whose containing boundaries and stabilizing persistence hold the remembered (Casey 186). Writing cannot be envisaged as a compensatory gesture "command[ing] [Edberg] into everlasting place" (*Places* 37) either, the text a "receptacle […] gathering evidence of its existence" (Omhovère 103): the recurring image of the cupped hands trying and failing "to enclose this soft jumble of houses and streets" (*Places* 34) brings to the fore this impossibility. What the first exploration does instead is to bear witness to the unresolved paradox of the narrator's desire "[t]o unhinge, and to carve with words" (*Places* 39).

9 Because Edberg refuses to let itself be written into a monument of the past, the narrator briefly sees it as "an Ellesmere" (*Places* 36), an elsewhere which is synonymous at once with escape and with "the eternal temptation of the lie that return is possible" (van Herk, "Map" 131). When, in the final section, she *does* escape to the Arctic island, the reflection veers away from the question of memory to probe the "male/lineated" territories of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* and of Arctic maps (*Places* 88), the forceful emplotment of women and place into unitary definition whose static circumscribing strives to stifle their "determin[ation] to enact their own vitality" (*Places* 125).

10 As she hikes on Ellesmere, reading Tolstoy by Arctic white nights, the narrator muses on the congruences between *Anna Karenina* and Ellesmere: "The nineteenth-century island: the nineteenth century novel" (*Places* 97). In 1873, Tolstoy started to write his book, "publish[ing]/punish[ing] [his character] by instalment" until 1877 (*Places* 97). Meanwhile, the Arctic island was being "extensive[ly]" explored by two expeditions in 1875 and 1876 (*Places* 97). Beyond the sole coincidence of dates, van Herk elaborates on the summarily summed-up equation "terror of women = terror of the north" (*Places* 123)[5] to bring under scrutiny "the transition from boundless space to bounding pen" (Omhovère 115) characteristic of European representations of the Arctic, be they travel narratives or maps. Tolstoy's ambition to explore the heart of female passion, whetted by his prurient fascination with "the body of an undressed and dissected young woman who threw herself under a train from heartbreak" (*Places* 97), participates in the same drive to chart

unknown territories which sent European adventurers across the Atlantic and into the Arctic ocean in search of "the un/found North West Passage" (*Places* 84). The narrator debunks these figures of knowledge-seekers by presenting them as instances of "rampaging male egos" (*Places* 80) whose singular lack of imagination (*Places* 81) is on par with their desire to define and capture in language through the imposition of "[p]rescripted choices" (*Places* 81). While *Anna Karenina*, as van Herk reads it, is "a fictional mirror of a male reading of women" (*Places* 82), the Arctic map is a projection of male explorers' narcissistic fantasy of writing themselves onto a landscape suitably empty (emptied) of women: "Name, name, leave names on everything, on every physical abutment, leave behind one's father's name, the names of other men, the names of absent and abstracted/ideal women" (*Places* 88). The narrator's derisive tone when reflecting on the naming frenzy which gripped Arctic explorers does not obfuscate the fearful symmetry of the male ideology of silenced femininity which condemns Anna Karenina and Ellesmere to absence, the former killed by the murderous plot of her creator, the latter emplotted as a *tabula rasa* (*Places* 77).

11 Reading past these inscriptions, the narrator offers Ellesmere as "a remedy" to the plight of Anna Karenina (*Places* 77), its "grammar of stone and tree, water and sky" (*Places* 84) opening possible reading routes to upset unitary definitions. Only then can Ellesmere "float into a geografictione" (*Places* 87), the fluidity of the liquid element suggestive of the movement of the "puzzle-ice" during the brief Arctic summer (*Places* 121), an alternative to engravement.

## "Home is a movement": un/reading place

12 If Anna Karenina steps out of the book into the landscape to walk and converse with the narrator (*Places* 103, 104, 106), ultimately, she cannot escape the plot Tolstoy devised for her. Meanwhile, the narrator refuses to choose a grave, a plot or a home. In response to the vexing question: "Where does home mean?" (*Places* 68), she proposes that "home is a movement" (*Places* 69), an aphorism which gives the lie to the notion of home as a resting place (Massey, *Space* 123), and sharpens the correlation she identifies in the

Canadian Prairie between "historic restlessness" and its "companion", settlement (*Places* 68). [6] The impossibility of turning home into a fixed entity, even when she forsakes the "temptations of exile" (*Places* 58) and decides to stay in Calgary (*Places* 62), gestures towards the increasingly problematic nature of the concept in "the contemporary world, where routes versions of cultural becoming are supplanting roots notions of identity" (Thieme 27). More important perhaps than the notion that "identity has many imagined 'homes'" (Hall quoted in Thieme 27), is the way the narrator's restlessness disrupts "sedentarist notions of place" (Thieme 37). In that regard, one may argue that van Herk is not so much interested in the transactions through which undifferentiated space is invested with meaning and value (Tuan 6), as she is in the mobile heterogeneity of place identities which are "always in transit" (Thieme 6). The narrator is acutely aware that the four sites of exploration have already been "entext[ed]" (*Places* 53) and mapped by others. Edberg is "[i]nvented: textual" (*Places* 40), Edmonton "a reading, […] an open book" (*Places* 47), while Calgary is "empenned" (*Places* 66) and Ellesmere a "paginated presence" (*Places* 77): all four are "places with acts of readings as their histories, and all of them [the narrator's] homes" (*Places* 36). Starting from the premise that place is "an act of text" (*Places* 47), van Herk ceaselessly works on the dialectical interplay between writing and reading, the reading writer always a writing reader who writes place as she reads it.

13 It is the narrator's concern with the "hermeneutics of place" (Thieme 29) which prompts the "un/reading" underpinning the four explorations. Understood in the light of the epigraph from Foucault's *Archaeology of Knowledge*, van Herk's coinage signals an investigation into "discursive formation" as a "space of multiple dissensions". [7] Un/reading becomes "a means of interrogating" which pays equal attention to content and process ("Unreading" 87). The question: "What justifies place?" (*Places* 20), which runs through the entire book, thus calls for more than re-reading or "de/coding" (*Places* 38). Significantly, it elicits differing responses. When the narrator exclaims, about Edmonton: "what's to be expected of a fort(ress) set up to trade/skin Indians" (*Places* 43), the cleft textually marked by the slash makes room for a revisionist reading of the city's foundation story and points to a correlation between the fur (skin) trading

activities held at the fortified fort and the brutality to which First Nations peoples were submitted. On Ellesmere, the narrator rectifies the record about the Arctic Island: "explored, not discovered", for the roaming bands of hunters from forty-two hundred years ago already had a name for it (*Places* 98). That name, however, remains unsaid, a silence to which the text draws attention: "if one only had the eyes to read it" (*Places* 97). [8] Brief as these two references to colonial rewritings and overwritings may be, they underscore the "discursive interference of colonialism" by calling attention to "the conflicting accretions which become the dense text that constitutes place" (Ashcroft et al. 197 and 190). The narrator's exploration of Calgary complements and complicates such un/reading. Under the heading "Denizen", she notes the archaeological finds which testify to First Nations peoples' originary claims: "Spearpoints found in the plowed fields east of the city (12,000 years old). Teepee rings, medicine wheels, effigies: Blackfoot, Sarcee, Stoney" (*Places* 66). [9] The list is immediately followed by another made up of the names of explorers and surveyors (*Places* 66). The juxtaposition may read as an implicit contrast between the nomadism of peoples whose sense of place is not dependent on settledness and static enclosure, and the mapping of the West by agents of European imperialism which transformed place into a "topographical system" predicated on the introduction of boundaries (Ashcroft 146). One is not pitted against the other, however. In a place "[b]egun by the oldest occupation, the nomadic herding of grazing animals" (*Places* 68), all are "transient denizens" (*Places* 66): "Arriving and leaving, citizens of their own rules: Ex-mounties, Ex-speculators, Ex-Metis buffalo hunters, Ex-Arrivals" (*Places* 66–67). By bringing together these examples of spatial mobility, the text does not shy away from the political implications of past and present spatial practices in post-colonial Canada, but resists "the easy resolution of seeing European discovery and invasion as a defining moment, or idealizing pre-Columbian America as a site of authenticity" (Thieme 7).

14 Un/reading, therefore, cannot be limited to the sole excavating and discovering of what has been ignored or dismissed by dominant discourse. In what may be construed as a tongue-in-cheek reference to the Foucauldian metaphor, the narrator remarks: "It's been said before: archaeologies are (in)formed by those who (in)vent

them" (*Places* 58). My contention is that van Herk's un/reading does not hinge as much on "palimpsestic layering" (Crane 52)—as tempting as the metaphor is, especially in relation to Foucault—as on a process of fragmentation "dismantling [the] text past all its previous readings and writings" (van Herk, *In Visible* 4). Such process is given cogent expression in her metaphoric displacements of the phrase "long division" which serves as the title of the Edmonton section. Once "dislodged from its scientific context", Claire Omhovère points out, it "comes to designate the riving process through which the narrator elaborates her geografictione" (105). It bears on the cleft opened by the North Saskatchewan, the river which "cut[s] the town in half: north/south" and whose axis holds for the narrator the promise of evasion, of "divid[ing] [herself] from the country" and its reductive plots [10] (*Places* 43). Out of the four explorations, the Edmonton section is the one which relies the most on fragments from a variety of texts which the narrator assembles as she negotiates reading paths through the "maze of [her] books" (*Places* 52). Featured in the text or quoted in free indirect discourse, these fragments are loosened from their status as archival evidence [11] to allow for multiple points of entry and passages leading to shifting reconfigurations. The narrator's remark on her "absteminous[ness]", having "yet to see the inside of a hotel" (*Places* 49), introduces an advertisement for the Edmonton hotel in colonial times, at the same time as it harks back to Edberg and women's exclusion from beer parlours (*Places* 14) and "the beer parlour tradition of oral narrative" which has fed the work of Prairie writers like Robert Kroetsch (Neuman 223). The content of the ad itself resonates with the society article included on the following page. Whether it be the promise that "[p]emmican and dried buffalo meat has long been a stranger at the table" (*Places* 49) or the reporter's insistence on the toilettes of a ball's attendees as proof of civility, both texts evince a desire to outgrow the pioneer past which results in awkward mimicry, as awkward as the narrator's own efforts to "match" the "flowered blouses vaunt[ing] cashmere cardigans" of the "rich city girls" (*Places* 51). In between these two fragments, a jocular article about the popularity of "coffin varnish" (*Places* 50) follows the fluvial axis of division, and points to the South and to the North. While the bootlegged liquor travels to Wyoming—without "having had its significance or usefulness impaired" (*Places* 50)—, the

colonial temperance movement gathers strength, intent on "press[ing] for total prohibition. On all passions" (*Places* 50). The pause in the formulation of the sentence signals a change of scope which can then encompass Tolstoy, that other "son […] of temperance" whose novel *Anna Karenina* the Edmonton student has yet to read (*Places* 50; see also 81).

15 As the narrator tries to divide herself from Edberg by "entext[ing] [herself] a city of pages" (*Places* 53), entextment proves to come with its own perils—after all, the neologism relies on the same affixation as engravement and emplotment, the prefix *en-* in each case suggestive of confinement. In the course of the second and third explorations, the motif of the maze becomes more prominent and blends with the image of the fortress. In Calgary, the narrator finds "a Jericho" (*Places* 57), an "enclosure" (*Places* 66) divided into quadrants but replete with the "crossword puzzle of street" (*Places* 72), interlocking bridges and malls, "labyrinths" (*Places* 72) in which she wanders until she becomes "enmesh[ed] in the very textual threads which should have led her out", at once Theseus, Ariadne and the Minotaur (Omhovère 107): "Who can find you here, a clumsy bawling beast in the centre of a web of thread, a cat's cradle of encapturement?" (*Places* 73). If un/reading and entextment might be construed as reversible polarities—one "exploratory", the other "introverted and possessive" (*Places* 113)—, place does not merely wait for the reader's probing; it is the agent of its own dis-location when "it moves, un/reads itself again, a sly alteration leaving [the narrator] puzzled" (*Places* 37), a movement which van Herk's poetics reciprocates.

# "Between habitations": dis-locating language

16 On Ellesmere, the narrator finds an "awayness so thoroughly truant [she] ha[s] cut all connexion to all places" (*Places* 77), a place where she is "free to un/read [her]self, home, […] the rest of Canada, all possible texts" (*Places* 91). Reading these assertions, the critic might be tempted to interpret the movement of the book as leading towards absolute deterritorialisation abolishing "capture and cartography" (Goldman, "Earth-Quaking" 36), the striated space of the city-grid

giving way to the smooth space of the Arctic desert (Goldman, "Earth-Quaking" 32), which would finally allow the narrator to do away with the restrictions and circumscription of emplacement and entextment. But van Herk's geografictione comes with "necessary cordons and fences" (*Places* 140). To write dis-location—"the self written between habitations" (*Places* 118)—, she works within the constraints of page and textual enclosure against the boundedness and singularity traditionally associated with place (Massey, *Space* 169).

17 The adjective "far" in the title of the book offers a first clue. It bespeaks a "relational focus" (Helmes 69) which precludes definition through counter position—the cities of Edberg, Edmonton and Calgary v. the northern wilderness of Ellesmere [12]—and hints instead at "connections with the beyond, with other places" (Massey, "Conceptualisation" 64). The narrator ceaselessly measuring the temporal, geographical and imaginary distances between the different sites, each place reflects on and inflects the others: with their unfixed and heterogeneous identities, all are unique, none are singular. This porosity is translated by "wandering tropes" [13] which create open and unstable networks undermining the textual enclosure of the four sections, the frame which their respective titles might seem to impose by announcing the symbolic associations attached to each place. The motifs of the train and the grave weave in and out of the text, the same way the figure of Anna Karenina drifts through the book. At times only present through seemingly incident references—to the arrival of the Canadian Pacific Railway in Calgary (*Places* 59), or to the necessity to arrange for a cemetery in colonial Edmonton (*Places* 52), for example—they assert themselves when their semantic variations serve as a vector to articulate the narrator's relationship with place. Thus, her repressive upbringing makes Edberg a "training for departure" (*Places* 18), the platform of the train station the promise of an elsewhere, the possibility of launching oneself into unmapped territories—provided one could frame the image so as to leave out the reminders of Edberg's nudging presence:

> The platform stood on the lip of the world, and if you could manage to ignore the cream cans and tractor parts, the wooden baggage cart, you could imagine (an Anna in black velvet stepping down to

> take a breath of fresh air on her way to one of the family estates: it is the Edberg platform that nudged and gestured, peering and curious) the platform a promenade, it was that even and level and inspiring. (*Places* 16)

18 The parenthesis cleaves the sentence open to allow for Anna Karenina's glamorous apparition, along with a metonymic displacement which lets in Edberg's "principles of scrutiny" (*Places* 14), the silent crowd whose gaze no departure can seem to escape. Because van Herk continuously works on slippage, permeability and disruption, her semantic variations frustrate sequential logic. The parallelism of the railway tracks gives form to the symmetry of childhood training—"[a]llowances: forbiddedness" (*Places* 27)—, making it the first instance of "engravement" (*Places* 23) from whose iron lines [14] the narrator tries to save Tolstoy's character when the "unrailwayed joining" of an Arctic island (*Places* 49) prompts the un/reading of the implacable symmetry to which male fiction condemns women—"forever culpable, exiled for their visceras, eviscerated for their exiles" (*Places* 83). Conversely, the meditation on Calgary, "this growing graveyard" (*Places* 57), gives the lie to the etymological meaning of "[c]emetery. Koimeterion" (*resting place*) by picturing the city as "a silent freight train carrying away long rows of boxcars neatly stacked with coffins" (*Places* 59). This image of ordered mobility is immediately contradicted by the depiction of rabbits' and gophers' "unrestricted" movements among graves which "elbow […] each other awake, saying 'move over'" (*Places* 59–60).

19 In an all-encompassing movement, the Ellesmere section concludes on the narrator's going through the list of possible sites for her future grave, a list which condenses the three previous sections (*Places* 140). But even the elsewhere of Ellesmere is given an elsewhere. The scope of the text is suddenly enlarged to other "sites of repose" (*Places* 141)—the coastal mountains of British Columbia, the Pacific Rim, the Australian Pacific coast—, once the narrator has pushed aside the temptation of merging with the Arctic landscape: [15]

> But traverse on, puzzle-ice in the lake you can still see as you go higher, and the tussocks you step over eternity of continuance.

