Brown Lake/Boumiera:
Posthuman Screen Poetics for the Anthropocene

by

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the degree of:

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(Communications)

under the supervision of:

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CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

I, Samantha Lang, declare that this thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy (Communications) in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Technology Sydney.

This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

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ABSTRACT

This creative practice-based PhD thesis consists of an exegesis and creative works, which together investigate the possibilities of a non-traditional screenwriting poetics and filmmaking practices in response to Brown Lake, North Stradbroke Island, Queensland, Australia, with the aim of affording the lake an active voice. Since approaching the Anthropocene critically is an unsettled concept, this thesis engages with it as a connector term that brings cultural, ecological, and geological debates together, generating challenges for new creative responses. In doing so it builds upon and extends a growing body of academic inquiry that seeks to respond to the conditions of the Anthropocene using imaginative methods.

The creative component of this thesis is comprised of two 'screen maps': a Cinematic Virtual Reality film, *Anthropocene VR* (2018) and a moving image work *Brown Lake/Boumiera* (2021). These research artefacts engage with hyperlocal, experimental, immersive methods, to make visible the existence of non-human and human relationships, through what I term 'posthuman screen poetics'. As multimodal forms these screen maps re-imagine the future in terms of a representational justice for all.

This exegesis focuses in particular on the works of theorists in ecofeminism, post-human knowledge, and environmental humanities to de-centre the human through screen practice. It asks,

> What creative strategies – through non-traditional screen practices – might an ecofeminist and posthuman conceptual framework offer for opening up new imaginaries and new subjectivities of a place as complex and entangled as Brown Lake in relation to the provocations presented by the unsettled concept of the Anthropocene.

Furthermore, it asks how might we, through screen practice and image making, activate and reanimate a greater reciprocity of care and attention between place, beings, and non-beings? It considers how Brown Lake's body of water acts as a carrier for multiple histories – geological, ecological, and cultural – in a flow of endless events. It engages the screen idea as a mode of inquiry to connect this unsettled concept and other entangled narratives of place with relocated cinematic forms to create cartographies of an 'otherwise' of Brown Lake.

This thesis makes the claim that screen practice as a research methodology can articulate alternative perspectives, story structures, and screen experiences that reorientate perceptions of, and feelings about, the more-than-human aspects of place. This small act of resistance and activism within the limits of late-capitalist settler frameworks of power writes nature into the narrative as a protagonist, engaging affirmative ethics and critique with creativity.

KEYWORDS

Anthropocene, Cinema, Cinematic Virtual Reality, Creative Practice, Ecofeminism, Geontopower, Geopoetic, Nature, Photofilmic Forms, Place, Posthuman, Posthuman Screen Poetics, Screen Idea, Screen Map, Screenwriting.

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A big acknowledgement is due to the curator of Prototype, Lauren Carroll Harris, and to Alexandra Burke, who commissioned the major creative iteration of this doctoral project. Thanks also to Lauren for her brilliant curatorial essay. Create NSW were instrumental in providing resources for the *Anthropocene VR* as Proof of Concept for a bigger series of VR films.The Bundanon Trust provided two artist residencies during crucial periods of this research.

This thesis was produced and written during one of the most intense phases of my life, and perhaps the Earth's. I pay my respects to Gadigal and Bidgigal people of the Eora Nation that a major part of this thesis was written upon, and to the Quandamooka people of Minjerribah, where we filmed *Brown Lake/Boumiera.*

To Raymond Walker, Petrina Walker, Kaleenah Edwards, the family of Oodgeroo Noonuccal – thank you. Katie Noonan, too, for the collaboration that saw Oodgeroo's poem 'Dawn Wail for the Dead' translated into Jandai language and spoken by her great-granddaughter Kaleenah Edwards.

A special thanks goes to family and friends that have helped shape this research. Alice Addison, Siobhan Hannan, John Maynard, Bridget Ikin, Jacqui Payne, and Sue Laganza kept me afloat.

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It's not all smoothy smooth...
(Braidotti 2017)

We have been lulled by films, and other sources of images, to believe that our future is going to be grim – so we clutch on to the present. Many of us feel that there is nothing we can do to make change possible, or even desirable. We have lost our future image literacy in leaving it up to the experts and filmmakers to create it for us. But we can reclaim our ability to image socially just and an ecologically sustainable futures, and filmmakers can be part of this journey, if they chose to. (Hurley 2008, p. 354)

FORMAT OF THIS THESIS

This Doctor of Philosophy (Communications) thesis is comprised of a creative component and a written exegesis. The creative component is my primary contribution to my field of knowledge. It was realized through two iterations of a moving image screen project, each framed by the research concerns of this thesis. The outcomes of each iteration were public screenings and exhibitions at Australian art galleries and museums, conferences, and a public access online platform. These included:

- *Brown Lake/Boumiera* (2021) at Australian Centre for Moving Image, Melbourne (2021),
- Part of *Her Beauty, Her Terror* at Moreton Bay Regional Art Gallery, Queensland (2021),
- Fisher's Ghost Prize Finalist, Campbelltown, NSW (2021),
- Asia Pacific Triennale GOMA, Brisbane (2022),
- Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, NSW (2022) and open access online at Prototype (2021/22),
- *Anthropocene VR* (2018) at the Create NSW 360 Degree Conference, Sydney, NSW (2019), and
- ANU Environmental History Workshop, Fenner School, Canberra, ACT (2018).

The full video link to *Brown Lake/Boumiera* (2021) can be located here: https://vimeo.com/541473926

The full video link to *Anthropocene VR* (2018) can be located here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x1xJgUMey3s

The structure of the written exegesis comprises five chapters. Chapters One to Four move through a theoretical framework, the genealogy to my screen practice, a contextualising of Brown Lake/Boumiera, and an analysis of my screen idea. Chapter Five concludes the exegesis.

OVERVIEW

> Ethnography today, only makes sense ethically and politically as autoethnography (Emmelhainz 2021, p. 1)

This thesis comprises two creative research artefacts and an exegesis. The exegesis contains my personal reflections on the position from which I am writing, and it acknowledges the personal connections I have to the lake on North Stradbroke Island known to me as both Brown Lake and Boumiera. I want to acknowledge that this research project on Brown Lake was instigated from my position as an outsider to this place, despite family ties and personal entanglements that are intertwined with North Stradbroke Island/Minjerribah. My emplacement serves as a point of reflection throughout this thesis.

I recognize that any non-Indigenous screen practitioner and/or academic in Australia is working on unceded land. While another way of approaching Brown Lake/Boumiera would have been to focus more on Indigenous cosmologies of place, I have chosen to largely draw upon a Western knowledge framework that includes ecofeminist theory, posthuman knowledge, and continental philosophy to navigate the complex subject matter of this thesis. I acknowledge that there are limitations with taking this position, but I have also found connections between these discursive modes that both allow for acknowledgement and attribution and prevent improper or unnecessary use of Indigenous knowledge systems.

Like the space between Brown Lake/Boumiera's two names, I am situated between different knowledge systems and creative practices, and I recognize multiple ways of seeing, hearing, reading, embodying, experiencing, and relating with the lake. I feel a responsibility to speak from a Western acculturated perspective, if only to unlearn that perspective and find another. This thesis has unfolded across six years, during which there have been some seismic cultural shifts around Brown Lake and on the island generally, as well as in the larger context of the planet. I have attempted to respond to these as nimbly as the research and my personal circumstances would allow.

Some of my understanding of the lake has been informed by prior and longstanding relationships with members of a family who are part of the Goenpul Dandrubin people living on Quandamooka Country. Their ancestors were the first humans to inhabit the area surrounding Brown Lake and they continue to be custodians of that Country, taking responsibility for care of the land, sea, and waters of the area.

However this is not an action research project like that of academic and filmmaker Elisabeth Povinelli, whose rich collaboration with Karrabing Collective has produced such meaningful research through creative practice (Povinelli 2016). Her filmmaking, books, ideas, and concepts around geontopower have nonetheless provided a meaningful reference point throughout my studies.