> The same principle: jumping from moment to moment across an abrupted space. (*Places* 122–123)

With its emphasis on on-going crossing, compounded with the descriptive notations about continuity and permanence on one hand, and sudden and unexpected changes on the other, the passage sheds light on Robert Kroetsh's reading of van Herk's writing as an instance of restless language whose recurring use of foreign words, multiple neologisms and metaphoric displacements "riddl[e] the grammar of what (almost) was" (Kroetsch 70). To the notion of accumulation which some critics have used to describe her use of tropes, I would therefore substitute that of dis-location since her metaphorical crossings maintain an in-betweenness, a spacing which generates destabilizing frictions and tensions. When, in the Edberg section, she borrows the British term "coppice" from J. B. Tyrrell's description of the Parkland "scattered trees" (*Places* 14, 20), she refrains from elaborating on the disjunction between environment and imported language, or from retaliating with a more appropriate word, which would participate in the same aspectual logic. Instead, she preserves the spacing opened in the referential process by the impropriety to produce surprisingly disjunctive connections: "initiation coppice" (*Places* 15), "the germ of origin, its coppice" (*Places* 32). In neither phrase does "coppice" refer to a definite object, a setting in which the narrator's experience may be seen as embedded. The dissonance caused by the instability of the signifier prevents the reading of the images from falling into "preconditioned" patterns (*Places* 122): far from dispelling the slipperiness and imperfection of the assignation which notions of origins make us claim as home (van Herk, "Map" 130), the word associations leave open breaches which unsettle the fixity of mental constructs.

20 Van Herk's restless language, which deliberately thwarts the efforts of "the comprehensive reader" (*Places* 118), inscribes in the text the very possibility of its own un/reading: "The words are stirred, mixed, likes pieces of a jigsaw, broken into their separate shapes and the whole picture lost, left to be reconstructed by another, a different hand" (*Places* 111)—provided it accepts that such reconstruction is necessarily incomplete and provisional, and abstains from "static circumscription" (*Places* 118). Marlene Goldman points out how the

image of the jigsaw, the "puzzle-ice", which runs through the exploration of Ellesmere (*Places* 87, 93, 111, 121), functions as a "figure for the exploratory strategy of a feminist reading of Tolstoy's text" ("Earth-Quaking" 35). I would go a step further and argue that it informs van Herk's poetics of place and its unsettling complexities. Underlying the metaphor is the idea of mobile fragmentation, thaw creating "open patches" (*Places* 93), producing unstable reading routes, new combinations which always exceed the sum of their parts. As always in van Herk's text, the image slides into another and that of the puzzle-ice needs to be read in relation to the attention the narrator pays to "the enduring traces" shape-changing ice "leaves on the landscape" (Omhovère 105). If *Places Far from Ellesmere* is indeed a map, what its overt fragmentation, disconcerting displacements and destabilising dissonances give form to is the persistence of place which imprints on the writer and the reader alike its unfixing.

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## NOTES

1 Further references to appear in parentheses in the text, prefaced by the abbreviation *Places*.

2 For a more thorough analysis of the cover map, see Omhovère (97–100), Grace (88) and van Herk's own interpretation ("Map" 134).

3 As Claire Omhovère underlines, "the position of these figures belies the location of the corresponding towns in an atlas" (99).

4 "The action indicated by the reminder is typically one step removed from the immediate present in which I apprehend the reminder itself. I am being reminded of a possible action which I may undertake very soon or eventually, though not precisely when and as I am perceiving the reminder." (Casey 93)

5 It is now commonplace in criticism on van Herk to underscore her engagement with the discursive formation of the north, the dominant narrative of "courageous men battling dangerous, hostile, female *terra incognita*" (Grace 16). Significantly, the Ellesmere section has garnered the most critical attention (sometimes to the detriment of the rest of the narrative). The extent to which it reinforces what it seeks to deconstruct has been a moot question among critics, some arguing that van Herk failed to do away with her dependency upon the male "Idea of the North" (Grace) or to satisfactorily engage with Euro-centric definition of the Arctic (see Grace, Helms, Crane). Omhovère proposes a more nuanced approach with her enlightening analysis of van Herk's subtle inversion of the gendering of space.

6 The passage points the reader back to the narrator's opening remark on the "restless settlers" of the past, drifting through the prairie (*Places* 19).

7 Two quotations, one from Levi Strauss about memory as a desert, the other from Camus about the need for deserts and islands, frame the excerpt from Foucault's *Archeology of Knowledge*. The authorial synthesis, at the bottom of the page and between brackets, repeats and displaces words from each of the three quotes, thereby offering a comment on what Levi Strauss's and Camus's texts may be read as glossing over: the gendering of space—"The world admits deserts and islands but no women" (*Places* 9). While van Herk does not elaborate on the archaeological method Foucault's

approach to space relies on, this authorial intervention is in itself a critical act of un/reading.

8 Van Herk's essay about her experience on Ellesmere explains this silence of the text: the Inuktitut words which her guide Pijamini taught her are his, "not [hers], and if [she] was able to hear them and to mimic them, it was only through his agency. [She] will not raid them" (*In Visible Ink* 10).

9 Such artefacts resolve the question of home for the Sarcee woman the narrator encounters at the Co-op store: "she knows home better than you do, she knows where it is" (*Places* 68).

10 "Drink and get laid and get away and quit school.
Quit school and get away and get laid and get drunk.
Reverse all orders: this is as far as you can get away from home." (*Places* 23)

11 Van Herk's text collapses temporal distance by including the events recorded in the archive documents on the same time plane as the narrator's experience as a student in Edmonton.

12 In that regard, my reading of van Herk's text differs significantly from Crane's analysis of the discursive construction of wilderness.

13 I borrow the phrase from Claire Omhovère's analysis of geographical tropes in Ann Michael's *Fugitive Pieces* (83).

14 "[H]e beats his characters into plowshares, or into railway ties, or their potential deaths" (*Places* 117; see also 121, 142).

15 "You wade the Abbé River too, and again the force, the surge of electricity in the water makes you want simply to submerge yourself into a tumbled stone. You want to become Ellesmere." (*Places* 121)

## ABSTRACTS

**English**
Aritha van Herk's *Places Far from Ellesmere* is informed by the contrary dynamics of the centripetal forces of "emplacement" as "entextment", and the centrifugal drive of dis-location striving to eschew textual and territorial enclosure. Taking its cue from the author's suggestion that her text is "a map masquerading as a book", this paper proposes to examine how she unsettles the traditional definition of place to write unmappable, unfixed and unfixing geografictione.

**Français**
Si Aritha van Herk propose de lire *Places Far from Ellesmere* comme « une carte se faisant passer pour un livre », il s'agit bien d'une carte paradoxale qui met en tension les forces centripètes de l'emplacement et de l'entextement, et le désir centrifuge d'échapper aux enclos textuels et territoriaux. La présente étude y voit une poétique qui vise à déranger les définitions traditionnelles du lieu pour le soustraire au statisme et à la fixité que lui impose ordinairement la cartographie.

## INDEX

**Mots-clés**
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# Mapping the Unstable: The Af-Pak Border and Its Tropes in Nadeem Aslam's *The Blind Man's Garden* (2013)

*Cartographier l'instable : la frontière afghano-pakistanaise et ses tropes dans* The Blind Man's Garden *de Nadeem Aslam (2013)*

**Maëlle Jeanniard du Dot**

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## OUTLINE

Context
Borders and invasion: impossible mappings
  A typology of borders
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The border and prismatic perception
  Re-mapping the world from the borderland
  Mapping otherness
  Sensory re-mapping
Towards a poetics of confluence
  Historical confluence
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## TEXT

1 Nadeem Aslam's fourth novel *The Blind Man's Garden* was published in 2013. Contrary to his biggest success *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004), which took more than a decade to write, *The Blind Man's Garden* was published only five years after another novel set in Afghanistan, *The Wasted Vigil*—a testimony, perhaps, of a continued need to explore this troubled region in the aftermath of 9/11. Nadeem Aslam is also known for handwriting his novels and living in extreme isolation while working—in an interview, he admitted to having tape-shut his eyes in his own house while writing this novel in order to grasp the blind character's sensations (Faber & Faber 00:02:20).

2 It is perhaps this meticulous approach, translated into Nadeem Aslam's minute syntax and frames of reference, which led writer and philosopher Pankaj Mishra to call the novel an "anatomy of chaos" (23). In this anatomy of chaos, the border is the throbbing heart of the narrative; it is a physical border, but it also runs through the characters' aspirations and beliefs, and reflects the highly segregated reality of the post-9/11 world in an already divided part of the planet. Aslam, a political refugee himself since his family fled the Zia regime in Pakistan in 1980, constantly interrogates the relation between place and violence.

3 In *The Blind Man's Garden*, the main characters, stepbrothers Jeo and Mikal, are thrown into the heart of chaos in the months following 9/11, in the perilous areas surrounding Pakistan's North-West border with Afghanistan. After they are held captive by the Taliban, Mikal has to go on alone and soon enters a new dimension of the borderland: the unforgiving "War on Terror".[1] While he is a prisoner again, this time of American forces, Mikal's stepfather Rohan and Jeo's widow Naheed await Mikal's return. Rohan progressively loses his eyesight, while a threat looms over his former school: the presence of a fundamentalist group called "Ardent Spirit". The novel reaches a climax with the attack of Ardent Spirit on the Christian school where Mikal's other brother teaches. When Mikal is about to be freed by the Americans, he kills two soldiers by mistake and has to remain hidden in the confines of the Af-Pak borderland during the rest of the novel, facing a number of ethical dilemmas.

4 In her article "Capitalism and Critique: 'Af-Pak' Fiction in the Wake of 9/11", Priyamvada Gopal contends that Pakistani writers like Nadeem Aslam or Kamila Shamsie, prolific though they were before 9/11, gained renewed interest in the wake of the war in Iraq and Afghanistan. She explains how some critics have been sceptical of such interest, perceiving the growing attention paid to novels in English set in the Af-Pak region as a mere—and rather voyeuristic—fashion (21–22). *The Blind Man's Garden* can indeed be construed as a post-9/11 novel, not only because it might belong to this subgenre, but also in a strictly chronological sense. The novel examines what happened on the Af-Pak border in the months that followed the attacks on the World Trade Center. However, the post-9/11 setting of the novel does not restrict it to a time-specific subgenre: the writer's

philosophical agenda emerges beyond the political context, as he constantly shifts the perspective from one character to the next. Upon releasing the novel, Aslam defined his aim as follows: "[…] to see how these wounded people are learning to cope, beginning to hold on to their humanity, despite the wounds" (Faber & Faber 00:05:55). Following this agenda, the war narrative ultimately discloses the powers of resilience lying within our common humanity.

# Context

5 As in most of Nadeem Aslam's narratives, the geography of the novel blends a number of fictional and real places.

6 Most of the narrative takes place between two areas. The first one is the fictional town of Heer, where the main characters live. The second zone, which, as we understand, is several hours away from Heer, is the North West border of Pakistan, notably the well-known city of Peshawar. This zone is contiguous with Afghanistan, and is formed of what have been called the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). The FATA zone was named as such after the 1947 partition, and it was dismantled in May 2018 by the government to be merged with the neighbouring province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Up to this date, there were specific laws enforced on the area, which were inherited from British rule. Such harsh laws aimed at subduing the Pashtun tribes who live there and whose traditions are different from the rest of Pakistan (Crisis Group; Barker, *The Guardian*).

7 Besides questions of governance, the area is also well-known for being what Barack Obama called "the most dangerous place in the world" (Saifi and Wilkinson). From a geological standpoint, this borderland is a mountainous land, which made it ideal as a guerrilla zone involving the Taliban, the tribal warlords and US forces in the months following 9/11. On a number of occasions, the characters of Aslam's novel get lost in these vast mountain chains. This complex geography also means that it was privileged for the American "seizure, incarceration and torture of terrorist suspects at 'black sites'" (Gregory 240), one of which is described at length in the narrative.

8 According to geographer Derek Gregory in his article "The Everywhere War", borderlands such as the Af-Pak area are "shadowlands, spaces that enter European and American imaginaries in phantasmatic form, barely known but vividly imagined—we jibe against the limits of cartographic and so of geopolitical reason" (239). By setting a fiction in English in such a zone, Nadeem Aslam addresses this loophole between the Western imagination and an Eastern reality, and leads his readers to question their understanding of borders, both physical and imagined, in the post-9/11 world.

9 In *The Blind Man's Garden*, mapping the Af-Pak borderland is a continuous process, perceived through the characters' displacement along, across and beyond the border, but also through a number of metonymic networks. The unstable borderland constantly mirrors the troubled post-9/11 global geography, while evocations of utmost violence in the war zone also provide an ethical approach to border-crossing.

10 For Thomas Nail, the instability of the border is part of its very definition: "The border is not simply a static membrane or space through which flows of people move" (Nail 6). In his *Theory of the Border*, the philosopher explains that the border moves itself—through geological processes or catastrophes—but it is also moved by others, for example when economic reforms or territorial conflicts occur. While Nail's theory relies essentially on physical borders, in *The Blind Man's Garden* motion is inherent to both physical borders and images of the border, thus de-stabilizing any attempt at mapping the complex post-9/11 world geography.

11 First, the motif of invasion is prevalent in the novel, whether it is ideological or territorial; it is often an obstacle to the attempts at mapping carried out by the characters. In the novel, the border can also be construed alongside the concept of the prism—an image used by Aslam himself—, allowing the story to reflect a poetic light on parts of the world rendered dim by political discourse and mainstream media. While the physical border is threatened by war and violence, the symbolic border points to Aslam's poetics of confluence, inviting the reader to acknowledge the border as a place of spatial and historical continuity rather than an impermeable limitation.

# Borders and invasion: impossible mappings

12 The borderland is constantly subject to invasion in *The Blind Man's Garden*. The characters are indeed confronted with the US-led "War on Terror", an invasion of the area triggered by the fight against al-Qaeda after the 9/11 attacks. Yet other, metaphorical forms of invasion pervade the narrative, showing how border-crossing and appropriation are not only a geographical stake.

13 But what form can invasion take when the border itself is ill-defined? In the wake of 9/11, sociologist Zygmunt Bauman pointed to "a symbolic end to the era of space", observing an annihilation of borders and the fact that "no one can any longer cut themselves off from the rest of the world" (81–82). In *The Blind Man's Garden*, both the experience of territory and the symbols of territory emphasize this problematic relation to delineation. The guerrilla-like fighting of the "War on Terror" and the globalization of conflict transpire in the characters' perception of the wartime borderland, and reflect how discourse itself might be the site of invasion.

# A typology of borders

14 Throughout the plot and the characters' journeys, two main borders appear: the Af-Pak border—a physical border—and the mental or ideological border between the East and the West.

15 In the first part of the novel, as Jeo and Mikal enter the war zone they have been sent to by the Taliban, believing they will help the wounded on the front line, the two brothers carry with them a book of maps. In one striking passage imbued with magical realism, Jeo sees the book of maps invaded itself by American bombs:

> From the book he carefully tears out several maps, and in this light Afghanistan's mountains and hills and restlessly branching corridors of rock appear as though the pages are crumpled up, and there is a momentary wish in him to smooth them down. Laser-guided bombs are falling onto the pages in his hands, missiles summoned from the

> Arabian Sea, from American warships that are as long as the Empire State Building is tall. (14)

16 Jeo's book seems to come alive, giving way to a three-dimensional reading of the war zone. With its pages "crumpled up", the object is almost likened to a pop-up children's book, an unavoidable threshold to the troubled area—and, for the reader, an eerily realistic threshold to the story. Thus, the border between the maps and the territorial reality of war is blurred, and the uncontrollable power of the landscape over men's wars is mirrored by the polysyndeton structure ("mountains **and** hills **and** restlessly branching corridors of rock"), while the United States' invasion of the area is made equally threatening by the comparison of warships with the Empire State Building. In this chaotic rendering of territorial stakes, the bombs and missiles pervade the page as well as the imagination: the comparison with the building calls to mind the cause of American invasion, that is the attacks on the World Trade Center. Through the book of maps, the two borders—the Af-Pak border and the East-West divide—appear simultaneously, interrogating the post-9/11 mindscape and placing Jeo and Mikal at the crossroads of these divides.