My friends, the traditional custodians of Quandamooka Country have been, and are currently, engaged in their own scholarly research within the academy. This is the Country of poet and activist Oodgeroo Noonuccal and Indigenous feminist and author Aileen Moreton-Robinson. Equally, on Minjerribah there has been significant research, with fruitful collaborations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars, archaeologists, anthropologists and, sometimes, artists. Archaeologist Annie Ross and her work in Traditional Ecological Knowledge, in conjunction with Dandrubin Goenpul elder Dennis Moreton, bears testament to new knowledges that are produced through cross cultural collaboration (Ross et al. 2011).

Given that much of this creative practice-based research took place across the COVID-19 pandemic, I was not able to visit the lake or the island during most of 2020 and 2021. Hence, I was obliged to use some of the 'rough' digital content that I had collated from prior field trips to Brown Lake while staying at Moreton Bay Research Centre. I did, however, make a very short trip to complete the moving image work in February 2021 before going back into lockdown in June 2021. My research for this thesis is framed by, and limited to, those early field trips, as well as historical records, hydrology and geology reports, newspaper articles, and publications from the North Stradbroke Island Museum, all of which have contributed to my understanding of the entangled narratives of Brown Lake. Such entangled narratives appear repeatedly in a late-liberal settler environment such as Australia. My aim in creating the sonic and visual interpretations of Brown Lake is to acknowledge through screen practice the science, geography, geology, history, ancient and modern cultures, and non-human elements in dialogue with each other there. My screen works aim to creatively interrogate the act of witnessing the non-human as the primary mode of sensing the world.

COVID IMPACT STATEMENT

This thesis was undertaken across 2020 and 2021. The New South Wales and Queensland governments' lockdown and border closures impacted this project in the following ways:

Creative component

My screen work *Brown Lake/Boumiera* was commissioned in March 2020 with a Sydney Film Festival screening scheduled for June 2020. The project was substantially delayed due to lockdown and the prolonged Queensland border closures. As a result, the format of the project shifted. At one stage I planned to use only rough draft footage to meet a new delivery deadline of January 2021 for the Prototype series launch. That deadline changed to April 2021, again because of COVID-19. I re-imagined the project once more and attempted to visit Brown Lake in December 2020. After I arrived, I learned I had been a close contact of someone in Sydney, and I was obliged to remain in lockdown for the entirety of the visit. In February 2021, I spent three days filming at the lake. This meant a compressed post-production period before the screening of the final version of *Brown Lake/Boumiera* at ACMI in April 2021. Thus, the precarity of the COVID situation affected my access to the lake. This then meant I needed to rethink the work repeatedly to accommodate changing circumstances. Finally, the second lockdown period (June to October 2021) began one day before the opening of the exhibition 'Her Beauty, Her Terror' in Moreton Bay Regional Gallery, where my work was installed. While I was able to fly to Queensland, when I arrived I was informed by the gallery that I could not attend either the opening or the artist panel due to the government restrictions put in place that morning. A second artist panel was arranged, but on that occasion Greater Brisbane went into lockdown the week before, and I was able to attend only by Zoom.

Exegesis

The second New South Wales lockdown from June to October 2021 was the period I had allocated to writing most of the exegesis. Across that period, due to changing circumstances, for three months I was the sole household carer for my two children. Juggling schooling and part-time work made it impossible to work on the exegesis. In truth I also lost momentum. This meant that I was not able to re-engage with the exegesis until late January 2022.

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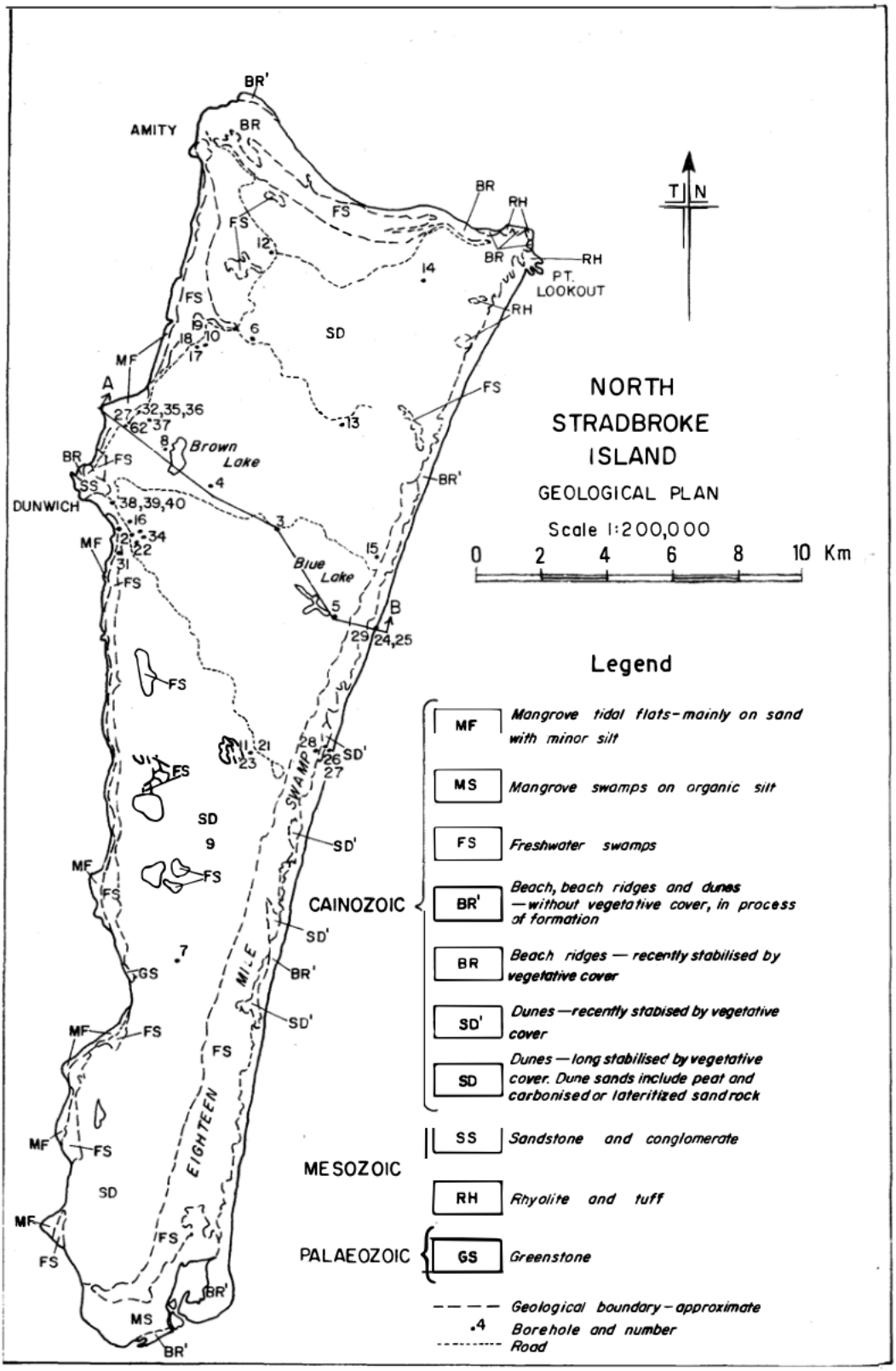
INTRODUCTION

Cinema is like the Anthropocene.
Cinema helps us see and experience the Anthropocene as aesthetic practice.

(Fay 2018)

To write about cinema in the epoch of the Anthropocene is to bring out new connections between these two practices that change how we think about both of them.

(Fay 2018)



Text.-fig. 1 Geological plan of North Stradbroke Island.

Figure A Diagram from North Stradbroke Island Geological Survey (Laycock 1978)

Brown Lake/Boumiera: An Entangled Landscape

> I am not from this place though my children have swum here since birth.
>
> (Liprot 2016) *The Outrun*

Brown Lake, a body of tea-stained water, is a perched lake, a twenty-thousand-year-old home to plants, insects, and animals and a part-time refuge to humans that sits above a sandstone water aquifer. Sealed by a solid layer of teewah sands it contains three layers of brown, amber and transparent – anoxic, cold and warm – fresh water. As well as being a children's place of laughter, Brown Lake is a female place, an ancestral place, a colonized place, a mined place, a reclaimed place, a hydrologically unpredictable place, and a place that features as the central character of this thesis. Place as protagonist. Brown Lake as feminine identity. Fractal of the Anthropocene

This place has troubled me since I first visited it. I have walked around, swum in, listened to, reflected upon, dreamt about, and filmed this small, discreet yet vibrant tea tree lake for over a decade. An assemblage of interconnecting narratives run around, within, across, outside, beneath and on top of Brown Lake – human and non-human – lively and inert. A mesmerizing stratigraphy of stories, hidden in plain view. It is these stories, hidden in plain view, that produced the primary questions that govern this thesis.

This hidden enclave of brown freshwater is also a place that has some personal relevance to me. I spend Christmas and other holidays together with a tangled family on North Stradbroke Island/Minjerribah in Quandamooka country, at a tiny farm that belongs to my partner's ex-wife. She is a Butchulla woman and not from this place either. My partner is Burmese-Australian and has spent several decades working with a Goenpul family from the island to secure native title, and more recently, claims to sovereignty. The 'farm', a vestige of the settler naming of place, is close to Brown Lake - though this popular tourist destination is better known to Goenpul, Noonuccal and Quandmooka people, its first human inhabitants, as Boumiera. For them the significance of this body of water is that it is the women's lake. It makes a pair with Blue Lake or Kaboora, the men's lake, and together they are seen, as a non-indigenous local told me, as 'the heart and lung' of the Island. Brown Lake/Boumiera is likewise the heart of this thesis. It is also a place that has forced me to make more rigorous sense of my own human and non-human entanglements.

Underscoring Brown Lake/Boumiera is the larger geography of North Stradbroke Island/Minjerribah, which has, in the last seventy years, been defined by significant human narratives. In 1949, sand mining operations commenced, first on the beachfront, then later inland, deleteriously affecting lakes and swamps close to Brown Lake. After much political wrangling, all mines were finally decommissioned in 2019, with resources allocated to the 'regeneration' of area affected by the mines.[1]

In the late 1990s the abundance of Minjerribah's freshwater of aquifer was pegged for water extraction potential by South-East Queensland councils. Today, over 28,000 megalitres of water leave the underground labyrinth of sandstone aquifers each day and make their way by pipes to the mainland to supply a growing suburban population in the nearby Redlands area (Pinner et al. 2019, p. 29). In addition, tourism throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has meant nearby Brisbane residents have built many holiday homes on the island, often visiting Brown Lake as a weekend leisure and recreational site. With the closure of the mine, part of the 'regeneration' project is to turn to 'ecotourism' as a means of sustaining the island's economy.

In 2011, after a long and embittering battle, the Indigenous inhabitants of the island, the Quandamooka people, evidenced their twenty-thousand-year-old connection to Country by winning a Federal court case to have their Native Title recognized (O'Rourke & Cooms 2011). Since 2016, Minjerribah/Brown Lake has been managed by the Quandamooka Yoolooburrabee Aboriginal Corporation (QYAC)[2]. North Stradbroke Island/Minjerribah is also notably the birthplace of, and home to, the beloved poet and activist Oodgeroo Noonuccal/Kath Walker, as well as academic and author of 'Talking up to the white woman', Aileen Moreton-Robinson (Moreton-Robinson 2000). I reference their works here because they relate to the environment, feminism, and ecofeminism mentioned later in this thesis.

When I first visited Brown Lake, I was told anecdotally by locals that it had been losing water and there was concern that without some intervention Brown Lake might, in fact, lose all of her water. There were conflicting reasons for the loss of this body of water, the primary life source for the surrounding ecosystem of tea-trees, sedges, frogs, dragonflies, birds and the occasional goanna, and inconclusive conjectures about what sustained Brown Lake and what or who might be responsible for her consistently losing water (Watts 2004). There was, however, a growing fear that this little-known corner of an

1 https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-12-13/stradbroke-island-sand-mining-ends-soon-whats-its-future/11792652
2 http://www.qyac.net.au

island in Queensland, this unassuming brown lake, was headed for extinction. Yet another casualty of the Anthropocene.

A striking, yet heterogenous place that makes clear these collisions of late-liberal settler societies, Brown Lake is thus a carrier of stories around environmental degradation, cultures of resource extraction, tourism, activism, and significantly, unceded lands and indigenous histories. Such an entangled meeting point draws together what filmmaker and academic Povinelli calls the 'figures and tactics of the Anthropocene' (Povinelli 2017, p. 49), which I will discuss later in the thesis. As such, Brown Lake offers a rich and complex place through which to engage with creative screen practices as a means to consider the ecological, cultural, and political questions provoked by the Anthropocene and to express the affects and percepts of the more-than-human at a moment in the planet's history when relationships between human and non-human require urgent reorientation.

Which narratives should be privileged depends entirely upon the perspective(s) provided. There are human narratives that contextualize Brown Lake within its recreational and leisure uses and for its resource extraction purposes, from environmental history, geological and archaeological perspectives, as well as, significantly, within its Indigenous cosmology. Within the limits of this thesis, I explore these histories briefly to bring into focus the 'more-than-human' narrative of being Brown Lake.

In thinking through ecofeminist and posthuman philosophies that propose strategies for acknowledging the lake's agentic force, of writing the unseen into existence, and of de-centring the human, this thesis explores the ways that non-human narratives can be made visible through screen practice. With Brown Lake as the subject of this research, my theoretical approach has been to respond to Val Plumwood's challenge for artists to write 'an active voice in nature' (Plumwood 2009) and Bradotti's call for multispecies thinking and affirmative ethics (Braidotti 2017b). The aim of my creative practice research is to 'write into existence' (Povinelli 2016) the marginalized subjectivity of the more-than-human beingness of Brown Lake by employing screen practice as a methodology to tell a story that evidences Brown Lake's vitality and point of view.

It is by foregrounding Brown Lake's subjectivity through screen practice that I argue for the value of creating a non-human perspective that will shift the axis on anthropocentric storytelling and reorient human and non-human relationships. To call upon cinema, and by playing with film genre conventions, I read Brown Lake losing water as a mystery, a little like a murder mystery movie, where the dead or dying woman cannot

seemingly speak for herself since she is the apparent victim of a crime around which there are several suspects. The task of the detective is to find the culprit by locating allies, finding clues, and bypassing red herrings to discern the truth of the matter. In the narrative of this thesis, however, I see my task not as having to solve the crime – for that is far too complex a proposition – but rather as resurrecting the voice of the dead or dying woman in order that she may be more fully written into the narrative. That, I propose, may allow for Brown Lake's survival.

My aim in this thesis therefore is to foreground 'Place as Subject', to reject the notion that 'landscape' is a background to human activity and extend the idea of place as sentient and in dialogue with human and nonhuman entities. I understand place as geopoetic rather than geopolitic; as a series of endless events; as a meeting point of narratives, some of which are conflicting. My aim here is not to resolve these conflicting narratives of place but to acknowledge the multiple subjectivities at play. By engaging with aspects of ecofeminist theory and posthuman knowledge to create a toolbox of creative strategies I propose the de-centring of the human and the reorienting of the non-human as a way of attributing to Brown Lake her own agentic force. By making screen works that privilege Brown Lake's point view, I offer new arrangements to open up new worlds.