17 The impossible mapping of the borderland is actually a power struggle in the novel. Later, as the brothers are held captive, their book of maps is taken from them and causes them to be suspected of spying for the Americans. The mastery of territory becomes so fundamental that the Taliban ask Mikal to interpret the stars for them; indeed, the latter uses navigational astronomy throughout the narrative. The men ask if Mikal knows "the language of the stars" (62), showing the failure of other forms of languages when it comes to mapping the borderland.

18 Without any mapping, gaining control over the borderland seems doomed to fail. Yet the novel progressively displays how the battles, unsuccessful though they are, can have the upper hand on the landscape of the borderland, to the point of shaping it anew. When Rohan goes looking for his sons in the borderland, he crosses a deserted, almost moon-like landscape:

> Through hillsides, across bridges, through a dust storm a mile long, and through streams in which float—by the dozen—the shaved-off

> beards of fleeing al-Qaeda militants, the journey to the destination in Afghanistan takes seventeen hours. In deep twilight they cross a broad flat valley with a river and river flats in it, every bit of it scorched black where a Daisy Cutter bomb had been dropped, reducing everything to ash, pumice, lava, the sides of hills torn up into segments […]. It looks like the site of a cosmic incursion such as a meteorite, not the work of men. (142)

19 In his border-crossing journey, Rohan enters a chaos that precludes any neat delineation of borders. The tension of the passage grows more and more intense, from the metonymical threat of the shaved-off beards to the anatomical description of the bombed landscape. Interestingly, this post-apocalyptic landscape is seen at a highly liminal moment of day (the "deep twilight"), a moment of change and uncertainty. It goes as far as blurring the boundaries between the human and the non-human, as the effects of men's wars are compared to those of a meteorite. Following his philosophical intention, the writer leads his reader to observe such chasms in several dimensions, and thus to explore the wounds inflicted by war—not only on minds and bodies, but also on landscapes.

## Symbolical invasions

20 While the physical borders seem impossible to map, and therefore to appropriate, the narrative regularly displays other forms of invasion. Nadeem Aslam's writing is run through with symbolism. In the first part of the novel, invasion metaphors remain linked to impacts of the war on the landscape, for instance when the American soldiers' footprints are personified (162); yet the complexity of invasion reaches a climax towards the end of the narrative, when Mikal discovers that the American soldier he holds captive in spite of himself has a striking tattoo on his back:

> There is a large tattoo on the skin: […]
> The word covers the entire space between the shoulder blades, and they stand looking at it, the American continuing to struggle.
> It says 'Infidel'.
> But it is not in English, which would have meant that he had had it done for himself or for others like him in his own country. It is

> in the Urdu and Pashto script so it is meant for people *here*. (400–401)[2]

21 The man's subversive tattoo—a visual token which Aslam borrowed from a picture seen in a magazine (Jaggi)—is an instance of the complex border-crossing at work in the narrative: the invader's body is itself invaded skin-deep by the invaded's language, in an act of provocation filled with symbolic power. The body stands as an interface, as the paradigmatic border between men, used to differentiate the inside and the outside, sameness and otherness. This body invaded by the tattoo epitomizes the many embedded meanings of the border in the post-9/11 Af-Pak borderland.

22 Invasion is also symbolised particularly powerfully when Naheed's mother, Tara, is asked by a young Talib to sew an American flag so that it can be burned publicly:

> Perhaps the blue in the flag means that the Americans own all the blue in the world—water, sky, blood seen through veins, the Blue Mosque in Tabriz, dusk, the feather with which she marks her place in her Koran, her seamstress's chalk, the spot on the lower back of newborn babies, postmarks, the glass eyes of foreign dolls. Muhammad swore by the redness of the evening sky, and Adam means both 'alive' and 'red'. Do the Americans own these and all other reds? Roses, meats, certain old leaves, certain new leaves, love, the feathers under the bulbul's tail, dresses and veils of brides, dates marking festivals on calendars, garnets and rubies, happiness, blushes, daring, war, the Red Fort in Delhi, […] the binding of her Koran—these and all the other shades of red, crimson, vermilion, scarlet, maroon, raspberry, obsidian, russet, plum, magenta, geranium, the tearful eyes of the woman from three doors down, who had told Tara she did not want her to sew her daughter's dowry clothes after discovering that Tara was possessed with the djinn, fearing Tara would stitch her bad luck into the garments, the red flag of the revolution dreamt by Mikal and Basie's parents, the Alhambra in Spain, the paths in Rohan's garden, carpets woven in Shiraz, shiny cars that the rich import into Pakistan only to find that there are no good roads to drive them on. The setting sun. The rising sun.
> She works without pause, the large flag materialising slowly in the interior as the hours go by, half the size of the room. (126–127)

23 The internal focalisation, rendered through the uninterrupted enumeration, reflects the character's own re-mapping of borders: through her enumeration of all the shades of colours included in her frame of reference, she delineates the borders of her own world, a world alienated from her by the United States' invasion of her region. The sewing metaphor is but another extension of border-making and border-crossing. Blending examples which are both internal and external to the narrative, and references which are universal (the setting and rising sun) but also geographically specific (the Red Fort, the Alhambra), the passage culminates in a micro-invasion at the level of Tara's flat, where the flag has taken up the space. As is often the case, Nadeem Aslam's poetic prose relies on hypotyposis, creating a coherent yet complex spatial imaginary within the space of a single sentence. The vivid descriptions he includes in the plot actually form part of an aesthetics which relies on perspective, and which can be explored through the concept of the prism.

## The border and prismatic perception

24 Nadeem Aslam has often described how his writing is perceived as hopeful in Pakistan while being considered beautiful but grim in the West. In an essay he wrote for the online 2010 *Granta* issue on Pakistan, he explained:

> Pakistanis are as complex as any other people on the planet. I think of a beam of light emerging on the other side split into seven colours. What you see depends on which side of the prism you are standing on: on one side the light is uniform, of a single colour. On the other, it's violet, indigo, blue, green, yellow, orange and red. I am on the coloured side. (Aslam)

25 Standing on the "coloured side" implies that Nadeem Aslam's writing of Pakistan—and Afghanistan—provides a different perspective on areas otherwise painted in black and white by newspaper reports and globally broadcast images of warfare. Through the prism of the narrative, the writer's enterprise consists in re-poeticizing places undermined by terror, but also by political and media discourse in the context of the "War on Terror"; the novelist aims at re-habilitating

their mythologies and their landscapes and endowing them with a variety of colours in his writing.

26 The prism metaphor can be extended to the treatment of the border and its tropes in *The Blind Man's Garden*. Indeed, setting the narrative in the borderland enhances the subjective dimension of any attempt at mapping and representing: perception differs whether one stands on one side of the border or on the other. The Af-Pak borderland and the ideological East/West border are put to the test of Nadeem Aslam's prismatic writing, and are revealed to be highly subjective constructs. In the process of this revelation, the reader is invited to question their own standpoint in the face of post-9/11 divisions.

## Re-mapping the world from the borderland

27 Throughout the novel, the Af-Pak characters constantly re-assess their understanding of space. As the internal focalizer changes regularly, so does the mapping of borders. The language conveyed by the characters operates an unstable mapping, which is always already challenged by the next assertion.

28 Early in the novel, the character of Jeo observes his town of Heer before leaving as a volunteer on the front lines of the borderland: "He scans the high view before him to see which other areas of Heer are without electricity tonight. His city within his fraught and poor nation, here in the Third World" (27). Jeo's definition of Pakistan as "fraught" and "poor" is further underlined by its lack of light—here again, it appears difficult to interpret space. Yet the final phrase is definitive: Pakistan is declared to be a Third World country, even though the phrase itself is an unstable label, usually bestowed by richer countries. Jeo's observation is another manifestation of border-crossing, whereby he seems to observe Pakistan from an outsider's perspective.

29 The narrative voice shifts to a much more patriotic representation of Pakistan whenever it voices the claims of Ardent Spirit, the fundamentalist group which finally attacks the Christian School in the town of Heer. On one occasion, their vengeful mapping of the

world is embedded in the perspective of Father Mede, the white British principal of the school, who hears them speaking from their van:

> 'We'll reduce America to the size of India, India to the size of Israel, Israel to nothing', the loudspeaker said as it lingered near the public monument at the end of the road, a giant fibreglass replica of the mountain under which Pakistan's nuclear bomb was tested. [...] Its insides are hollow and it is lit up from within at night: in the pale evenings from the balcony of his room above the school, Father Mede watches it come on—one moment it is dead and grey but then suddenly, like a fever rising from its very core, a glow spreads on the slopes and it swells and brightens until its radiance rivals the moon, and the beggar children who shelter in there can be seen moving in silhouette on the brilliant sides. (226)

30 The Ardent Spirit group re-maps the world through words shouted in a loudspeaker, but the pseudo-patriotic speech is rendered ironically fake and inefficient as the members stand next to a fake mountain. The replica's artificial lighting points to the sham that is the detention of nuclear weapons by Pakistan, but it also sheds light on the contradictions of a nation: as the white man looks at the replica, the glow merely shows poor children taking shelter inside the mountain, hinting back to Jeo's definition of Pakistan as "his fraught and poor nation". Well-armed though it may be, Pakistan is pervaded by paradoxical limitations, and the apparently majestic mountain is similar to a large nesting doll from which less glorious versions of the country are extracted. Here again, the evocation of the children acts as a prismatic device, revealing a contrasted perception of the place through the prism of the narrative voice.

## Mapping otherness

31 The attempts at delineating borders also appear in the encounters between self and other. The narrative creates a divide between the American and Af-Pak characters, a divide made manifest by the treatment of prisoners by American services, to which Mikal has been sold by a warlord. While they attempt to question Mikal, the problematic status of the Af-Pak borderland is once again hinted at:

> ‘We know you can speak. You spoke in your sleep. Sometimes in the language of an Afghan, sometimes in the language of a Pakistani. Are you a Pakistani, an Afghan, or an Afghan born and raised in Pakistan?’ (201)

The Americans’ failed mapping of their prisoner’s identity illustrates the intricacy of the borderland. The duality of the borderland is further reflected in the character’s mind through his hybrid use of language, which is both an unconscious habit in his sleep and a deliberate act: Mikal chooses to answer the question in Pashto, in order not to be identified by the American Military Policemen. The use of the substantive forms by the American instead of the adjectives (“the language of an Afghan”, “the language of a Pakistani”) bears witness to the border standing between the men and their prisoners, as a distance is maintained even in words. [3]

32 The perception of Afghan and Pakistani men as potential “terrorists” is not only expressed in words, but also in pictures, by American children whose drawings Mikal can see on the walls of the prison:

> ‘Why are there pictures in the corridor?’ Mikal says. Their bright colours had pained his eyes. […]
> ‘They are from children in America.’
> Drawings of butterflies, flowers, guns shooting at men with beards and helicopters dropping bombs on small figures in turbans.
> ‘They are letters to the soldiers from schoolchildren. The words say, *Go Get the Bad Men* and *I Hope You Kill Them All* and *Come Home Safely*. I saw one that said, *We are praying for you, and said the Rosary for you today in class.*’ (209–210)

The children’s naïve drawings and use of words delineate the contours of the Eastern world from a limited prism. They form a topsy-turvy imagination by attributing religious discourse to the American children, while their country fights against a fundamentalist group, thus suggesting that the “War on Terror” might have roots in religious discourse as much as said “terror” does. Interestingly, the presence of bright colours is not proof of a comprehensive view, of a prism reflecting a variety of lights; rather, it turns the drawings into sheer caricature. Furthermore, the use of capital letters as if referring to a set phrase points to a disturbing

internalisation of clichés by the schoolchildren. Nadeem Aslam thus resorts to caricature to reveal the problematic patterns of discourse emanating from post-9/11 East/West relations. In his 2013 interview on *The Blind Man's Garden*, he explained that he wanted to explore how the previous ten years had led to "[…] an incomplete understanding of the West, and an incomplete understanding of the East" (Faber & Faber 00:00:23). The blinding drawings invite the reader of English to question their own ethical positioning and to re-evaluate the manifold manifestations of a border between self and other.

## Sensory re-mapping

33 The five senses are another element leading to mapping in the novel. Early on in the novel, as Jeo and Mikal enter the war zone in the Af-Pak borderland, their senses are assaulted by the experience of warfare. As the men who hold them hostage take them deeper into the war zone, they are surrounded by a desolate landscape and believe that they are lost in the borderland. But suddenly their hearing is affected as well:

> And as they stand there surrounded by the strange earth and the strange sky, Jeo hears what he has never heard before, the awful crump of tank shells, explosions and gunfire in the far distance. 'Do you hear it?' 'Yes, Mikal replies. 'It's a battle, isn't it?' 'Yes.' 'It's the world', one of the other men says. 'The world sounds like this all the time, we just don't hear it. Then sometimes in some places we do.' (56–57)

The experience of perception through a prism is once again prevalent in this passage. The change of perspective is twofold: first, upon crossing the border, Mikal and Jeo enter the unknown, a zone with a "strange earth" and "strange sky". Their perception of landscape changes as both images and sounds now seem unfamiliar to them. Yet another border-crossing occurs when one of the men in the truck re-directs their perspective from "a battle" to "the world". The sensory call upon their hearing seems to trigger a pivotal re-definition of space, a re-mapping of the world in its entirety. The Af-Pak borderland is turned into an epitome of world conflict at

large, and the characters' experience comes to represent the world's deafness to the sounds of the war zone. Through this passage, the novel itself clearly stands as a prism through which the reader can access a highly realistic, more comprehensive understanding of the war zone.

34 Another important sensory re-mapping is that of the novel's eponymous "blind man". After he happens to be on the site of a terrorist attack, Mikal's stepfather Rohan starts losing his eyesight, the eye operation he needs being too expensive. Rohan's experience of progressive blindness symbolizes the difficulty of mapping the violence-ridden world. His sensory re-mapping of the world through other senses is facilitated by Naheed, who describes colours to him or paints flower petals so he can see their colours. In the midst of divisive borders, the border which separates Rohan from the world around him acts as an incentive to assess and map the world differently. The character's anxiety mirrors the anxiety of war and global upheavals, notably when we are told: "His hands rest on the table as if to steady the world, or to make it stay there" (176–177). While the descriptions of Rohan's sensory journey undoubtedly form part of Nadeem Aslam's enterprise of re-poeticizing Pakistan, by depicting its colours and smells to the reader, the final reference to Rohan hints at another role that space plays in the novel:

> Within the garden she has tied a cord from place to place. They refer to it as the 'rope walk' and it connects all the different plants and locations Rohan likes to visit. Rohan makes his way through the garden by holding onto it, feeling his way along the red line zigzagging through the trees. (466)

Rohan's walk is described as a highly tentative stroll, and the balance found by the characters at the end of the novel seems to be just as precarious as tightrope walking. But what it enhances most is the creation of a connection through the cord put in place. After the characters have been constantly wounded both physically and mentally throughout the narrative, the metaphorical mending process described here shows that the borderland, a place made of divisions and severed ties, can also be a site of continuity, showing the confluence of trajectories.

# Towards a poetics of confluence

35 In his 2013 interview with Faber & Faber on *The Blind Man's Garden*, Nadeem Aslam explained that in the novel "[…] people are always reaching out" towards others (Faber & Faber 00:03:58). More recently, Nadeem Aslam wrote *The Golden Legend* (2017), a novel revolving around a rare philosophical book torn apart in the context of Pakistan's blasphemy laws, entitled *That They Might Know Each Other*. The book is stitched back in golden thread by the characters. The writer acknowledged that for this novel, he was partly indebted to a study called *Confluences: Forgotten Histories from East and West*, authored by Ranjit Hoskote and Ilija Trojanow. The latter book sheds light on the many ways in which countries and cultures that are seemingly remote from one another can actually be traced back to common histories, through traditions, encounters or stories. The authors explain that the usual perspective on history is mistaken in its bounded, essentialist discourse:

> Our history, regulated by concepts of singularity and pure origin, is as much a cartographer's invention as the […] river. By taking a certain tableau of it to represent a culture's form and essence, it mistakes a snapshot of the river for its whole course. (4)

36 Although such considerations are explicitly evoked in *The Golden Legend*, this understanding of confluence can already be traced back to *The Blind Man's Garden*, published four years earlier. This poetics of confluence, perceptible in the novel's themes, structure and images, is particularly relevant to the treatment of the border. Indeed, the border stands as the uttermost site of confluence, giving way to encounters that seem to forge history as much as individual stories.