Research Questions

INITIAL IDEA FOR BROWN LAKE SCREENPLAY - 2016

Three women visit Brown Lake. They are all about to turn fifty. They do not know each other. One born in Sri Lanka, the other in Australia, the other near the lake. It's late summer. The first is swimming, using the brown freshwater of the lake as a giant swimming pool. She is methodical, rhythmic, precise in her strokes. She finishes her swim and becomes distracted by dragonflies. She is a scientist. Her research project involves analysing the selective perception of these scintillating creatures. Eventually she will understand how the insects' eyes and brains coordinate to attack their prey. Her research will be used in cutting edge technology in drones. Drones used in non-human warfare. She smiles at the dragonflies as they form their heart shaped love making tryst, then sits in the warm sand and watches as other humans come and go past a 'Bathers Only' council sign. Brown Lake will bring her career success. Next stop. Boston. She breathes out. A relief to leave this politically fraught place behind.

The second woman is walking an uneven brackish trail around the lake. She has a camera. She records any evidence of extinction or catastrophe. Which, for her, is things dying. Dead Kangaroo, Dead Frog, Dying Lace Monitor. Old Cicada shells. Receding water line. She looks purposeful. Recording helps her maintain her purpose. She uploads her images, alongside facts, on a website that advocates for a better world. An environmental activist, she believes the planet is dying. A young man, late twenties, lanky, appears from behind a Mahogany oak. She startles, feels hostile towards his masculine presence but he grins at her, moves towards her, holding out some keys. "These yours?' She recognizes her car keys - but shakes her head in denial.

The third woman has taken a battered 4WD along the unsurfaced road to the other side of the lake. There is a small beach amidst her favorite paperbark trees where she can watch the reeds sway while she strategises around the political conundrums of being a local resident, whilst supporting water extraction programs from the island. If she can keep both sides happy she will maintain her seat in the next state election. She fought for this role and wants to maintain her power. Something her mother never had a chance to enjoy. So why shouldn't she? She watches the movement of the lake's water. Decides it's not the day for a swim. Ancestors are not in favor.

At the outset of my research practice my aim was to write about ageing, women and the Anthropocene in a conventional screenplay for a cinematic film. Three women, Faith, Hope and Sugar, were the main figures in my screenplay. As I wrote, they visited Brown Lake over and over, asking themselves questions about the various ways in which their lives were unfolding. Perhaps because of Brown Lake's significance to its indigenous community as a women's lake unwittingly I appropriated that aspect of its agency on their behalf. The answers to these women's questions about ageing seemed to relate to the body of water.

Fluctuations in water volume, animals and plants living and dying, spaces being named, renamed, identities being reclaimed served as parallels in the lives of the women.[3] Each woman felt she was losing agency in her life, and this was somewhat reflected in the gradual disappearance of water they witnessed, at Brown Lake. The lake, entangled though it was, was a place where they perceived themselves in sharper focus, in relationship to a different kind of time and space – one that was ancient, yet vulnerable. As film theorist Pamela Gravagne writes in her book about women ageing on screen, 'Every woman could greatly benefit by reimagining how she would like to see herself' (Gravagne 2013, p. 104).

The lake became a place where these three women, living and dying in the era of the Anthropocene, wished to re-imagine themselves. As I worked on the screen idea I was reminded of a Canadian film called *'In the Company of Strangers'* (Scott et al. 1991).

[3] Elisabeth Poviinelli – geontologies – land turning away from humans

In it, a bus-load of older women from diverse backgrounds are stranded and take refuge in an abandoned house by a lake. Over a day and a night, the women share stories of their younger selves and contemplate the end of life. In this poignant film the lake acts as a calming backdrop for coming to terms with their mortality.

Yet something about watching this film again made me take pause and consider Brown Lake from a different perspective. Why wasn't Brown Lake the protagonist in my story, not the backdrop? Wasn't this one of the questions raised by the Anthropocene? Why couldn't the women, in fact, participate as one of the multiple species who 'storied' the lake itself? Considering a shift in the storytelling axis would reorient the view on both the lake and the women. It would put their human ageing in perspective, give them a different kind of material presence, and connect them to the lake relationally – in a vibrant series of 'agencements' (Bennett 2010, p. 23) – rather than through a hierarchy of subjectivity.

From this viewpoint, the mystery unfolding at Brown Lake, in which a subject other than the women plays a meaningful role, would act as a kind of call and response to the conditions of Anthropocene, by positing place as active and in relationship with humans. The mystery of why Brown Lake was losing water might be revealed once the idea of a conventional screenplay was relocated and the human narrative decentred. This was the starting point for my research.

My imaginary reorientation of Brown Lake away from recreation, resource or political backdrop for humans to a becoming protagonist in the narrative, also provided a loose entry point through which to trouble over questions about what kinds of storytelling are needed to respond to the unsettled concept of the Anthropocene (Braidotti 2017a; Plumwood 2009; Povinelli 2016). Reading philosopher and sociologist, Bruno Latour's book *Down to Earth*, I found myself confronted by his assertion that 'what is certain is that we can no longer tell ourselves the same old stories. Suspense prevails on all fronts'(Latour 2018, p. 44). Latour proposes that storytelling in the Anthropocene needs a 'reorientation, like a compass, a new North' (p. 54). Responding to this call for a change in direction 'towards the terrestrial' that will 'need all our powers of investigation if we are to find our place among other actors '(p. 87) also provides a critical focus for the concerns of this thesis, and scaffolds the main research question:

> What creative strategies might an ecofeminist and posthuman conceptual framework offer for opening up new imaginaries, new subjectivities of a place as complex and entangled as Brown Lake – through non-traditional screen practices

– in relation to the challenges/provocations presented by the unsettled concept of the Anthropocene?'

Extending on this first question: In a post-cinema landscape, what relocated photofilmic forms of screen practice might open up a way of expressing place in its agentic form? And finally, as a means of interrogating the value of creative practice research: How might screen practice as methodology offer a means to realign human and non-human relationships?

Screen Practice | Relocated PhotoFilmic Forms

> We don't want false, polished, slick films - we prefer them rough, unpolished, but alive; we don't want rosy films - we want them the colour of blood.
>
> Jonas Mekas 1961[4]

> Post-cinema is in a state of unstable equilibrium between the original, persistent cinema dispositif and new ways of making and considering the film, as well as its mode of working in the postmodern cultural context.
>
> Chateau and Moure 2021[5]

> Post-cinema is also the realization of possibilities left unexplored.
>
> Casetti 2016)

The aim of this thesis is to shift the axis of anthropocentric storytelling using rough unpolished but alive screen practices in order to realise some of the possibilities left unexplored, in the post-cinema era. Just as there are new ways of seeing Brown Lake in the Anthropocene, there are other possible ways of seeing cinema. Agnès Varda, for example, was a female pioneer of emerging cinematic and digital formats, experimenting with what was available to her, to tell stories that might not otherwise have been seen and shared (Moure 2020, p. 27). If Brown Lake is the protagonist of the narrative then

[4] American Film Group Manifesto 1961

[5] Post Cinema Amsterdam University Press B.V., Amsterdam 2020

relocated photofilmic forms (Burgin 2020; Casetti 2016)[6] [7]are the lead characters of the screen practice methodologies in this thesis.

This thesis asks how might housing the narrative of Brown Lake differently, under different framing, or even delimiting that framing, change perceptions of its agency? What screenwriting poetics might shift and reframe how a human audience might understand Brown Lake? If feelings and perceptions are the tools of cinema, they are also drivers of human behaviour. What screen forms could reorient and reanimate, what anthropologist, Deborah Bird Rose proposed as a dialogical relationship with place? (Rose 2015, 2002).

Whatever it was about Brown Lake that caught my eye, or rather whatever it was that happened when I fell under her 'gaze', how might that be communicated to others? As with poets such as Judith Wright in her poem 'The Lake' or Julianna Spahr in her anthology *Then, There Now*, or Alice Oswald in 'Falling Awake, or Lisa Gorton in 'Empirical', who with their poetry reorient the perceiving and feeling places on Earth, what are the means through screen poetry to establish a different paradigm of feeling for places in nature? What if there were a screen poetic of inverted perspectives and of dialogue, mutuality and care? For example, if we saw how place communicates its care for us, might we then better communicate our care for that place? How might we, through screen practice and image making, contribute to activating an affirmation of place and a situated ethics of care?

Hybrid documentary forms have already grappled with this question, in films such as *Honeyland* (Stefanov et al. 2019) where a woman in an act of reciprocity, shares equally in the honey her bees produce, or the inverse where in *Taming the Garden* (Jashi 2021) an impoverished local resident sells her hundred-year-old tree to a billionaire who collects and ships it, at great expense, to his own private garden of Eden whilst the villagers weep over losing the tree that is lost to them. Where might other possibilities lie?

To employ an advanced capitalist paradigm – what would a marketing campaign for an inversion of Earth and human relations look like? There is significant artistic activity engaged in answering this kind of question, through practice right now. At Le

[6] Photofilmic narrative forms offer alternatives to the mass-produced verisimilitude of hegemonic mass culture." Burgin 2020

[7] What allows an experience to relocate itself in new physical and media environments? A new context brings transformations along with it. relocation," as Francesco Casetti calls it, using devices of all kinds that change the films. Casetti https://reframe.sussex.ac.uk/post-cinema/5-1-casetti/

Palais de Tokyo, a recent exhibition is titled 'Reclaiming the Earth'[8] and features work by Indigenous Australian artists, Judy Watson and Megan Cope. The Earth is immense though, so the question of colliding scales arises – human size, planetary size and/or human time, geologic time. Individually, we cannot endeavour to meet a challenge of such magnitude and scale. Collectively we can, however, specifically locate, place by place, artwork by artwork, poem by poem, film work by film work, advocate for and be part of, a great marketing campaign for reimagined relationships between all humans, not just select categories, and the Earth.

And if colliding scales of time are a challenge, so too are the colliding scales of perception. Whilst Amitav Ghosh in his *Great Derangement* (Ghosh 2018) laments the smallness of the realist novel's imaginary, over the last century, with its apparent distaste for the more-than-human, catastrophic planetary events of climate change[9], he perhaps underestimates the power of the micro as means to reconceive the macro.

The methodology employed in this thesis, through experimental screen practices, is drawn from several key manifestos for filmmaking as well as by using critical theory creatively. From these sources I fashioned a principle of practice, which I set out fully in chapter four. Briefly, the Manifesto for Sustainable Screen Writing (Millard 2014) offered some guiding principles: accretion, think big, act small, write with your camera, your iphone, your voice memos, engage provocative competence and improvisation, write through picture editing. Karrabing's dirty manifesto (Povinelli 2016) was also influential, as I elaborate on in Chapter Two. Early experimental VR work done with Erth Visual and Physical Theatre[10] inspired the proof-of-concept VR work and gave me some principles of practice to work with and against. The notion of non-profit, public access work was important, so participation in film curator Lauren Carrol Harris' Prototype[11] collective, open access, online platform of moving image works fulfilled that remit. A lot of my methodology was driven intuitively – from an early encounter with Brown Lake I felt differently about the agency of place – and as a filmmaker my first response was to want to frame and house that new feeling and perspective on place with a camera. I filmed what I felt more than what I saw.

[8] https://palaisdetokyo.com/en/exposition/reclamer-la-terre/
[9] Although one could argue that George Elliot's great novel *Middlemarch* was anything but disinterested in the more-than-human.
[10] https://www.erth.com.au/prehistoric-vr
[11] https://youaretheprototype.art

By noticing, paying attention, and actively listening to the small, slow and intimate aspects of Brown Lake, I eventually decided I wanted to experiment with different film forms as a means to construct the micro affects and percepts of the lake. To do so, I engaged with cinematic virtual reality and artist moving images, rather than drawing from the conventional feature or short film practices that, as a feature film and television director, I had spent several decades previously working with[12]. I have used lo-fi devices, recycled materials, and improvised scripting processes in order to keep things intimate, slow and accessible. I wanted to create conditions that might reorient an audience and activate in them an enlivened connection with place, not as a place to possess, or argue over amongst themselves as humans, but Brown Lake as a subjective entity with whom they find themselves in horizontal relationship of reciprocity. I started small, with this research on Brown Lake as agentic subject because it was in the quiet moments at the lake that I experienced a seismic reorientation of perspective. If I were geophilic I might say that I fell in love with this place.

Shaping the narrative of this thesis, the first chapter of this dissertation engages with the unsettled concept of the Anthropocene, first interrogating the Anthropocene as both framing concept for geological and cultural debate, working towards Latour's suggestion that might operate most usefully as 'connector' device that brings together scientists, philosophers and artists. (Davis &Turpin 2016, p.49). In it, I describe the 'conceptual toolbox' that informed the creative methodology of this thesis. I also outline key provocations from ecofeminist and critical posthuman theorists that point to methods for reanimating relationships between human and non-humans. These include nature in an active voice, affirmative ethics and aesthetics as an analytics of existence, all of which offer opportunities for decentring the human on screen. To establish the aims of the creative research, I link this conceptual toolbox to the practical application of screen practices via an understanding of geopoetics (Last 2017; Magrane 2020), gesturing to the notion of the geopoetic as 'screen map'.

The second chapter establishes a genealogy of cinematic and photofilmic works about specific places, within which my creative component operates. I provide several short case studies. I first address ecofeminist moving image works and the poetic video essay, then move to the hybrid docu-drama feature film form using *Quattro Volte* (Frammartino 2010) and its use of perspective and parallelism to achieve multi-species

[12] I have worked as a film and television writer/director following more conventional filmmaking pathways albeit often in an independant/freelance context.

subjectivities as an example. I discuss techniques employed in several artist moving image works by Su Yu Shin, Robert Nugent and Malena Szlam with regards to subjectivities of place. I then examine the works of Karrabing Collective and Rojave Film Commune, who 'write into existence' the 'otherwise' of site specific, hyper local, works that employ diverse and lo-fi screen materialities. Finally, I review several immersive Cinematic Virtual Reality works that aim to present place in its agentic form and suggest post cinema is about encounter as opposed to storytelling. I argue for the gap in knowledge around the site-specific, hyperlocal, agentic, heterogenous, subjectivity of Brown Lake as a 'changescape' (Gibson 2015) and claim an original contribution to knowledge through the generation of two screen maps (my own term) that map Brown Lake's posthuman, polycentred subjectivity in terms of its everchanging directionality, movement and connections, extending the screen encounter beyond the confines of the rectangular frame.

In the third chapter I turn to Brown Lake itself. I focus on the narratives of the colour brown as ecological, as cultural, and as political. I do this to make visible the stratigraphy of stories around the brown water at Brown Lake. Drawing on Brown Lake's environmental history, I explore the specificities of its geology, hydrology, and ecosystems as an extension of interpreting the liveliness of the place. In parallel, I examine the indigenous ways of knowing place and of having care for country. This speaks to the overlaps and the gaps in continental ways of knowing with indigenous ways of knowing place. The contextualizing of 'place as subject' feeds into the methodology through screen practice in the fourth chapter.

In the fourth chapter, a definition of the 'screen idea' (Macdonald 2013, p. 6) – as a way of connecting the unsettled concept, entangled narratives, and relocated forms in the development and production of the film works – provides insight into my choice of pluralistic approaches to screenwriting or scripting, as well as the articulation of Brown Lake as 'changescape' (Gibson 2015). These pluralistic approaches are influenced by the 'conceptual toolbox' set up in Chapter One. I discuss the outcomes of the cinematic virtual reality and artist moving image works of Brown Lake in light of the aims of the creative practice research, which is to provide multiple perspectives from which to understand and relate to a site-specific place, to open up the world of the non-human and affirm its agency and subjectivity, to realign human and the non-human relationships, and to write into existence the otherwise of Brown Lake

Chapter 4 thus explores Brown Lake as a body of water whose movements can be navigated through 'screen maps', rather than be 'seen' or 'told' through the traditional

industrial method of the screenwriting and screen production. Where the screenplay suggests a human point of view, the use of a VR camera that can move through time and space without providing a singular perspective instead offers multiple viewing experiences (polyphonic) that allow for place to be experienced differently each time it is met or visited. This builds on the notion of the 'screen map'. Furthermore, I consider how Brown Lake's body of water acts as a carrier for multiple histories, and endless events, and how it through the artist moving image work Brown Lake can be 'seen' to be engaging with the figures and tactics of the Anthropocene, the Desert, Virus and Animist,(Povinelli 2016, p. 1), not as an object upon which those figures impose themselves but as an active participant and subject within a larger planetary design.