# Historical confluence

37 The novel contains many references to history, notably to the parallels that can be established between the moment when the narration is set and other events from the past. The narrative starts with this enigmatic aphorism: "History is the third parent" (5). To a certain extent, the characters indeed seem to be influenced and

educated by history. Nadeem Aslam's prose frequently uses historical reference as a means to emphasize sameness and continuity. On one occasion, the blind man, Rohan, who is a learned elderly professor, remarks upon the links between contemporary geopolitics and historical facts:

> 'Spain was once a Muslim land', Rohan says, cupping the flowers in his hands. 'In October 1501, the Catholic monarchs ordered the destruction of all Islamic books and manuscripts. Thousands of Korans and other texts were burned in a public bonfire.'
> She lets him talk as she looks around for Mikal. Nothing but a kingfisher stitching together the two banks of the river with the bright threads of its flight. (228)

38 Here again, the witnesses of the war at the Af-Pak border are made to enlarge their perspective to global, imagined borders. In the post-9/11 world of antagonisms, Rohan reminds Naheed that once, part of the West also believed in Islam, and by so doing he deconstructs the strict mental boundaries erected by the ongoing "War on Terror". Naheed notices a kingfisher appearing after the old man's speech. The coloured bird is often known as a symbol of peace: its Greek name *halcyon* is drawn from the myth of Alcyone and Ceyx, finding peace together as birds after being condemned for their love. It is also said that its bright colours appeared upon leaving Noah's ark after the Flood (Larousse). Here, its act of "stitching" the riverbanks mirrors Rohan's comment on the confluence of religions in history, and operates a cathartic form of border-crossing at the end of a story full of suffering: the reader observes this free crossing in spite of the character's entrapment in his blindness and in the pangs of war. The "bright threads" might also be read as another means of giving colours to the Af-Pak borderland in the midst of the conflict.

39 Later in the novel, Mikal meets a man who welcomes him for the night, and asks him his way back to Peshawar. The two characters are in an ancient cave in the mountain, filled with hieroglyphs several centuries old. The man draws the map in a palimpsest-like gesture which makes the narrative cross a historical border: "[…] he draws Mikal the route to Peshawar, his marks moving over and through the Buddhist writings, between them and incorporating them" (249). The walls of the cave are thus used as a re-mapping device, allowing the

character to trace his future journey in light of historical continuity. Here again, Nadeem Aslam's writing resorts to symbols of historical legacy to convey the prevalence of continuity over division.

## Ethical confluence

40 The notion of confluence, however, is not a naïve concept that would limit itself to an idealistic reconciliation of religions and cultures. Rather, its aim is to encompass the necessity and inevitability of cultural encounters in history. Ranjit Hoskote and Ilija Trojanow explain it thus:

> Confluence is not without conflict; rather, cultural transformation has been effected just as much by peaceful encounter as by the tumults of war, invasion, slavery, inquisition and exiles. Periods of deep confluence were not utopias of serenity and understanding among diverse groups brought together into a single polity. (11–12)

41 *The Blind Man's Garden* thus ends with a confluence in the trajectories of antagonistic characters. In the third part of the novel, the reader is introduced to an American soldier, who has come to the Af-Pak borderland to avenge his dead brother supposedly killed by a "terrorist". The reader progressively understands that the man he is looking for is Mikal, and that his dead brother is one of the Military Policemen Mikal killed in order to escape, earlier in the novel. At the end of the narrative, Mikal and this vengeful soldier cross paths, and Mikal puts him in chains upon finding him asleep, lest he should kill him. Both characters ignore one another's identity, and the dramatic irony that unfolds gives way to a form of ethical confluence. Indeed, Mikal regularly wonders why he goes through the struggle of hiding this man instead of killing him, and of crossing the border back to Pakistan with him. Yet Mikal's curiosity about this stranger's life has the upper hand, especially as they cannot speak to one another:

> The white man's eyes are a doorway to another world, to a mind shaped by different rules, a different way of life. What kind of a man is he? Is he well spoken, a union of strength and delicacy? Is he in love with someone or is he oblivious? Does he, like Mikal, have a brother? (419)

This “doorway” is perhaps another border to be crossed, although the two men’s destinies will be separated without them having exchanged a word. The use of multiple questions here seems to be addressed to the reader as much as it is a self-exploration process for the character. Because they remain fundamentally universal, Mikal’s concerns broach the sameness of human relations beyond borders.

42 Yet it is worth remembering that the novel is not naively didactic, and one of the final passages, when Mikal is in conversation with a Pashtun man about his American hostage, proves the difficulty of putting confluence to the test of solid mental boundaries:

> ‘We can’t know what the Westerners want’, the old man says. ‘To know what they want you have to eat what they eat, wear what they wear, breathe the air they breathe. You have to be born where they are born.’
> ‘I am not sure. You mentioned books. We can learn things from books.’
> ‘No one from here can know what the Westerners know’, the man says. ‘The Westerners are unknowable to us. The divide is too great, too final. It’s like asking what the dead or the unborn know.’ (441)

The man’s cryptic reference compares foreignness to death, creating a curious intermingling of time and space. While his peremptory assertion that “the divide is too great” is left to the reader as the last reflection, one cannot but read Mikal’s reference to books as a meta-fictional device. The reader is addressed as if to invite them to contemplate their own mental boundaries. The man’s tautological reasoning is confronted by the possibility of learning, and eventually, of crossing borders through the very act of reading, with the page standing as a possible site of confluence.

# Conclusion

43 In Nadeem Aslam’s 2009 novel *The Wasted Vigil*, one of the characters reflects: “How keen everyone is to make this world their home forgetting its impermanence. It’s like trying to see and name constellations in a fireworks display” (354). This assertion could apply to the impossible mapping at work in *The Blind Man’s Garden*. While the border is acknowledged from a geological standpoint, its political

relevance is constantly questioned and confronted with the continuity of human experience. The "fireworks", here, are the fires of war in the post-9/11 world; and while the characters try to survive in the midst of a conflict bigger than themselves, the delineation of a stable geographical and political separation seems doomed to fail.

44 Through this impossible mapping process, the novel directs our gaze towards questions of sameness and difference, permanence and transience, and the universality of suffering on both sides of a conflict-stricken border. Despite the violence that may ensue, the border remains fundamentally a site of encounter, and interrogates the narratives we build for ourselves and for others.

45 Nadeem Aslam has regularly repeated that, to him, "a novelist doesn't tell you what to think, a novelist tells you what to think about" (Gough). By placing his narrative in the Af-Pak border during the War on Terror, the writer abides by this agenda: he guides the readers of English towards a place they need to explore—towards borders they need to cross.

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## NOTES

1 The phrase is used here to refer to the campaign launched by the US government against Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and Iraq in the wake of 9/11. It was initially used by President George W. Bush on 16 September, and is known for being contentious. It remains problematic as there was no single identifiable enemy, no government *per se* to be "at war" with, and because the phrase has often been said to be used as a justification of acts of extreme violence and torture by US forces in the area. Nadeem Aslam's novel begins in October 2001, exactly at the time when this "war" was declared, and it displays the complex antagonisms which then appeared in discourse, whether it was discourse produced by Afghan and Pakistani civilians, by the Taliban, or by US soldiers. (see *infra*). (<http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010916-2.html>).

2 I have decided not to type the word in the quotation so as not to betray the exact script displayed on the page. The word as it appears on the page is most likely the Pashto script **کافر**, which seems slightly closer to the Arabic **كافر** (*kafir*) than to the Urdu script for the word:**کُفر** (sources: *thePashto.com*, <http://thepashto.com/word.php?english=&pashto=%DA%A9%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%B1&roman>, *Oxford Urdu Living Dictionary*, <https://ur.oxforddictionaries.com/translate/urdu-english/%DA%A9%D9%81%D8%B1>). Languages of the South Asian subcontinent such as Pashto and Urdu have known a number of encounters with Arabic as well as Persian. In this specific instance in the novel, the similarity with Arabic partakes both of a lexical and a scriptural proximity of Urdu and Pashto with Arabic. The main scripts used in Urdu and Pashto-speaking regions, *Naskh* and *Nastliq*, bear close resemblance to one another, and in borderland regions like Peshawar, the choice of one or the other can indicate preference for either Urdu or Pashto. For more on the subject, see *The Indo-Aryan Languages* (Cardona and Jain, 2003, *infra*, p. 52) and *Language in South Asia* (Kachru et al., 2008, *infra*, p. 128).

3 For a disambiguation on the languages of the Af-Pak borderland, see note 2.

# ABSTRACTS

**English**

Nadeem Aslam's fourth novel *The Blind Man's Garden* was described by Pankaj Mishra as an "anatomy of chaos" (Mishra, 2013). In this anatomy, the border appears as the throbbing heart of the narrative: more than a backdrop to the story, it runs through its characters and appears in even the smallest details of the writer's meticulous, poetic prose.
Set in the troubled FATA (Federally Administered Tribal Areas), at the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, *The Blind Man's Garden* is the story of a family caught in the mental and physical divisions of the post-9/11 world. In the narrative, mapping the Af-Pak borderland occurs through the characters' displacement along, across and beyond the border, but also through a number of metonymic networks. One such construction is the motif of invasion, whether it is ideological or physical, making real and imagined borders more salient and forcing a semantic reinvention upon the characters. In the novel, the border can also be construed as a prism—an image used by Aslam himself—allowing the story to reflect a poetic light on areas rendered dim by global discourse. This appears notably through the blind man's sensory border-crossing. While the physical border is threatened by war and violence, the symbolical border reveals Aslam's poetics of confluence, inviting the reader to acknowledge borders as a place of spatial and historical continuity rather than a boundary.

**Français**

*The Blind Man's Garden* est le quatrième roman de Nadeem Aslam. Décrit par Pankaj Mishra comme une « anatomie du chaos » (« *an anatomy of chaos* », Mishra, 2013), il donne à voir la frontière non pas seulement comme arrière-plan contextuel du récit mais comme le cœur même de la diégèse, donnant vie à ses personnages et aux détails même les plus infimes de la prose minutieuse qui caractérise les romans de l'écrivain.
Le roman est situé dans les FATA (Federally Administered Tribal Areas), à la frontière pakistano-afghane. *The Blind Man's Garden* suit le parcours d'une famille victime de la fragmentation mentale et géographique de l'immédiat après-11 Septembre. Dans ce long récit, le processus de cartographie de la frontière pakistano-afghane passe par le déplacement des personnages le long, à travers et au-delà des frontières, mais également par un déplacement de sens dans un important réseau de métonymies. L'une d'entre elles est le motif de l'invasion — idéologique ou physique — qui rend la frontière d'autant plus manifeste, et conduit les personnages à repenser leur rapport au sens et à l'autre. La frontière fonctionne aussi comme un prisme, symbole cher à Nadeem Aslam, et en cela elle permet de projeter une réflexion poétique lumineuse sur des espaces rendus illisibles par les sombres images de guerre. C'est ce qui se passe au travers de la redécouverte sensorielle de l'aveugle, le « *blind man* » éponyme. Là où la

frontière géographique est menacée par la guerre, la frontière symbolique, quant à elle, révèle finalement une poétique de la confluence : Nadeem Aslam invite ainsi son lecteur à percevoir la frontière comme un lieu de continuité spatiale et historique plutôt que comme une limite infranchissable.

## INDEX

**Mots-clés**
Aslam (Nadeem), frontière, 11 Septembre, terrorisme, déplacement, perception, confluence

**Keywords**
Aslam (Nadeem), border, borderland, 9/11, terror, displacement, perception, confluence

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# *Cartographies en mouvement*: Re-Imagining the Irish Landscape through the Tim Robinson Archive

*Cartographies en mouvement : réimaginer le paysage irlandais à travers les archives de Tim Robinson*

**Nessa Cronin**

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## OUTLINE

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Tim Robinson (1935–)
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Conceptualising the archive
*Iarsma: Fragments from an Archive*
Creative cartographies: some reflections

## TEXT

# Introduction

1 In September 2014 the Tim Robinson Archive was formally launched with a preview exhibition, international symposium, and public interview with Tim Robinson, at the National University of Ireland, Galway. Robinson is acknowledged as being the most significant writer and cartographer of the Irish landscape over the last forty years, and his work has been published to much critical acclaim and translated to a wider global audience in recent years. As a mathematician trained in Cambridge, Robinson is a self-taught visual artist that lived and worked throughout Europe (primarily in London) in the 1960s and early 1970s where his visual and environmental artworks were exhibited in galleries and non-traditional settings. His international reputation now lies with his extraordinarily work

detailing the landscape of the west of Ireland, primarily through maps and books he has written focusing on the complex histories and geographies associated with the places and people of this part of western Europe. This paper explores the archive of Tim Robinson through an artist-in-the-archive research project, *Iarsma*: *Fragments from an Archive*, based on the maps and writings of Tim Robinson.

**Figure 1. – Artwork from *Rianiú Talún: Interpreting Landscape Exhibition*.**

Designed by Proviz Design, Ireland. 2014. Reproduced with kind permission.

2 In many ways then, the idea of *cartographies en mouvement* is a perfect description for Robinson's life and work. Indeed, it could be argued that it is more apt to retain the French rendering of the expression rather than offering a discussion embedded within the translation of "cartographies in/of movement" (or, "mobile cartographies"), as the English approximation does not capture the capaciousness of the French phraseology. The French *cartographies* offers a more immediate engagement with the foundational idea of map-making and cartography historically. In the western European tradition, maps were often drawn on *cartes* which could denote anything from animal hide, to manuscript materials, to paper, deriving etymologically from the Latin *charta* and the ancient Greek

*khártes*, meaning “papyrus, paper” (Harley and Woodward xvi). This is a point worth remembering as it reminds us of the particular cultures and material histories associated with mapmaking in Europe. The second element to the word, *graphies*, is associated with the *graphos* of writing, and so the map is a form of writing or textual inscription on the map or chart. The *graphies* also infers an active engagement with the *cartes* and so the interplay between the two offers us a way to think of cartography as a way of making, doing, writing about space and place, through the process of the making of the map. In addition, a discussion of maps as being *en mouvement* offers more ways of thinking about cartography as a processual, open-ended and ongoing project, and allows us to think of movement and dynamism as being both internal to the very act of drawing and creating a map. It also invites us to remember that maps as mobile objects travel across space and through time, and so we can consider how maps themselves are also “on the move” as well as their makers and users.

3 Inspired, then, by such considerations of *cartographies en mouvement*, these ideas speak very much to the life and work of Tim Robinson. We can think of how the art and practice of mapmaking is an act of external movement (Robinson moves from London to the Aran Islands off the west coast of Ireland in 1972), and of mapmaking as a form of internal dialogue between the acts of creating the texts and images that eventually are drafted, edited and finally printed as the finished product of the map. This process, of both an external and internal dialogue with regard to the very act of mapmaking, is central to an understanding of Robinson’s work on Ireland. In particular, Robinson foregrounds that the very act of mapmaking is always already an infinite process of gathering material and capturing the texture of a place, it is as much about the relationship between hand and foot, as it is about the relationship between pen and paper, and indeed for Robinson the two are inextricably intertwined.

4 Finally, the role of language cultures (of speaking, writing, and communicating) has a very particular resonance when examined through the lens of any project associated with the west of Ireland. This is a region that has been long associated with vernacular Irish culture and, in particular, with the Irish language. Today, the Gaeltacht (Irish-speaking) areas of Conamara (Connemara) and

Oileáin Árann (the Aran Islands) in the west of Ireland are places that retain Irish as the first language, but are also becoming more bilingual in nature with the increasing use of English by their inhabitants and seasonal visitors.[1] Indeed, the position of the Irish language as the primary language culture in these areas is a matter of constant national debate as many see the increasing influence of English as a matter of linguistic concern with regard to the future viability and vibrancy of the Irish language in this region in particular and across Ireland more generally. As an Englishman living in and writing about this part of Ireland, Robinson is acutely aware of the sensitivity associated with his own positionality and has described his various projects as a sort of "act of colonial reparation", as noted in conversation with Brian Dillon. Robinson's forensic attention to detail and his inclusion of other voices, narratives, traces and memories (from Irish and English language sources) associated with the region has been seen as an ongoing dialogue in terms of a historically weighted relationship between Britain and Ireland. It also speaks to the more interpersonal and intimate relationship between himself and local individuals and communities as he became gradually accepted as a "newcomer" and deeply respected for the knowledge he added to living landscape that has been now captured in his writings and archive for other generations of residents, scholars and artists to explore and expand upon in the future.