Thesis Structure

The rationale for the structure of this thesis-as-assemblage is to build, through both the creative components and the dissertation, a stratigraphy of narratives that open up ways of accessing the Brown Lake's agentic form. In doing so, I take inspiration from Ross Gibson's description of place as a 'changescape', where he suggests that 'place is not a location but a series of endless events' (Gibson 2015). I have structured this thesis on Brown Lake, not as a definitive and/or fixed piece of research about a landscape but as a way of producing new knowledge around place as poly-centred, active, subjectivity that will continue to become something other than what is set down here.

Reflecting the lake, this thesis has its own stratigraphy, a layering of ideas, questions, concepts, theoretical frameworks. and methodologies. This assembling, layer by layer, of an ecofeminist call for an active voice, a recognition of figures of the Anthropocene in places, an environmental history of place, geography, geopoetics, Indigenous cosmologies, collisions, and the intersection of thoughts, screen practice, screen maps, screenings, installations, online access, research impacts, and further questions has created an assemblage of new knowledge

The thesis, as a stratigraphic assemblage of 'creativity with critique' (Braidotti 2019 p. 46), provides a way of being with Brown Lake that acknowledges the palimpsest of narratives surrounding her, as well as the agentic force of her embodied, material self. It argues for an imaginary of Brown Lake that acknowledges its geological, topographical, historical, ecological, ethical, aesthetic and cross-cultural specificities, all of which contribute to her heterogenous, polycentred, yet specifically located, agentic identity. I

claim that employing site-specific screen practice to produce a geopoetics of place in the form of screen maps acts as a form of engaged analysis of the Anthropocene as cultural debate. In Latour's terms, the filmmaker might act as a 'diplomat' (Latour 2013, p.16-17)[13] to engage with the Anthropocene as a connector term to bring together science, art, and philosophy to better understand human and non-human relations.

Creative Component

1. The moving image work – *Brown Lake/Boumiera* (2021) – employs different perspectives and media formats to decentre the human by suggesting a non-human perspective of the lake and by making parallel relations between non-humans and human. Furthermore, the means of distribution of this screen work is significant in that it can be witnessed on multiple platforms and always with open access. Engaging with human audiences in different ways extends the sense of 'meeting' with the lake. As Martin Buber says, 'All real living is meeting' (Friedman 2002). This screen work has been 'met' in six ways: (i) online as a public artwork across phones, tablets and computers as a kind of 'portable landscape', (ii) as an immersive installation in a Moreton Bay Regional gallery close to North Stradbroke Island, (iii) as an ACMI film screening with a Q+A discussion afterwards, (v) as part of a film progam in the Asia Pacific Triennale at GOMA, and (vi) as a finalist in the Fisher's Ghost Art prize.

2. The virtual reality (VR) proof of concept work – *Anthropocene VR* (2018) – is a puppeteered film made in collaboration with Erth Visual and Physical. Brown Lake was reconstructed from recycled materials of wood, paper, steel, wax ,and plastic and filmed from the perspective of Brown Lake's water cycle, with dragonflies, rocks and people as supporting cast. The water of Brown Lake travels around the lake, once again decentring the human perspective and offering the viewer a more-than-human embodied experience. This creative work is a further iteration of this project's 'screen idea' (MacDonald 2012). This VR experience was on view at the Create NSW 360 conference on VR innovation (2019), as well at the Environmental History Workshop at the Fenner School at ANU (2018), and will soon be a permanent public installation at North Stradbroke Island Museum. Again, the nature of this immersive work is to propel the viewer towards a sense of an embodied 'meeting with the lake', even if in a more abstracted form.

[13] http://modesofexistence.org/extrait-de-lentretien-a-la-revue-critiques-bruno-latour-sur-le-diplomate/

Through these two creative research artefacts and this exegesis, the purpose of the research has been to create new knowledge in the form of a geopoetic of place as screen map, that is, events that offer a human audience on-going experiences of being with Brown Lake, through screen practice, as a means to inspire further enquiry into human and non-human relationships. Throughout this thesis, I connect the Anthropocene, place, and cinema. Brown Lake is an entangled meeting point of the Anthropocene. Focusing this thesis on Brown Lake's subjectivity and agency through screen practice is a response to the challenge to find new connections between Anthropocene and cinema that change how we think about both of them (Fay 2018). As women's film theorist Hoi F. Cheu posits in 'Cinematic Howling':

> Humankind is a story species; to be healthy, a human society needs artists to substantiate new possibilities in images and words. (Women's) cinema does not generate only a subversive drive that we need if we are to survive cultural assimilation, but also fresh, relevant stories and images to rehabilitate the self that loses itself.' (Cheu 2014, p. 185)

This creative practice research experiments with finding ways for filmmakers to remake image worlds that activate their audiences to envisage a better future on Earth.

CHAPTER ONE

Anthropocene | Reorienting the Human and the Non-Human

> For us the project of belonging involves both participating in the vast experiment that is the Anthropocene and connecting deeply to specific places and concerns.
>
> JK Gibson-Graham (2011) 'A feminist political imaginary of solidarity'

> Looking ahead, dissonant forms of knowledge and argument about Earth present and future will be key to forging a 'good Anthropocene.'
>
> Castree (2021) 'Framing, deframing and reframing the Anthropocene'

The Anthropocene – An unsettled concept

Although the term has yet to be adopted officially by the International Commssion on Stratigraphy[14], which oversees the official geological time chart, over the last decade the Anthropocene has gained substantial scientific currency to describe our present as the first geological era created by human activity (Steffen, Crutzen & McNeill 2007). A rapidly increasing human population, acceleration of industrial production, use of agricultural chemicals, and prolific resource extraction has led to the assertion that human activity is impacting the Earth's geology.[15] This, in turn, raises profound philosophical questions of sustainability, the limits of democracy, and history (Chakrabarty 2009). Consequently, social science discourses, including but not limited to, posthuman philosophy, environmental humanities, and eco-feminist theory, have been calling for at least the last decade for a thorough rethink of how we view humanity's relationship to the Earth; they also emphasise the necessity for a recalibration of the dominant paradigms of hegemonic, global commodity cultures and power differentials, in part, by challenging classic binaries

[14] https://stratigraphy.org
[15] https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-019-01641-5

of human/non-human, life/non-life, subject/object, geologic time/human time, male/female, black/white, wealthy/poor. Across disciplines, there have been many lively calls for affirmative action in extending understandings of the interconnectedness of beings and non-beings, in all their diversity and complexity (Braidotti & Hlavajova 2018; Gibson-Graham 2011; Plumwood 2009).

Further to this call, key Anthropocene feminists (Grusin 2017) have proposed terms such as Capitolocene, Plantationocene, Chluthulucene (Haraway 2015) or more recently 'Elachistocene' (Schneiderman 2017) in an attempt to remove the focus from 'Anthropos' and extend ways of describing unequal relations among humans and non-humans, industrial ecologies, the human significance on the web of life, and geological stratigraphy through resource extraction and environmental degradation. Feminist and posthuman critiques of the use of 'Anthropos' have been dynamic and expansive. Donna Haraway, Rosi Braidotti, Elisabeth Povinelli, Donna Barad, Anna Tsing, Isabelle Stengers, Stacey Alaimo and Jill Schneiderman, among others, have contested the androcentric universalizing of the human experience with the use of the term 'Anthropocene', claiming it masks exploitations and eschews questions of exclusion and participation. It remains 'male-centred' and thus 'dominated by the tyranny of narrow focus and minimum rethink' (Plumwood 2009, p. 113).