# Tim Robinson (1935–)

5 Tim Robinson was born in Yorkshire in 1935 and studied mathematics at Cambridge University. He currently spends his time between Roundstone, County Galway and London with his life-long partner and wife Máiréad. After a career as a visual artist in Istanbul, Vienna and London, he settled in Oileáin Árann with Máiréad in November 1972, and would soon commence his detailed study of the landscape of the West of Ireland through the lens of cartography and writing from his home on the islands. His books include *Stones of Aran: Pilgrimage and Labyrinth*, the *Connemara* trilogy (*Connemara: A Little Gaelic Kingdom*, *Connemara: Listening to the Wind*, *Connemara: The Last Pool of Darkness*), and a suite of essays, *My Time in Space*, and *Stepping Foot on the Shores of Connemara*. More recently, a photo-book centred on the

photographic work of French photographer Nicolas Fève, *Connemara and Elsewhere*, was published in 2014. With an introduction by American nature writer John Elder and edited by Jane Conroy (an Irish scholar of French literary history), this book was inspired by Fève's own longstanding relationship with the west of Ireland and how his readings of Robinson's work has shaped and informed his own photographic practice. The book concludes with three short essays by Robinson in a sequence entitled "Elsewhere" (Robinson, in Conroy 127–142). Together with Liam Mac An Iomaire, Robinson translated into English what is regarded as the greatest twentieth-century Irish language novel, Máirtín Ó Cadhain's *Cré na Cille*. Their translation, *Graveyard Clay / Cré na Cille: A Narrative in Ten Interludes*, won the prestigious Lois Roth Award for "Translation of a Literary Work", as acknowledged by the international Modern Languages Association in 2016. [2]

6 In 1984 the Robinsons set up Folding Landscapes as a specialist publishing house and resource centre in the studio of their home on the quayside in Roundstone. Its main purpose was to publish Robinson's maps and some of his books concerned with the three areas of interest around Galway Bay that would serve as the fulcrum of his work: Oileáin Árann, the Burren and Conamara. In 1987 Folding Landscapes won the Ford Ireland Conservation Award and went on as Ireland's official entry to win the European award in Madrid, where the Mayor of Madrid's citation especially commended the project's "unique combination of culture, heritage and conservation". [3]

7 Robinson was elected to Aosdána (Irish National Association of Artists) in 1996, and to the Royal Irish Academy in 2011. In 2011 he was the Parnell Visiting Fellow at Magdalen College, Cambridge, and in 2012 was the Visiting Artist-in-Residence at the Centre Culturel Irlandais, Paris, which serves as Ireland's flagship cultural centre in Europe. His visual art works and constructions have been exhibited as part of joint and solo exhibitions at Camden Art Gallery, Serpentine Gallery, Irish Museum of Modern Art and the Hugh Lane Gallery amongst others. Other explorations of Robinson's oeuvre include the documentary film, *Tim Robinson: Connemara*, directed by Pat Collins (Harvest Films, 2011), and an interdisciplinary essay collection, *Unfolding Irish Landscapes: Tim Robinson, Culture and Environment*, edited by Christine Cusick and Derek Gladwin. Robinson's writings

and archive has been written about from a wide range of international scholars crossing the fields of Cultural Geography, Irish Studies, "New" British Nature Writing, Historical Cartography, Visual Arts, and Environmental Sciences, to name but a few fields where his work has had an increasing impact in recent years. A new generation of ecocritics and feminist scholars such as Christine Cusick and Maureen O'Connor are critically engaging with his writings in particular to explore new ways of thinking about the relationship between human and non-human worlds in relation to concerns over climate change and the politics of the Anthropocene. Since the inception of the artist-in-the-archive project (which will be discussed in more detail below) many artists have also come to encounter Robinson's work and archive supported by the Centre for Irish Studies through the Visiting Fellowship scheme at the Moore Institute, NUI Galway, a fellowship programme that allows for a very broad understanding of what "scholarship" is and can be across the arts and humanities. [4] One recent example of this is the work of artist-scholar Cathy Fitzgerald and how her ecocritical practice has been influenced by her experience of researching the Tim Robinson archive can be read on her 2017 blogpost, "Understanding a place 'without shortcuts': exploring the Tim Robinson Archive".

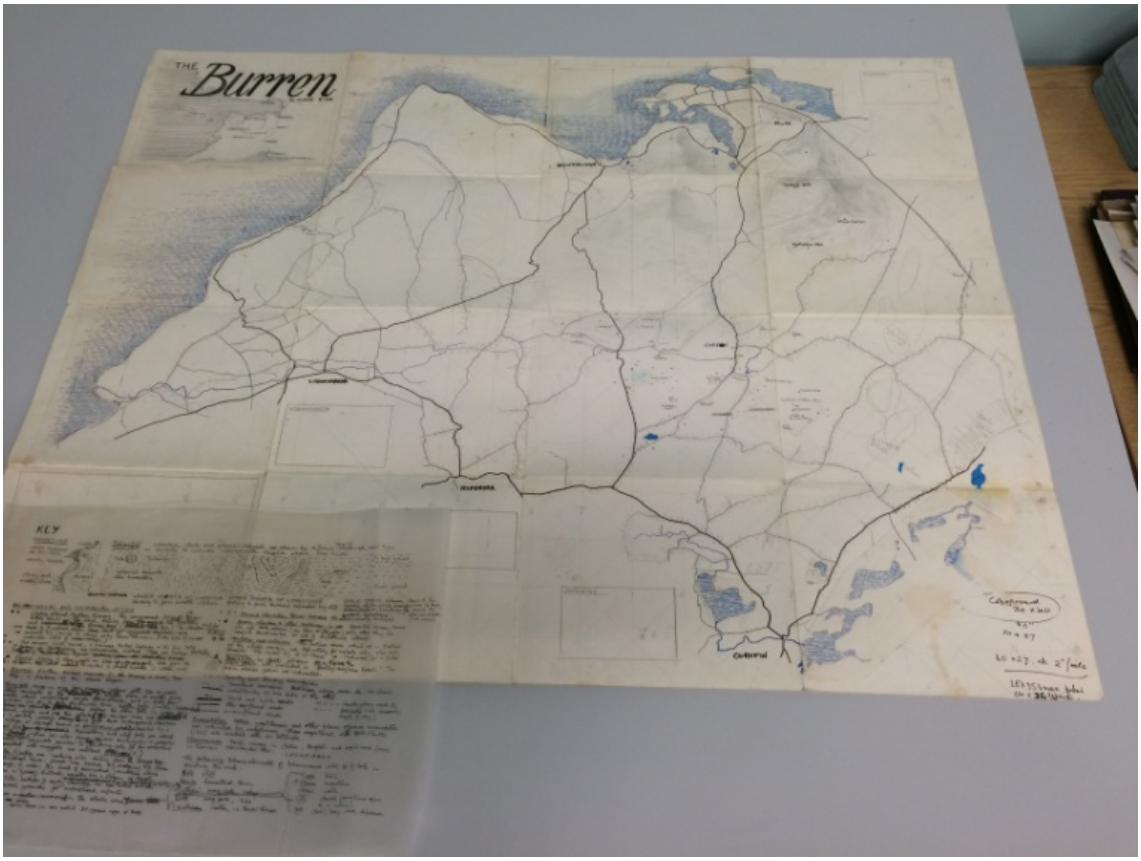
# Tim Robinson archive

8 In 2014 the Tim Robinson Archive was officially donated to NUI Galway as a generous gift to the people of the region by Tim and Máiréad Robinson. The Robinsons did not seek, nor wish, to receive any compensation for the archive, an extraordinary gift considering the vast scale of unique material contained therein and the growing international reputation associated with Robinson's work. The archive contains mostly maps, manuscripts, placename index cards, books from Robinson's personal library, letters, notes, and ephemera from his travels and life in Ireland, England, Turkey, Italy and France. The archive to date contains:

- 489 pages of maps;
- 9,650 pages of correspondence dating from 1960–2010;
- 24,365 pages of manuscripts, and first editions of his maps and books;
- 300 Irish and English language reference books;

material relating to his life and work in Vienna, Istanbul, London and Cambridge;
- 11,700 items of placename index cards contained in 13 drawers;
- field notebooks, index cards, rubbings;
- drawings, photographs and other fieldwork related material and observations relating to work in the Burren, Connemara and the Aran Islands since 1972;
- other items and miscellanea.

**Figure 2. – Items from Burren Map and Notebooks.**




Tim Robinson Archive, James Hardiman Library, NUI Galway. Reproduced with kind permission.

9 The process of depositing and cataloguing the archive commenced in July 2013 with a team of librarians and academics, with the majority of the items being deposited in Autumn 2014. A series of events in September 2014 was co-ordinated by Professor Jane Conroy to mark the preview of the Tim Robinson Archive at NUI Galway. This included an exhibition curated by Jane Conroy and Nessa Cronin entitled, *Rianiú Talún: Interpreting Landscape*, highlighting

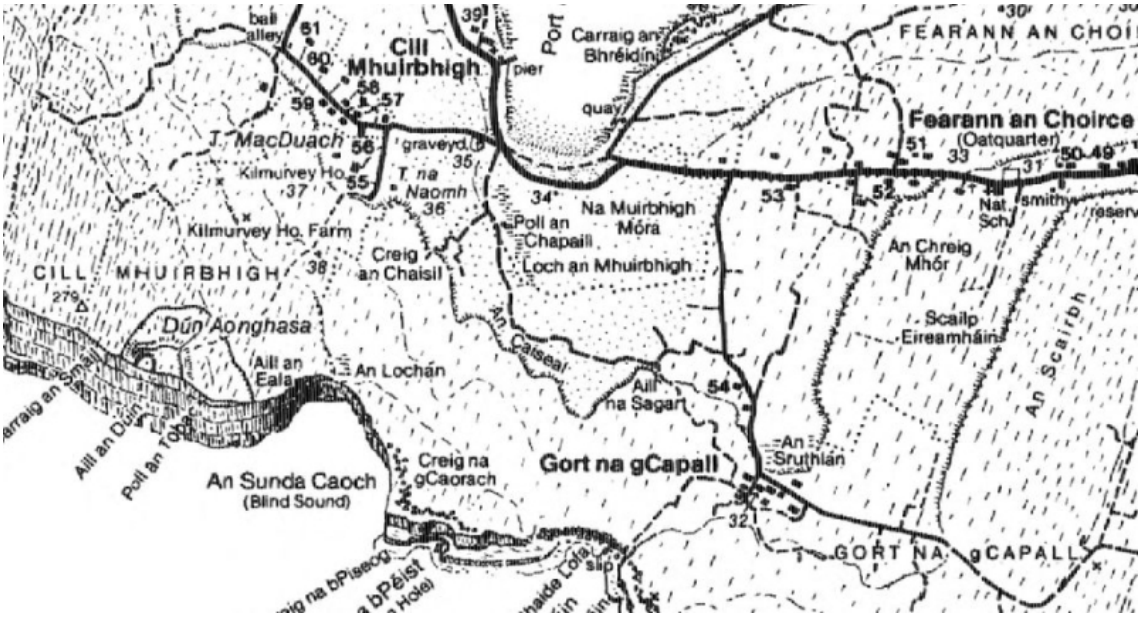
the intersection between Nicolas Fève's images and Robinson's writings; the public book launch of *Connemara and Elsewhere*; an international symposium *Interpreting Landscapes*; a public interview with Tim Robinson; and a meeting of the Royal Irish Academy that also took place in Galway as part of this series of events dedicated to marking Robinson's life and work. [5] This was all followed in December 2014 and January 2015 with a two-part radio documentary on Tim Robinson by writer Vincent Woods for the national broadcaster RTÉ Radio 1. [6] In June 2015 *Connemara and Elsewhere* had its subsequent French launch in the Irish Embassy in Paris, where a roundtable discussion on the book was chaired by *Irish Times*' journalist, Lara Marlow, and also included Tim Robinson, photographer Nicholas Fève and Jane Conroy as editor of the volume.

# Conceptualising the archive

10 With regard to his own ideas as to what his archive is, and what it could mean for the future, Robinson wrote that:

> I try to ensure that copies of as many as possible of these lists [of placenames] from Connemara and Aran and the Burren come into my hands, and are added to my archive, which will eventually go to NUI Galway. Now, it may be that some minor historical puzzles can be resolved through consulting such lists, or a scholar may use them to buttress a thesis about land-use or emigration or plant distribution. That is, the placenames become grist to the academic mill. Artists and writers may pick and choose among them for their own creative purposes. (2003, 50)

**Figure 3. – Detail from Oileáin Árann Map, NUI Galway.**

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11 With such ideas in mind, *Iarsma: Fragments from an Archive* was conceptualised as a project to explore the different ways in which we could engage with archives in general, and the Tim Robinson Archive in particular, opening them out to different publics and uses in creative and scholarly ways. Several different aspects of archives and historical memory were at play, in particular with regard to the idea of how to ethically engage with difficult, colonial pasts in our present, how to deal with contested zones of language and cultural identities, and finally how to engage in an open-ended way to make the archive relevant and "live" for a contemporary audience.

12 The concept of "deep mapping" was key to shaping and informing my own understanding of Robinson's work as an act of deep mapping the west of Ireland. I also hoped to explore certain aspects of deep mapping practices through the perspectives of language, literature, music, dance, image and text, in what would finally become the transdisciplinary *Iarsma* project. In particular, the work of cultural geographer Karen E. Till and artist-scholar Iain Biggs in relation to their writings on deep mapping practices and in "mapping spectral traces" informed the project work from the beginning (Biggs 2014). In her catalogue essay for a US visual arts'

exhibition entitled *Mapping Spectral Traces*, Till poses a series of questions opening up discussion as to how different and difficult pasts can be captured, framed and represented sensitively and with respect to different heritages and traditions. She asks, "How might we listen to and recognize stories, remnants, and submerged ways of knowing as unresolved remainders of memory?" and, "What might mappings that are sensitive to past injustices look, sound, and feel like?" She enquires further as to whether there might be "approaches to environment that treat ground as home and resting place, as thresholds through which the living can make contact with those who have gone before?" (2010, n. p.). What Till highlights here is the need to maintain a constant vigilance as to the different valencies of history, to honour different ways of remembering, and to carefully consider how best to ethically engage with "remnants and submerged ways of knowing". This is of particular importance in relation to former colonial spaces where history, identity and ways of being are still very much contested as part of a narrative of the present. As Robinson writes in an Irish context, "History has rhythms, tunes and even harmonies; but the sound of the past is an agonistic multiplicity" (2008, 2). The challenge then is how to navigate such histories and geographies of belonging that respects past traditions and contemporary communities.