Across this exegesis, I maintain a dialogue with these 'Anthropocene feminist' descriptive modes and value the differentiation provided by these multiple ways of voicing planetary concerns. My use of the term 'Anthropocene', as first coined by Eugene Stoermer and Paul Crutzen, two decades ago (Crutzen & Stoermer 2021), seeks not to eschew these modes, but rather to build upon the proposal by French philosopher and sociologist Bruno Latour that, despite its descriptive limitations, the 'Anthropocene' can be used a 'connector term' (Davis & Turpin 2015, p. 49). Since Latour is driven by the understanding that modernity has been warped by the dividing of nature from science, he recognizes the potential of Anthropocene to bridge the historical divide between apparently 'neutral' scientific narratives and politically nuanced cultural ones. He posits that the Anthropocene is as much part of a cultural debate as a geological one; it is also part of a philosophical and artistic one: 'The Anthropocene is a connector term that suggests science and politics is connected so it brings together scientists, artists and philosophers' (Latour 2014) This in turn raises questions about aesthetics, ethics and the environment. Latour is not alone.

The question of how do we tell stories that re-connect the human and the non-human, as housed by the term 'Anthropocene', has been taken up by scientists who acknowledge the storytelling capacity of their field, and by philosophers and artists who are enriching their stories with understandings and speculations about science. Whether it is through Povinelli's (2016) figures of the Anthropocene – the Desert, Virus and Animist – and her filmmaking practices, or Anna Tsing's (2015, 2017) study of Matsuke mushrooms in *Mushrooms at the End of the World*, or Donna Haraway's (2016) speculative fabulations on multispecies thinking in *Staying with the Trouble*, this term has triggered intense debate about how, through storytelling, we can rethink our human relationship with the earth.

The work of this thesis thus joins the growing canon of 'connected' theorists and practitioners who are asking essential questions about human activity on Earth: How we can reorient the behaviours associated with a belief in human exceptionalism(Debaise & Stengers 2022; Tsing et al. 2017); How we can reimagine proper questions and approaches to a changing planet (Stengers 2021); How we can recast human stories within the context of larger synergetic time frames and processes (Ghosh 2018); How we can rethink what it means to be human in posthuman terms (Braidotti 2017a). Provoking a proliferation of questions over the last decade, the cultural debate around the unsettled concept of Anthropocene has produced a sprawling, prolific, multiplicity of cross-disciplinary scientific discourses, philosophical thinking and artistic practices in response to the still-contested human geological epoch.

This epoch is characterised by what philosopher Timothy Morton describes as the 'hyperobjects', meaning objects such as global warming, styrofoam, and radioactive plutonium, that are so massively distributed in time and space as to transcend spatiotemporal specificity, (Morton 2010, p. 130). Arguably a hyperobject itself, this epoch is overwhelming. It feels bigger than human capacity to manage it. The climate crisis and the potential mass extinction of humans and non-humans alike that are attributed to anthropocentric, capitalist, extractive, carbon imaginaries, and other exclusionary ways of being on planet Earth (Burtynsky 2013; Burtynsky et al. 2019) might also be seen as insurmountable hyperobjects that nonetheless demand innovative and complex responses. According to Morton, hyperobjects not only become visible during

an age of ecological crisis, but alert humans to the ecological dilemmas defining the age in which they live.[16]

Alongside the scientific and philosophical contributions, discourses in post-art, post-cinema (Chateau & Moure 2020), sustainable screenwriting studies (Millard 2014), women's film theory (Cheu 2014), and Anthropocene film theory (Colebrook 2017; Fay 2018) demonstrate a turn to alternative perspectives and modes of art and screen practice (Maras 2009; Dooley 2021; Emmelhainz 2021; Macdonald 2013; Munt 2016) that both contest cinematic and artistic conventions and challenge representations of women, nature and a sustainable future (Hurley 2008). Central to the emergence of this dynamic and lively field of artistic thought and practice – are calls for a heightened imaginary response to climate crisis through storytelling. As Morton (2018) argues, action must be massive and collective. He suggests that '*the experience of art* provides a model for a kind of co-existence of ecological ethics and politics we want to achieve between humans and non-humans' because 'beauty gives you a fantastic impossible access to the inaccessible' (p.41, my italics).

Artistic practitioners, and more specifically screen practitioners, have troubled over creating radically transformed modes of storytelling in order to challenge limited and anthropocentric perspectives and time scales that have been dominated by the tyranny of narrow focus and minimum rethinking. Today, Anthropocene art and film works, not unlike viruses, proliferate at an inhumanly fast pace, forming new arrangements and assemblages, whether as a film collective such as Australian group Karrabing writing themselves into an 'analytics of existence' with *When the Dogs Talked* (KarrabingCollective 2014); the feature film *Quattro Volte* (Frammartino 2010), which offers up horizontal perspectives for plants, animals and humans; or the Indian collective Raqs Media Collective, who collided human/geologic time scales with their moving image work *The Blood of Stars* (2017), in which creative tactics shift human perceptions and feelings about their place on Earth. To return to Latour: 'there is not yet an institution to house a new 'terrestrial' politic' (2018, p. 90), but cinema with its ability to express affect and percepts has always been a medium through which ideology or philosophy can be tried out through storytelling (Colebrook 2006; Deleuze & Guattari 1994).

[16] *Coffield, Kris. "Interview: Timothy Morton". Fractured Politics. Archived from the original on 2011-08-16.*

Changing Earth

Now a keyword in academia after two decades of usage (Crutzen & Stoermer 2021), the Anthropocene, as geological term, has solidified Crutzen and Stoermer's earlier assertion that the Earth is active, changing and affected by human activity. Until that term made its appearance, three key insights identified by earlier geoscientific scholars had been used in the humanities in different iterations but were not able to connect science with the humanities in a manner that gained purchase outside of the field (Castree 2014). Nonetheless they are significant and perhaps worth reiterating for the purposes of this creative research. These three insights are: Earth is active and changing (Graedel & Crutzen 1989); humans and ecosystems interact in unpredictable ways (Folke et al. 2002); and an experimental ethos between disciplines is essential (Lorimer & Driessen 2014).

The concept of the Anthropocene as a geological epoch 'changed everything' when it first appeared (Klein 2014). Even if the Anthropocene remains unresolved as a geological epoch, as a *connector* term (Latour 2018), it offers significant opportunities for the humanities to rethink cultural narratives and reimagine new ways of engaging with the Earth. For example, a key response to the Anthropocene that came from the humanities was historian Dipesh Chakrabarty's (2009) article 'The Climate of History: Four Theses', in which he questions the limits of democracy and its sustainability and observes the incongruencies brought about by human time rubbing up against geologic time. This marked a significant turn in the way human history might be considered (Robin & Steffen 2007). Despite the impact of Chakrabarty's essay, geographer Castree (2014) argues that initially work coming out of the environmental humanities was from 'inventor-discloser' or 'deconstructor-critic'[17] positions that prevented the discourse from being taken outside of the humanities themselves, and therefore had limited impact within society at large. Castree suggests there is a need for a greater willingness from the humanities to play the role of 'engaged-analyst' in collaboration with the field of geosciences and beyond:

> The engaged-analyst does not only rely on science to at some level frame their own intellectual endeavours; nor does s/he only rest content with questioning scientific representations of the world from afar for various ontological, ethical or political reasons, however compelling. Instead, the engaged-analyst – recognising the enduring power of scientists to affect the thoughts and actions of societal

[17] These terms are explained in Castree (2014)

> decision-makers – tries to get their hands dirty in the places those scientists operate. (Castree 2014, pp. 243-244)

For this thesis, I extend Castree's call for the engaged analyst to get their 'hands dirty' as a way of framing the endeavours of a creative practitioner. A documentary film such as *Fire of Love* (Dosa 2022), where two French volcanologist spend their lives documenting erupting volcanoes in close proximity, brings to mind the notion of an engaged analyst. In line with Bruno Latour's (2013) notion of the Anthropocene as 'connector' term, I introduce his figure of the 'diplomat', whose mandate he describes as follows:

> The hope for a shared world accompanies the diplomat: [s/he] goes to the negotiation in an attempt to save something of this idea of a shared world, knowing full well that this world is one that must effectively be made.[18] (Latour 2013, para 2, translated from original French)

My creative practice research begins by reframing the role of a filmmaker as both an 'engaged analyst' and a 'diplomat', with the understanding that 'there is no common language for diplomacy' (Latour 2013, para 2).[19] There is much to learn, and new languages are required to remake the world.