13 The work of Till and Biggs has in turn been shaped by the writings and work of Clifford McLucas who wrote a manifesto of sorts, "There are ten things that I can say about these deep maps". [7] McLucas outlines that deep maps are big, slow, sumptuous, multimedia, engage insider and outsider, the amateur and professional, might only be possible now, are subjective and partisan, and are unstable, fragile and temporary. He finally states that, "They will be a conversation and not a statement". [8] The idea of the "deep map" of a landscape as being an open-ended, processual conversation between a place and the people that shaped it, had a deep resonance in terms of the work of Robinson. As he writes:

> For me, making a map was to be a one-to-one encounter between a person and a terrain, a commitment unlimitable in terms of time and effort, an existential project of knowing a place. The map itself could hardly then be more than an interim report on the progress of its own making. (1995, 76)

14 With such considerations to the fore, thoughts then turned to other collaborative projects that engaged with archives differently, and that encouraged people to rethink the very idea of an archive in a radically different way. Through work in the field of Cultural Geography I became aware of the 2002 interdisciplinary project *Visualising Geography* by geographers Felix Driver and Catherine Nash and artist Kathy Prendergast, located at Royal Holloway, University of London, England. *Visualising Geography* was an interesting "experiment", as the authors frame it, in how such collaborations could lead to more "more productive and challenging exchanges" in terms of extending ideas as to how artists visualise geography, or how geographers use the visual record as part of their research. As Driver, Nash and Prendergast write, "For many participants these collaborations have led to unexpected new directions in their work, to thoughtful conversations and rewarding exchanges, and to relationships that will continue beyond this project's formal ending. Each collaboration has its own dynamic, depth and character." [9] They also note that an exhibition associated with the project, entitled *Landing*, "sits between the conventions of research report and exhibition catalogue, between academic writing and artistic work, posing explicit questions and offering suggestive reflections." [10]

15 A secondary concern was how to deal with the embodied and *living* aspect of the archive, and how to deal with the idea of archival memory. I was aware of the work on post-9/11 polices and their effects since 2004 in America through the collaborative artistic work of Mariam Ghani and Chitra Ganesh. Their joint artist-activist project, *Index of the Disappeared*, sought to explore the idea of people who have "disappeared" from archives and national records for different reasons in recent history and foregrounds the difficult histories of migrant, "Other", and dissenting communities in the US today. [11] Much of their work was presented in a series of public programmes, texts, website, installations throughout 2013–14, in relation to their residency at the Asian/Pacific/American Institute, New York University. In relation to *Index of the Disappeared*, Ghani and Ganesh argue that, "By framing archiving as a radical practice, we wish to consider: archives of radical politics and practices; archives that are radical or experimental in form or function; moments or contexts

where archiving in itself becomes a radical act; and how archives can be active in the present, as well as documents of the past or scripts for the future."[12] From Ghani's and Chitra's work we learn how archives are not just a repository of history, but are a method, medium, and interface, echoing to a large extent the impulse behind McLucas' deep mapping principles. The idea of an archive of absence being made into a *presence* had a particular resonance with the Tim Robinson archive, where Robinson's work seeks to make present and visually emplace on the map Irish language placenames and sites of memory that had been either mistranslated, misplaced or omitted entirely from the original maps of the Ordnance Survey of Ireland dating from the 1830s. Indeed, as Robinson would discover, many of those errors and omissions were retained in modern maps of the region up until the 1990s.

16 Finally, the online journal *Radical Archives* is an excellent source to think through and consider alternative kinds of archival practices, based on different approaches to traditional ways of archiving and warehousing material. Robinson's writings seem to echo concerns discussed in many issues of that journal, such as how to adequately capture experience, how to write ethically about absence, and how to forge new connections between different pasts and presents. As Robinson writes in the "Preface" to *Connemara: Last Pool of Darkness*:

> How can writing, writing about a place, hope to recuperate its centuries of lost speech? A writing may aspire to be rich enough in reverberatory internal connections to house the sound of the past as well as echoes of immediate experience, but it is also intensely interested in its own structure, which it must preserve from the overwhelming multiplicity of reality. (2008, 3)

17 The idea of "reverberatory internal connections" was an idea that had resonance and took hold, and helped shape the internal logic of the project as it unfolded over the course of the year, and the idea of the archive as housing the "sound of the past" would go on to conceptually frame the architecture of *Iarsma*.

# *Iarsma: Fragments from an Archive*

**Figure 4. – Film still from *Iarsma: Fragments from an Archive*, 2014.**

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18 *Iarsma: Fragments from an Archive*, is the artist-in-the-archive research project that involved a number of artists across a range of practices who were commissioned to collaboratively work to devise a new way of engaging with the idea of an archive. Choreographer Ríonach Ní Néill, composer and musician Tim Collins, and visual artist Deirdre O'Mahony worked with me over a six-month period to form the *Performing Landscapes Collective* which sought to explore and investigate new ways in which archives of the Irish landscape could be encountered, envisaged and re-imagined through various disciplinary approaches and arts practices. The film produced as part of this project was directed and produced by Deirdre O'Mahony on location in the archival rooms at NUI Galway, and on location in the Burren and Connemara. The music score was composed and arranged by Tim Collins, including the newly commissioned pieces, "Anthem: Ómós Tim Robinson", "The View from Above", "Sir Donat's Road", "Sheas sí an Fód", and "Labyrinth". Ríonach Ní Néill directed the choreography and her recorded and live movement segments, "Bird

in the Archive", "Léarscáil an Cheathrú Rua", and "my foot is my pen" utilised contemporary dance environmental research and embodied mapping practices.

19 In June 2016 *Iarsma* was launched and performed at the UNISCAPE International Conference on "Landscape Values" at NUI Galway, Ireland.[13] The launch entailed an introductory presentation from NUI Galway archivists, Aisling Keane and Kieran Hoare, outlining their work in handling and cataloguing the material from the archive. This was followed by a performance of *Iarsma* from the *Performing Landscapes Collective*, the transdisciplinary artist-scholar collective established as part of the project to produce a work of public engagement as part of the remit of opening out the archive to different audiences in very different ways.[14]

**Figure 5. – Film still from *Iarsma: Fragments from an Archive*, 2014.**

Reproduced with kind permission.

20 *Iarsma* was initially envisaged as a project that would foreground the work of artists working in, through, and out of, an archival context as an alternative way of experiencing this landscape archive of great public interest. However, as soon as the collective came together, it became very clear that the project would take on a life of its own in many ways. Throughout the project, from the early stages of conceptualisation to the mid-phase of development, to the final

phase of directing, editing and performance, two core principles were agreed upon by all involved. Firstly, the archive and work of Tim Robinson would serve as a compass for direction, both in terms of being material starting points and conceptual landing places. Secondly, the work was to be collaborative, co-created, and conceptualised through a bilingual process whenever possible. In this way the project would respect the two primary languages associated with Robinson's work and the places that he mapped and wrote about, i.e. Irish and English language cultures. Finally, there was an acknowledgement that the emphasis at any given point of the project might head in one particular direction (visual, sound, movement, text) depending on the thematic being explored at that particular juncture. And so, accordingly, the direction of the work in that particular segment would naturally shift towards, and be led by, the member of the collective whose expertise lay in that area of practice.

## Creative cartographies: some reflections

21 A key part of the success of the project as a collaborative endeavour and artist-scholar "experiment" lay in its innovative approach to researching our past, as it examines what is contained in (and what gets left out of) institutional and national archives. As a result, the archive is seen as a site of provocation, a place to think in and through questions about Irish national identity, history, and belonging in a contemporary, globalised world. The project also approached critical scholarship in new ways, and explored the means by which fields of enquiry (distinct disciplinary formations) shift to modes of enquiry (different kinds of interdisciplinary practices). Finally, it highlighted the integration of critical and creative practices and methods and demonstrated how they can yield new ways of thinking about the narration of history and the creation of maps, in a spatio-temporal framework.

22 The concept of "iarsma", which translates from the Irish as "fragment", "trace", "relic", was a defining concept in terms of how the archive should be envisaged as a place that collects fragments, traces and relics from past times for future posterity. In Robinson's writings the fragment is mapped through the movement of the pen writing the

text, and the foot marking out the lines of the map. Ríonach Ní Néill's choreography in particular embodied this aspect of the Robinson archive in terms of her embodiment of place in her dance sequences, as refracted through the maps and texts of Tim Robinson. In relation to Robinson himself, we asked if the participants the in *Iarsma* project were mapping out the life of the artist, the cartographer, the writer? Where was Robinson situated in the archive itself? Was he the absent presence participants were seeking to capture in the work?

23 The critical perspectives and creative pathways that were explored in *Iarsma* can be read in terms of recent developments in the area of GeoHumanities, Creative Geographies and Environmental Humanities more widely. For many scholars working in the wider area of Cultural Geography, it has become increasingly apparent that collaborative and interdisciplinary approaches to research questions can yield exciting new ways to think about old questions. Such approaches in turn can be transformative because the change in methods and practices also leads to innovation in everything from epistemological structures and formations to ontological understandings of the world. In addition, the act of engaging different publics and audiences also allows for different kinds of discussions in the future. One could argue that, now more than ever, with the challenges of anthropogenic climate change, the migrant crisis and increasing geopolitical insecurity with the very idea and institutions of democracy under threat in this mis/information age, the creation and maintenance of public scholarship and socially responsive research is even more important now than ever. *Iarsma* was an interdisciplinary project that captured the imagination of different publics; as such it is one example of the way in which institutional archives can restate and reclaim their role as a space for open and progressive discussions as to how nations deal with their pasts (however difficult). It also reminds us how such considerations can help shape futures that make space for new modes of belonging using methods that remember and respect the past and enable such traditions to be honoured in the future.

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## NOTES

1 I use the Irish language placenames here in relation to these areas as Irish is the primary language of these particular areas in the west of Ireland.

2 See the awards listed for 2016 at: <www.mla.org/Resources/Career/MLA-Grants-and-Awards/Winners-of-MLA-Prizes/Biennial-Prize-and-Award-Winners/Lois-Roth-Award-for-a-Translation-of-a-Literary-Work-Winners> (accessed 7 December 2018).

3 As noted on the Folding Landscapes website, <www.foldinglandscapes.com> (accessed 12 January 2019).

4 Since 2014 there have been 15 Visiting Scholars at the Moore Institute working on the Tim Robinson Archive, 6 of whom are interdisciplinary artist-scholars. This scheme has proved to be a vitally, important form of support especially for artist-scholars, at a time of decreased funding for the Arts and Humanities in Irish and British institutions after the global financial crisis of 2008. See <https://mooreinstitute.ie/visiting-fellows-scheme/> (accessed 1 February 2019).

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11 For more on this aspect of their work, see their "Radical Archives", <http://creativetimereports.org/2014/05/27/radical-archives-mariam-ghani-chitra-ganesh-nyu/> (accessed 3 January 2019).

12 Mariam Ghani, "Index of the Disappeared", <www.mariamghani.com/work/626> (accessed 3 January 2019).

13 UNISCAPE is the European Network of institutions dedicated to the implementation of the 2004 European Landscape Convention, and has participatory status with the Council of Europe (<www.uniscape.eu>).

14 See <https://deirdre-omahony.ie/works-and-projects/2000s/42-artworks/2000-s/90-landscape-collective-tim-robinson.html>.

## ABSTRACTS

**English**

In September 2014 the Tim Robinson Archive was formally launched with a preview exhibition, international symposium, and public interview with Tim Robinson, at the National University of Ireland, Galway. Robinson is acknowledged as being the most significant writer and cartographer of the Irish landscape over the last forty years, and his work has been published to much critical acclaim and translated to a wider global audience in recent years. As a mathematician trained in Cambridge, Robinson is a self-taught visual artist that lived and worked throughout Europe (primarily in London) in the 1960s and early 1970s where his visual and environmental artworks were exhibited in galleries and non-traditional settings. His international reputation now lies in his extraordinarily work detailing the landscape of the west of Ireland, primarily through maps and books he has written focusing on the complex histories and geographies associated with the places and people of this part of western Europe. This paper explores the archive of Tim Robinson through an artist-in-the-archive research project, *Iarsma: Fragments from an Archive*, based on the maps and writings of Tim Robinson.

**Français**

En septembre 2014 a eu lieu à l'université nationale d'Irlande à Galway l'inauguration officielle des archives de Tim Robinson, avec une exposition, un colloque international et une interview de Tim Robinson. Robinson est reconnu comme l'écrivain et cartographe du paysage irlandais le plus important de ces quarante dernières années, et son œuvre a été accueillie très positivement par la critique, et a acquis une renommée internationale ces dernières années grâce à la traduction. Robinson a étudié les mathématiques à Cambridge, et est un artiste autodidacte qui a vécu et travaillé en Europe (surtout à Londres) dans les années 1960 et au début des

années 1970, exposant ses œuvres d'art visuelles et environnementales dans des galeries et des espaces non traditionnels. Sa réputation internationale repose à présent sur le travail extraordinaire qu'il a accompli en détaillant le paysage de l'ouest de l'Irlande, essentiellement par les cartes et les livres qu'il a écrits et qui s'intéressent aux histoires et géographies complexes associées aux lieux et au peuple de cette partie de l'Europe occidentale. Cet article explore les archives de Tim Robinson par le biais d'un projet de recherche, *Iarsma: Fragments from an Archive*, basé sur les cartes et les écrits de Tim Robinson.

## INDEX

**Mots-clés**
cartographie, Robinson (Tim), Irlande, paysage

**Keywords**
cartography, Robinson (Tim), Ireland, landscape, mapping

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# Google Street View: Digital Mapping, Glitching and Social Documentary

*Google Street View : cartographie numérique*, glitching *et documentaire social*

**Lisa FitzGerald**

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## TEXT

1 Google Street View (hereafter GSV) is a digital application that was launched in 2007 and enables the user to zoom in from the traditional cartographic bird's-eye view to an immersive 360° street level environment. The result, with its continuous and frictionless interface, is a virtual version of a cartographic tool where the users can immerse themselves fully in a panorama of their chosen environment. These ostensibly seamless horizons are captured using stitched together images taken from Google's infamous street view cameras on 2.5 metre photographic masts attached, for the most part, to the roofs of various vehicles. The resulting images can be unsettling and quite often provoke a voyeuristic response in the viewer. Most notably, the incidental and everyday actions of individuals are captured in the harvesting of countless images by Google's cameras. Almost immediately, artists began to appropriate these images into their own artwork. Artworks, such as those discussed in this article, have emerged that use this technology to explore the social implications of GSV. Most particularly the unveiling of glitches that are captured by GSV unsettles the seeming objectivity of the camera and upends the balance of power and control that is then transferred back to the social practice of mental mapping: a cartographic practice gleaned by moving through the landscape.

2 One of the defining features of GSV is its adherence to the narrative logic of human organization. As Sarah Pink writes, GSV images are "consumed through the experience of movement across the screen, and it is here that the question of the interconnected senses becomes

most central" (11). GSV is experienced through a sense of movement. The fused images are not static but streamlined as the user flows from one environment to another:

> Google Street View offers another perspective, which is closer to the metaphor of knowing in movement. It affords viewers possibilities to use their existing experiences of environments to sense what it might be or how it might feel to move through the 'real' locality represented on screen. (11)

3 In that respect, online environments such as those experienced through GSV (and VR) can be analysed through the lens of place-based discourse. The tension between embodied mapping through movement and the seemingly objective practice of observation using GSV as an all-seeing eye illustrates the fraught relationship between technology and bodily materiality. Negotiating a landscape has been the subject of many technological innovations (such as surveillance), and there has been an emergent aesthetic that explores the themes of technology and observance in contemporary art practice.

4 Building on a history of street photography (as seen in the works of Paul Strand, Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange and Robert Frank) but also emphasising the vastly different scale that Google Street View generates, artists sought to incorporate into their work, not just the differing viewpoints that the technology offered, but also the vast archive of strangely disconcerting images of the everyday. This paper will examine the impact of GSV on how landscape (and our place within it) is represented and the repercussions for the aesthetics of space in our contemporary digital culture in the work of photographers Michael Wolf, Doug Rickard, John Rafman and Emilio Vavarella. The impact of digital applications such as GSV on aesthetics is a new phase in an ongoing conversation between artists and technology. The use of a distinctly digital aesthetic in an artwork allows the artist to comment directly on what is arguably the most fundamental and ground-breaking change in our contemporary culture: digital technology and its corresponding applications. The work that develops and emerges organically from that tension between art and technology is a crucial one to unpack, particularly given the repercussions of the emerging digital aesthetic on what is becoming a crisis in spatial and environmental discourse.

5 What these images are in terms of their genre is also a pertinent one. They sit somewhere between photography and photomontage. Not without controversy, artist Michael Wolf received an honourable mention at the World Press Photo Awards in 2011 for his project, *Street View: A Series of Unfortunate Events*. The series was constructed by taking photographs (of his own computer screen) of GSV images that he had chosen from the application. This newfound ability to take street photography without actually being out in that specific environment ushered in new conversations about the issues of voyeurism and surveillance based on the use of an image intended for one purpose but appropriated for artistic purposes. The images were appropriated without the permission of the subjects and whilst the faces of the figures in each image are blacked out (as they would be in GSV), there is in the series a confirmation of sorts that the strange juxtaposition between the voyeurism of the viewer and the anonymity of the participant evoke the tension between technology and subjectivity. The anonymity of the subject in the image suggests that both the unknowability of the other and the pervasiveness of technology are an important factor in drawing attention to the issues of societal injustice as seen in social documentary.

6 Another instance of social documentary where GSV datasets were used to explore themes of injustice captured by technology is Doug Rickard whose exhibition, *A New American Picture*, depicted the desolation and isolation of communities that live below the poverty line. These gritty, piloted, surveillance images depict the intense isolation and trauma of figures that are marginalised. But they also speak to a history of social photography that can be seen as exploitative: capturing and framing the lives of the less fortunate for the singular purpose of creating a visual aesthetic deemed pleasing for others. Whereas this method of documenting the less fortunate has been confronted with this criticism historically, the use of GSV datasets brings the moral ambiguity of the practice to the fore. In many instances, for example, there are images taken that capture an individual in inappropriate situations or behaving suspiciously or aggressively either for the benefit of the GSV camera or without any awareness of it. Although the notion of surveillance and the tools that form a part of the surveillance apparatus (such as CCTV) have been around for a few decades, only recently has the technology allowed

for complete tracking of an individual's movements. An early example of an artistic response to surveillance in new media was the *iSee* project created by anonymous activists, The Institute for Applied Autonomy in 2004. The activist group created a web-based application that contained user-generated data which established the positions and tracking of surveillance cameras in New York. Users marked the beginning and endpoint into the online software and were instructed as to where the points of surveillance along their journey were situated. They could then print off a map so as to avoid being in the range of the cameras. The artwork was a comment on the pervasive increase in social control and the attempt of the individual to subvert or push back against that wider state (and anonymous) surveillance that has become pervasive in public spaces.

7 While surveillance is clearly an important theme in artworks that draw on digital technology and applications such as GSV, the spatial or cartographic element is also evident. While the material gathered by Google is essentially extraneous data in the form of images that correspond to a particular point in a geographical area, the markers are placed in a way that allows the user to visualise the map as an embodied spatial experience. Exploring the earth from a global or god's eye perspective plays a large part in nature aesthetics historically. The impact of the Arts on scientific understanding of environment has always been evident in the collaboration and interaction between artists and scientists. Early modern attempts to understand the cosmos is evident in grappling with the displacement of the earth and the expansion of the universe in works such as Copernicus's *De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium* (1543) and Galileo's *Dialogo sopra i due massimi sistemi del mondo, Tolemaico e Copernicano* (1632). It has been argued that the scientific revolution of the Renaissance and Early Modern period has been largely influenced by the artistic development of linear perspective (Panofsky, 1927; Edgerton, 1975; Alpers, 1983). Albrecht Dürer had co-created (alongside cartographer, Johannes Stabius and mathematician and astronomer, Conrad Heinfogel) two-star maps in 1515 from the vantage point of the northern and southern hemispheres which depicted the 1,022 stars in Ptolemy's Almagest.[1] Understanding where we, as embodied and material entities, sit within the wider landscape is an old question. What is different in the

images addressed in this article, and, in particular, the Vavarella's series is the intervention of technology at the point where surveillance has become endemic. These images of Wolf, Rickman, and Vavarella all frame or emphasize the everyday omnipresence of surveillance, not only triggered by us, but pervasively present in the landscape with or without human presence. GSV has a structure in place that seeks to capture the incidental in contrast to, for example, the criminal. It is a step further in the use of technology in gathering vast amounts of data for largely nondescript purposes.

8 Contemporary artists have, in recent years, wrestled with how to represent scientific data in their work. Diana Thater's *Six Color Video Wall* (2000) for example is made up of six plasma screen displaying six slowly rotating suns. The images were digitally animated from a sequence of NASA photographs taken by the Solar and Heliospheric Observatory (SOHO). The images had already been separated into the component colours, red, green and blue (for scientific investigation) and Thater added the complementary colours, cyan, magenta and yellow. John Klima's installation *EARTH* (2001) goes further with a geo-spatial visualisation system that uses data layers (from geographical surveys, satellite images, weather patterns, etc.) projected onto a spherical ball in stratified layers. More recently Chris Milk has made an online interactive video piece in collaboration with musicians, Arcade Fire, called *The Wilderness Downtown* (2011). Written in HTML5, and using GSV and Google Maps API, the short film allows the user to enter the environmental landscape of memory. After typing the address of your childhood into the browser, the interactive video allows the user to be a part of a personalised video experience. The technology intersects with the users personal memories of a particular environment in a fascinating new layer that can be added to the personal online archive of an individual's life. These three examples illustrate the move in contemporary art to harness scientific discovery to comment on landscape and environmental representation.

9 An artist using the same material is Jon Rafman. Rafman has exhibited found images gleaned from GSV in his collection 9-*Eyes* (2009-ongoing) which has been exhibited online and as an exhibition (*The Nine Eyes of Google Street View*) in the Saatchi Gallery, London. [2] The

artist trawls through the GSV data to find surprising instances that capture the surreal moment when someone (or something) is caught unaware, echoing the uncanny notion of unveiling. Images such as *A reindeer Running Down Rv888, Norway*, 2010 record a moment that would otherwise have escaped the viewer of a reindeer running down a stretch of highway between Bekkarfjord and Hopseidet in Norwegian Lapland. His images are untouched leaving, for example, the Google navigation tool at the top left-hand corner of the image. As the artist commented:

> The work is connected to the history of street photography [...] but also to the 20th-century ready-made movement. So leaving those artefacts in the image is extremely important. In the bottom-left corner of each picture is a link that says, "Report a problem". Maybe in the middle ages you passed somebody in trouble on the road and were confronted with the moral dilemma of whether to help them. Then came a time when you could call the police. Now we've reached the point where it's a hyperlink. That represents just how alienated we've become from reality. (Quoted in Walker)

The process illustrates how digital tools are being used to expand what our idea of the nonhuman world is. Artists have previously used digital tools and harvested data to think about landscape aesthetics in new ways.

10 An emergent intersection between GSV technology and art is the digital glitch or error. The art of the digital error is the ultimate enactment of the naturally emergent artform. Its use in glitch art is an important reminder that new media art can not only endlessly replicate but create an image that is representative of a digital world. One of the striking aspects of the use of GSV technology is the emergence of a frailty or a notion of disconnection brought about by the mistakes or glitches that seep into what is otherwise an omnipotent and global technology. An artwork that highlights the decentralised and participatory nature of glitching and how it intersects with digital technology is Emilio Vavarella's *The Google Trilogy*. This three-part project consists of *Report a Problem*, *Michelle's Story*, and *The Driver and the Cameras* that feature GSV technology. The series use the technology to explore themes of cartography and power as Varvarella writes on this website: "The

end-goal of Google mapping is nothing more than the oldest archetypical obsession of any mapping effort: that of mapping a territory until the map itself becomes a territory in its own right" (<http://emiliovavarella.com/archive/google-trilogy/>). There is an attempt in the process of mapping and representation to make new worlds and this distancing is where the tension emerges between the subject of the technology and the communality or empathy that emerges in social documentary.

11 The first, *Report a Problem*, is a series of 100 digital photographs that plays on the feature in the GSV screen that allows the user to report technical errors. Vavarella travelled to the (online) landscapes where an error had been reported and captured the scene before Google repaired the glitch. The errors can result in unnatural imagery and intense, vivid colours that would not be found in commonly accessed landscapes. These glitched landscapes resonate as fractured segments of imperfection in an otherwise streamlined software program. The series is colourful due largely to the errors in colour attribution that run through the photographs. There are washed out rural and urban scenes and, in each photograph, the omnipotent Google buttons frame and surround the landscape. The scene is heavily mediated and functional in contrast to perhaps a traditional landscape where the aim was to immerse the viewer in the environment. These street view images seek to remind the viewer that no matter how extensive the available information is on a landscape (bordering on VR), it is still not that landscape and mistakes happen. The hyper realism offered by the digital technology in this case falters as if to break with conventional relationship between the digital environment and our experience of the material (or at least non-digital) one.

12 Ingraham and Rowland point out that resistance to the ubiquitous use of GSV surveillance has emerged in the form of "microactivist performance-events by people who stage tableaux vivants for the passing GSV cameras" (212). Their article examining performance that occurs for and in front of GSV cameras, such as Kelly Gates's *A Street with a View* (2008), notes that Jon McKenzie's definition of "performance assemblages" which incorporate cultural, organizational and technological performances is an apt descriptor for the phenomena of the interaction between the GSV camera and

those resisting the surveillance that seems totalising. McKenzie draws on Deleuze and Guattari to name this phenomena machinic performances (216). For Ingraham and Rowland, these machinic performances denote the "dispersed assemblages that exemplify the entangled nature of cultural, organizational, and technological performance types" (216). Jon McKenzie labels the active resistance to technological surveillance, as seen in these performances that subvert the assumed objectivity of digital technology, as hacktivism. This expands on the notion that hacktivism, what he describes as "electronic civil disobedience" is a form of social activism:

> I will define machinic performances as arising whenever different processes "recur" or communicate across diverse systems, thereby creating performances that escape subjective control and even objective analysis. Machinic performances do not occur at discrete performative sites; instead, their occurrence is distributed. They happen at multiple sites through multiple agents, both human and technological. (22)

13 Whereas McKenzie discusses machinic performances in relation to the 1986 Challenger Shuttle Disaster, for Ingraham and Rowland, the GSV performances can also be categorised in the same manner because they incorporate not just the cultural and organizational performance but also technological performance, given the clear cooperation with Google. They write:

> This is not just a matter of supposing a distributed agency to coexist between people and things, but of acknowledging that machinic performances transpire across the wider territory of biopolitics and the control over life and non-life. It is no wonder, then, that some of the most intense performances undertaken for GSV cameras have involved staging tableaux vivants of life and death itself. (217)

14 The same emphasis is evident in *Michele's Story*, Vavarella's second instalment in *The Google Trilogy*. These performances, under the omnipresent gaze of the GSV camera, reflect the embedded body in a network of information and data dispersal and retrieval that has become the defining feature of the technological age.

15 Michele's Story is the second installation in the project and a collaboration with Michele, a paralysed man with memory damage. Google Street View, in this case, is used to "precariously reconstruct a single human journey by recovering snippets of stolen and dehumanized life" (<http://emiliovavarella.com/archive/google-trilogy/micheles-story/>). The collection points to the instability of memory and quite often its reliance on visual aids. Issues of ownership, censorship and how the user can extrapolate or create narrative from the use of such technology arise and are treated in these artworks. Michele's story and, indeed, all three instalments in the project rely on the mapping systems produced by a private company.

16 Just as Google has taken control of urban and rural environment totalising their monopoly on the control and organisation of data, there appears to be a crack in the polished gleam that is their digital view on the world. There are mistakes that highlight the vulnerability of the technology that has become so pervasive in our lives. The power of Google software is in its seamlessness and ease of use. As Ingrid Hoelzl and Rémi Marie have pointed out, the use of Google maps as the default global mapping system has emerged from the company's "ability to reconcile the cartographic and photographic modes of representation" and on "its ability to build the technical tools that allow a smooth 'landing' from one to the other, as if they were and always had been operating in the same symbolic space" (261).

17 The glitches that crop up in the functioning of the software prove to be a fertile ground for appropriation by media artists. The project, and many others, disclose the fallaciousness of Google software. The final installation in the series examines the use of blurring to disguise facial features and the (relatively frequent) system error that overlooks faces. *The Driver and the Cameras* is a series of photographs that have escaped Google censoring procedure to protect identity. The technique has been used before by, for example, artist Michael Wolf's *Fuck You* series in 2011 which consisted of a sequence of shots capturing people sticking their finger up at the camera. The images that Vavarella uses, however, are of the drivers of the GSV car, who are willful participants in the use of the Google mapping software. This blurring of facial features and other

identifiable data refers the viewer back to the construction of the image. As Hoelzl and Marie have pointed out:

> the digital artefact—the stuttering and stammering of the image, as Deleuze would argue [...] can be understood as the manifestation of a digital aesthetics that is medium reflexive, in the sense that it reflects the means by which the image has been processed and distributed. (264)

18 The opening up of the framework upon which the image is built is a core constitute of this type of glitched art. On the one level, it reveals the underpinning of information that is generally thought of as objective, and on the other, its portrayal of the landscape and the actors within it revel in a type of beauty that is a part of the consistent failure to capture landscape in any real and meaningful way. It is worth returning to Hoelzl and Marie as they aptly argue that new media art has changed the way—the fixed assurance—with which the image of our surrounding environment could be fixed:

> Somewhere along the temporal process that led from the stable subject-object relationship of the modern era to the mutable object-object relationship of the digital era, the fixed relation between world and image that underpinned the photographic paradigm of the image was gradually replaced by the dynamic relation between data and data that is the foundation of the algorithmic paradigm of the image. Somewhere within this cybernetic data-to-data relationship, the image still intervenes. (266)

19 This is one of the defining features of the art practice that is immersed in digital technology. Where the image and digital technology intersect is now “unstable algorithmic configuration of a database in the form of a programmable view” (266). The essence of the glitch in art that intersects with digital technology is to frame that instability in the form of an image. Vavarella describes a glitch as “a sort of digital fingerprint of a particular technology” whose use is directly linked to the “technology from which it derives” (11). The machine is essentially a collaborator in the process allowing different avenues for representation that the artist would not have otherwise considered. For Vavarella, “a glitch reveals what lies beneath the apparent visibility and fluidity of the technology surrounding us” (11).

And technology is pervasive, not just in surrounding the human as subject but as a significant moment. In her book, *The Internet of Things*, Jennifer Gabrys mentions "the year when Internet-based machine-to-machine connectivity surpassed that of human-to-human connectivity" (184). The sheer volume of data that emerges from the Internet and the networks that operate independently from human within that modality are testament to the groundbreaking phenomena that the digital art aesthetic encompasses.

20 *Report a Problem* and *The Driver and the Cameras* are examples of how glitches intersect with the internet as an immense database: an ecosystem in itself. Within this ecosystem, the errors that are made should not be seen in a negative sense but an open and fruitful version of the multiplicities and complexity that celebrates difference and divergence. In *Report a Problem*, the glitch in the landscape reminds the viewer/user that these images are aesthetic renderings of landscapes, but it comes with a built in option to correct or report an issue as the viewer sees it. As with the interdependent internet of things, correction and regulation is dispersed throughout the system. The opportunity to report a problem means that the images that were produced with a mistake built into them are to be rectified and discarded. The sanctification of discarded images is not new in historic process-based art movements. What is different here is the direct relation between the system and the user in the original sense when the user reports the problem and in the second sense when the glitched image is appreciated as a work of art rather than a discarded item.

21 With *The Driver and the Cameras* the onus is on the driver of the GSV vehicles to avoid the stitched images that the GSV camera takes. Even if their faces are blurred by the face recognition technology, there is a sense that the mistake is not just on the part of the technology but also on the human element. As both attempt to uphold the structure of which they are a part, through the exposure of the glitch and the revealing of the driver, the system itself is called into question. These glitches show that GSV is far removed from the seemingly objective cartographic experience of aerial photography, for example, and falls more naturally into our desire for narrative. As Aaron Shapiro points out, it is the street level imagery that differentiates GSV from other cartographic methodologies:

> Whereas aerial imaging and its vertical gaze provide a disengaged "view from nowhere" of the earth's surface and the array of human activities that take place there (civilian and military, urban and infrastructural, natural and meteorological, etc.), street-level imagery is always explicitly grounded in a somewhere; its emphasis on the particularities of place rather than cartographic abstractions of space makes it seem progressive, absolved from the visual-semiotics of scientific rationality or objectivity. (1202)

22 GSV makes a landscape much more real in the mind of the viewer than aerial imagery and so is more fulfilling as a nature aesthetic. It can be seen as soothing, easy to understand, the viewer is intrigued and drawn into the image by the human figures. It follows conventional narratives outlines: who are these people? What are they doing there? The glitching of the image reminds the viewer that this is not a conventional image; it can be manipulated to reverse the outcome that created these particular forms. Algorithms can search for faces and blur them out. GSV can and has contributed to the study of big data. Data harvesting has generated new ways of categorizing spaces which can act detrimentally in many ways engaging in the type of place-sorting that reinforces racial and social biases. As Shapiro writes: "virtual mapping applications like GSV illuminate novel configurations of sociality and surveillance that both promise and threaten to reorganize social landscapes, to reaffirm or undermine our normative categorizations of space and place" (1215). Glitching is just one method for teasing out the assumption of infallibility that much algorithmic data now finds itself with.

23 These are images garnered or instigated from errors in a system that is thought of as being in the service of human beings and yet Glitch art reveals a more independently-minded if not essentially self-serving system. *The Google Trilogy* clearly shows a digital and pixelated aesthetic and some pieces (*Report a Problem* and *The Driver and the Cameras* more so than *Michele's Story*) show the random error occurrence that is the defining feature of glitch art. Many contemporary new media artists have used the idea of the glitch and incorporated it into their own work. There is an element of the tinkered with—that hacktivist element—that essentially emerges from the glitch but is incorporated within the broader digital aesthetic.

The mistaken images of the GSV drivers or landscape speak to a subjective relationship that is uncertain where memory and sensory embeddedness cannot be assured. Landscape is, no doubt, a real and vital subjective experience. However, as that experience is interlaced with ever-growing virtual experiences of the environment, it is important to think about the blurred lines between the real and the virtual and, in the case of computer mediated landscapes, the very material network that facilitate that experience. As Lisa Parks argues:

> If we are willing to take seriously the fusion of the biological and the technological, it is important to consider not only how consumer electronics become human prostheses but also how automated facilities on the outskirts of cities that are dug deep into the dirt and surrounded by plants and wildlife—seemingly in the middle of nowhere—are integral to broadcasting in the digital age. (157)

24 Embedding landscape representation in its material networks allows for acknowledgement of the materiality of both the landscape and the networks that offer the user unmediated access. The history of representing the landscape in the visual arts reveals its significance as a tool for human identity construction and ideologies. Parks points out this dynamism connecting landscape to social practices, arguing that "rather than approach Earth-observing practices only as *representing* infrastructure sites and processes, we need to understand these practices as *performative acts* […] which need to be specified and considered" (157, emphasis author's own). These artists use digital technology to deconstruct and interrogate traditional conventional notions of the landscape and the cartographic tools used to represent it. The artists featured have created innovative and significant new ways to explore, inhabit and ultimately represent the landscape for a new digital age.

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## NOTES

1 Written by Claudius Ptolemy in the 2nd century, this catalogue of the stars was the accepted astronomy model until Copernicus.

2 The number nine in the title refers to the number of cameras that are mounted on the cars.

## ABSTRACTS

**English**

Google Street View was launched in 2007 and enabled the user to zoom down from the traditional cartographic bird’s-eye view to an immersive 360° street level environment. The result is a virtual version of a cartographic tool where the users can immerse themselves in a panorama of their chosen environment. These vistas are captured using stitched together images taken from Google automated street view cameras on

2.5 metre photographic masts mounted, for the most part, on the tops of cars. The resulting photographs are unsettling, using wide angle camera lines and fused images, the impact provokes a voyeuristic response in the viewer. Almost immediately, artists have begun to appropriate these images in their own work building on a history of street photography as seen in the works of Paul Strand, Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, Robert Frank but also emphasising the different scale and viewpoint that Google Street View generated such as digital artists Eduardo Kac's *Lagoogleglyph* series where the artist created artworks that were visible only using the technology. This paper will examine the impact of Google Street View on how place is represented by contemporary artists and the repercussions for the aesthetics of space.

**Français**

Google Street View a été lancé en 2007 pour permettre à l'utilisateur de zoomer à partir de la traditionnelle vision cartographique panoramique vers un environnement immersif à 360° au niveau d'une rue. Le résultat est une version virtuelle d'un outil cartographique où les utilisateurs peuvent s'immerger dans un panorama de leur choix. Ces vues sont obtenues en assemblant les images prises par les caméras automatiques de Google montées sur des mâts de 2,50 mètres fixés, pour la plupart, sur le toit de voitures. Ces photographies sont déstabilisantes, par l'utilisation du grand angle et des images fusionnées, et leur impact provoque chez le spectateur une réaction voyeuriste. Presqu'immédiatement, des artistes se sont approprié ces images, dans la lignée des photographes de rue comme Paul Strand, Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange ou Robert Franck, mais également en soulignant l'échelle et le point de vue différents générés par Google Street View, comme Eduardo Kac dans sa série *Lagoogleglyph*, où il a créé une œuvre numérique qui ne peut se voir qu'en utilisant la technologie. Cet article analyse l'impact de Google Street View sur la manière dont les artistes contemporains représentent les lieux, et ses répercussions sur l'esthétique de l'espace.

## INDEX

**Mots-clés**

technologie digitale, Google Street View, cartographies en mouvement

**Keywords**

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# Finding Permanence in Movement: An Interview of Dina Nayeri on Migration, Writing, and the Gradual Process of Home-Building in Exile

*Entretien avec Dina Nayeri sur la migration, l'écriture et la construction d'un chez-soi en exil*

**Jessica Small**

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## TEXT

***Acknowledgements***
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Iranian-born author Dina Nayeri is no stranger to migration. In 1988 she fled her home country with her brother and mother—a Christian convert whose faith put her at grave risk of execution at the hands of the moral police of Khomeini's Islamic Republic—leaving her father behind in their family home in Isfahan. After two years living as asylum seekers in Dubai and Rome, the three settled in Oklahoma, where Nayeri would spend her teenage years, before studying in Princeton and Harvard. Since then, Nayeri has lived in multiple cities across the US and Europe and become a multi-award-winning writer, whose evocative novels *A Teaspoon of Earth and Sea* and *Refuge* tell the complex tales of Iranians before and after exile. When I met Nayeri at an event for Liverpool's Writing on the Wall literary festival, she was on a tour of the UK and the US to promote her latest book, *The Ungrateful Refugee*: a non-fictional account of the testimonies she has gathered through her travels to refugee camps in recent

years, intertwined with a detailed and emotional account of her own experiences as an asylum seeker and a refugee.

**Jessica Small: Your books explore the notion of home and how it evolves and complexifies through displacement. How would you define home, and how can it be built in exile?**

Dina Nayeri: I think as you get older and become more used to displacement, the definition of home becomes more and more vague. So for my three-year-old daughter, her concept of home is extremely concrete: it's the physical place where we live, the specific square metres of space that are hers, contained behind her front door.[1] In my case, it started off as a small village. It's very hard to let go of that initial concept of home and you always attach a certain permanence to that. I'm sure if I were to go back to Isfahan, I would feel overwhelmed by the homeness of it.[2] But as you migrate from one place to another, the idea of home becomes more and more conceptual and you shroud yourself with other people, and make your home in them. That's phase two. Then, if you've moved around as much as I have, and left as many people behind, home becomes even less concrete; it's no longer about specific people but it's more based in ideas and community: it's about having certain kinds of people around you. So for me, it's about being surrounded by people who are readers, who are thinkers and who have similar politics to me and a particular love of the things that I love. It's almost a cynical way of thinking but now, at the age of 40, I've come to realise that those people don't have to be the same, they can change. Now my concept of home has stabilised in that I know that home is not static: it can be rebuilt again and again and again.

**JS: Has Niloo found home at the end of *Refuge*, as her father and mother join her in Amsterdam?[3]**

DN: I think Niloo is in that second phase of homebuilding. In the early parts of the book, she is bitter about the loss of that first home and in her displacement she is unable to feel comfortable anywhere. Then towards the end, she starts to find her home in people and in the fellow Iranian exiles she befriends. When her parents come back to her, she starts to understand that home can be rebuilt anywhere. So she's in that middle phase of building her home in specific people. But maybe in ten years, perhaps when she reaches the inevitable parents-

dying-phase, she'll realise that home has to be recreated again and again. I think she's also someone who needs an intellectual environment … She's not as extroverted as me, so perhaps for her, it'd be four or five people who are of a like mindset, maybe her friends from the Iranian community. I think home is very different for each person, once they've reached that third phase.

**JS: Is food also essential to home-making? Both of your novels and even your non-fiction are characterized by regular, detailed and sumptuous depictions of Iranian food which seem deeply linked to a sense of cultural identity and belonging.**

DN: Well of course! Food is home. But food is also essential to capturing a full sensory experience of a place. It's the only thing that people share that uses all five senses. It's also a vital part of every culture, so I think it would be very hard to try to write for an audience about another place without capturing the food.

**JS: You've commented previously that you think men can particularly suffer from migration and can struggle to rebuild, especially in the Iranian context where you've said "women root men down". Returning to *Refuge*: in your mind, how does her fathe—an animated but aging character, deeply rooted to his village life and battling with opium addiction—adapt to life in Amsterdam?**

DN: Sadly I think if I were to write a sequel focusing on her father, it would be a very sad story. Firstly because it would be a hard struggle to get him his paperwork, but more importantly because so much of what makes it difficult to assimilate is the loss of dignity, the loss of your place in the world. This is a man who is a professional, who is respected and rooted and had a sense of himself; he's joyful and full of magic. In Europe all of that magic would be lost because he wouldn't be appreciated for all of his glorious eccentricities. He's someone who is strange and misunderstood. And now he has to live out his old age in this place of misunderstanding, He's not beloved and he's not a part of the air of the place. So I think all that would be a huge shock for him after he gets over the initial elation of being around his daughter.

**JS: It makes me think of the story of Mamad …** [4]

DN: Exactly. The Dutch just don't open the doors for him.

**JS: How did the experience of writing this story as fiction compare with that of your recent re-telling of this event in non-fiction form for *The Ungrateful Refugee*?**

DN: I think there's a lot more catharsis any time you can fictionalise something … there was something self-indulgent in the way that I wrote this because I was so hurt by what happened to Kambiz Roustayi. I didn't know how to make sense of it. It took me a long time to process my feelings, feelings which I sometimes felt I didn't have a right to have because he was in such a worse position than I was. I felt very out of place in the Iranian community in Amsterdam because I was one of the highly privileged ones having come from America. To be able to put myself—or the fictional version of myself—in that moment and just watch it and describe it and attach pretty prose to it, was a very different experience than when I actually wrote the story for this book, where I went and found his best friend, the one who identified his body, and I sat and talked with him for hours. The story had to be written in a certain way. It had to be written in a way that remained close to the voice of the man who told it to me, because he's the keeper of that story now. So I couldn't be indulgent with some of the ways that I wrote it, I couldn't put any kind of romantic sheen on it, I was facing something that was really brutal and not mine. It felt very different.

**JS: On that note, can you speak about the ethical issues at stake when representing refugees and immigrants in fiction?**

DN: I don't think so much about ethical issues of writing refugees and immigrants in particular because I think that it can feel a bit restrictive. I think of it more as a general issue of artistic integrity and the ethics of representing people. As a writer, you owe something to the truth: that is, to the complexity and fullness of a human being. So for example, people who appropriate from other cultures are those who are eager to write about someone else but they don't bother to get deep into the lived experience of a person so that they can represent them as they would represent themselves. But that is an issue that is not restricted to representing immigrants or refugees, that's the entire ethical dilemma of writing fiction: you want to represent someone as a fully realised character. That means including

both good and bad; you don't whitewash people and try to make them perfect for someone else's gaze, either.

**JS: How about your narrative strategy? There is a fascinating hybridity to the language used in these two novels: written in English, but with (romanized) Persian proper nouns throughout and plenty of Persian idioms and expressions with translations and explanations for readers. You take a different approach to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, for example, who in *Americanah* chose to keep passages of dialogue in Igbo, for her readers to research for themselves.[5] How did you go about deciding how to blend Persian and English in your narrative strategy?**

DN: It wasn't a choice to blend English and Persian in the way that I did, in fact it was more in service of what I just described: creating fully realised human beings. In *A Teaspoon of Earth and Sea*, I wanted to capture Iranian grandmothers and it was impossible to do so without all of their Persian idioms and the funny Farsi things that they say, so my challenge was to capture the hilarity of it in a way that is understandable in English whilst keeping as close as possible to the Farsi. That's why I didn't take the Adichie approach: I didn't want to take readers out of the moment at the cost of the humour. These colloquial expressions are funny to us too as Iranians because they come from a different generation, so when we hear one of our grandmothers say things like this it's slightly foreign to us, too. So it needs to be brought into enough English to be understandable to a Western reader, and the charms of human communication do the rest.

**JS: From comments that you have made previously about the process of writing your novels, it is tempting to read them as a pair: you have said of *A Teaspoon of Earth and Sea*, a Bildungsroman that follows the life of a girl growing up in a small fishing village in post-revolutionary Iran and dreaming of emigrating to America, that it came from your own imaginings of what your life could have been had you stayed in Iran; whilst *Refuge*, the story of an Iranian exile's attempt to recapture her homeland, seems to have a lot of autobiographical elements in it. Do you see those two books as two parts of a whole, two sides of the same coin?**

DN: I think they're a single complicating story. I don't mean one story is more complex than the other, I mean in terms of layers of understanding on my part. In between these two novels I was not only developing as a writer but I was also developing in my understanding of what it can do to a person to go through those key moments of exile, return, and becoming acquainted with your other self. There were things that I still had to go through after *Teaspoon* that I was not very aware of while writing it, so I think in that way *Refuge* is a next step. There's something very movie-like and almost cartoonish about *Teaspoon* that I love because I was so taken up with the magic of writing fiction and it was the first opening up of my imagination: I got to delve into my memories of the old ladies in Isfahan and the way they told me stories, and the way we made up things about America, so there's this underlying theme of the imagined space and how very whimsical and beautiful it can be. *Refuge* is more sober: I felt much more confident as a writer, I felt I had certain responsibilities and I had much more understanding of my subject. It had less of the unwitting magic, but I think it had more life experience and wisdom in it. So I think it's the next step of the same story, sort of like if you repeat the same story again and again and again and tell it differently each time. In her book *My Name Is Lucy Barton*, the writer Elizabeth Shrout said that we are always telling the same story again and again in different ways, so that all of us tell one story in a hundred ways throughout our entire life. That's true. Storytelling is like the way an oyster goes over a piece of dust: in order to make it a pearl, the oyster goes over that piece of dust again and again and again, so that if you open it too early there are different versions of it. That's what I feel a writing career is, telling that same story until you reach perfection at some point. And it might not be the last version you tell, it might be the fifth or sixth or any number, but you continue to do it again and again.

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## NOTES

1 Nayeri lives in London with her partner Sam and their young daughter, Elena.

2 For safety reasons, Nayeri has not been able to return to Iran since her initial departure, aged 8.

3 Echoing much of Nayeri's own life story, the protagonist of her second novel is an Iranian refugee who grew up in Oklahoma, attended Ivy League universities and then eventually moved to Amsterdam, where her successful career in academia does not abate a deep longing for the landscapes and culture of the country she left as a child.

4 The character of Mam'ad, who Niloo befriends amidst the Iranian community in Amsterdam, is a once esteemed academic who is living in poverty as an undocumented migrant after multiple rejected attempts to claim asylum. Driven to despair, he commits suicide by setting himself alight in the city centre. This plotline is based on the real-life story of Kambiz Roustayi, who died in the same way in April 2011. In Nayeri's words, "He had lived in Amsterdam for a decade, following their rules, filling out their papers, learning their culture, his head always down. He did all that was asked of him and, in the end, he was driven to erase his own face, his

skin." Kambiz Rousayi's story is one of those featuring in *The Ungrateful Refugee*.

5 She has said on the topic: "I've always had Igbo [in my writing]. And I've always had well-meaning advice, often about how American readers will be confused, or they won't get something. I don't set out to confuse, but I also think about myself as a reader. I grew up reading books from everywhere and I didn't necessarily understand every single thing—and I didn't need to. So, I think for me, what was more important, for the integrity of the novel, was that I capture the world I wanted to capture, rather than to try to mold that world into the idea of what the imagined reader would think." (Chimamanda Ngozi Adichi)

## ABSTRACTS

**English**
This interview took place at the Writing on the Wall Literary Festival in Liverpool, England, on 23 May 2019. Nayeri was attending the event as part of an international tour to promote her latest book, *The Ungrateful Refugee*, a non-fictional account of the testimonies she has gathered through her travels to refugee camps in recent years, intertwined with a detailed and emotional account of her own experiences as an asylum seeker and a refugee. The discussion explores questions of writing refugee narratives and home-building in exile.

**Français**
Cet entretien a été réalisé le 23 mai 2019 pendant le festival littéraire « Writing on the Wall » à Liverpool, Angleterre. Dina Nayeri était présente à cet événement dans le cadre de sa tournée internationale de promotion de son dernier ouvrage, *The Ungrateful Refugee*, où elle rapporte les témoignages qu'elle a recueillis ces dernières années lors de séjours dans des camps de réfugiés, entremêlés à son récit détaillé et sensible de ses propres expériences comme demandeuse d'asile et refugiée. La discussion explore les questions des récits de réfugiés et de la construction d'un chez-soi en exil.

## INDEX

**Mots-clés**
Nayeri (Dina), exil, migration, réfugié, asile, construction d'un chez-soi

**Keywords**
Nayeri (Dina), exile, migration, refugee, asylum, home-building

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