Reorienting the Anthropocene – a conceptual toolbox of theorists

With much to learn, a toolbox of strategies is needed to initiate this reframing process. I see the conceptual framework of this thesis as a set of tools that a filmmaker, as an 'engaged analyst/diplomat', can draw on. In this section I 'connect' provocations made by three theorists that propose to de-centre the 'human' in narratives and realign the non-human (Braidotti 2017a; Plumwood 2009; Povinelli 2016). Together, they offer a conceptual toolbox for attributing subjective identity to place. Given that this thesis is concerned specifically with a place that has been researched through non-traditional screen-writing poetics (Macdonald 2013), I look at how this conceptual toolbox might offer strategies for creating a poetics of place by including in it the concept of geopoetics (Last 2017; Magrane 2020; White 2004). I argue in this thesis that when geopoetics, that is, poetry about place, is mediated by screen practice, a new cartography of place (Brown Lake) can be written into being, its subjective agency navigated by a screen map (my

[18] http://modesofexistence.org/extrait-de-lentretien-a-la-revue-critiques-bruno-latour-sur-le-diplomate/
[19] ibid

term). Geopoetics in the form of screen maps via a conceptual tool-box of ecofeminist and posthuman thought offers a way of remaking the world in the Anthropocene.

Nature in an active voice

> We need a thorough and open rethink which has the courage to question our most basic cultural narratives. We need to bring to our writing an active voice in nature. (Plumwood 2009, p. 113)

Val Plumwood (1939–2008) was an Australian environmental philosopher and a feminist. She identified as an ecofeminist, and her rigorous, non-dualistic framework identified gender, race, class, and nature as four categories of exclusion constructed by what she termed 'the master story' of patriarchal domination (Plumwood 1993). Before the concept of the Anthropocene had emerged in 2000 (Crutzen & Stoermer 2021) but after the discourse around the death of nature had commenced (Merchant 1980, 1993), Plumwood in her book *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (1993) raised many of the same issues around inequities between human/human and human/non-human relationships that still confront us in the 21st century. The 'master story', she concluded, is a 'disabling story' for humankind (p. 196). Resisting 'anthropocentric' discourse, which she claimed overlooks the 'excluded categories' of the 'human narrative', Plumwood demanded instead an understanding of the complex identity tied to those humans who dominate and exclude other categories of humans and non-humans. She called for an end to all oppression, arguing that no attempt to liberate women (or any oppressed group) would be successful without an equal attempt to liberate nature. Plumwood further warned against attributing the essentializing of the tropes of the feminine to *all* women. Above all, she fought for the recognition of nature as an agentic force.

In this this thesis, I consider an ecofeminist response to the Anthropocene as housing a theory of nature being active, as well as a practice of intersectionality, beyond essentialisms, that can include men. Furthermore, Plumwood's ecofeminism advocates for set of liberatory ideals that are embodied, materialist, non-dualistic, and full of mutuality. She argues for decentralizing an androcentric gaze that is tied to a 'master story' and for alleviating the narrative practice of a single, monological, universalizing, and exclusive protagonist. She also gestures towards extending mutuality to humans and non-humans.

It is Plumwood's final essay, 'Nature in an Active Voice' (Plumwood 2009), that is of specific relevance to this thesis. In the last paragraph, under the heading 'The Role of Writing', Plumwood calls for the project of re-animating the world and remaking ourselves, adding that it 'converges with much poetry and literature':

> Opportunities for re-animating matter include making room for seeing much of what has been presented as meaningless accident actually as creative non-human agency. In re-animating, we become open to hearing sound as voice, seeing movement as action, adaptation as intelligence and dialogue, coincidence and chaos as the creativity of matter. The difference here is intentionality, the ability to use an intentional vocabulary. Above all, it is permission to depict nature in the active voice, the domain of agency. (p. 129)

This affecting call to perceive nature and by extension, place, *actively* reaffirms Plumwood's conviction that creating new narratives that articulate the agency of nature is as relevant as political agitation, which as she posits in earlier work, 'exists in a sphere, formed from the multiple exclusions, of the protagonist super hero of the western (now global) psyche, reason, whose adventures and encounters form the stuff of western intellectual history' (Plumwood 1993, p. 3)

Thus Plumwood (1993) sets a precedent for conceptualizing how to move out of the late-liberal paradigm and invites us to re-orient ourselves and our thinking, value and emphasize other ways of seeing, and question the lenses through which we view our own conditions of existence. She sets this challenge in order to open up a world of being with, rather than dominating, nature:

> The power to direct, cast and script this ruling drama has been in the hands of a tiny minority of the human race and of human cultures. Much inspiration for new, less destructive guiding stories can be drawn from sources other than the master, from subordinated and ignored parts of western culture, such as *womens' stories of care*. (p. 196, italics added)

It is worth emphasizing the intersectional potential already latent in Plumwood's work, as acknowledged recently by Indigenous feminist and Quandamooka woman Aileen Moreton-Robinson, author of 'Talking up to the White Woman' (Moreton-Robinson 2000). During a talk[20] to discuss the 20th anniversary reprint of her book, Moreton-

[20] https://www.wheelercentre.com/events/aileen-moreton-robinson-20th-anniversary-of-talkin-up-to-the-white-woman/

Robinson noted the ground laid by Plumwood's (1993) ecofeminist conceptualization of the exclusions made by the 'master story'. What also connects the intersectional aspects of Plumwood's ecofeminism with Moreton-Robinson's indigenous feminist perspective is that Plumwood later came to identify with philosophical animism and to understand Country as communicative and intelligent, and all knowledges as relational. The nuance of her position was articulated by anthropologist Deborah Bird Rose (2013): 'Rather than mimic or appropriate indigenous animisms she [Plumwood] was developing a foundation that could be argued from within western philosophy' (p. 93).

This insight is crucial to the conceptual framework of this thesis, since my position aligns with and extends Plumwood's (1993) approach of arguing from within Western philosophy while nonetheless recognizing that 'those with the requisite humility and sympathy might look elsewhere to gain ideas from the sustaining stories of the cultures we have cast outside reason as an antidote' (Plumwood 1993). The work of this thesis is to re-animate the dialogical nature of the Earth with human affairs, drawing from Plumwood's belief that 'Earth language is never monological; always relational, it is a call to enter into encounters, to be co-present and engaged' (Rose 2013). Plumwood's early nod to intersectional discourse is further affirmed by the contemporary turn that reclaims ecofeminism as a forceful, if decoherent, concept for liberatory ideals (Gaard 2011).

Posthuman Subjectivity

> Subjects are collective assemblages, that is to say they are dynamic but framed: fields of forces that aim at duration and affirmative self-realisation. In order to fulfil them they need to be drawn together along a line of composition. (Braidotti 2014, p. 173)

In continental philosopher Rosi Braidotti's Tanner lectures, 'Posthuman, All Too Human: The Memoirs and Aspirations of a Posthumanist' (Braidotti 2017b), she outlines the posthuman knowing subject as 'a complex assemblage of human and nonhuman, ecological, technological, planetary and cosmic, given and manufactured, organic and technological relations' (p. 26). The posthuman knowing subject is thus defined by where that subject is situated in relation to other subjects, whether the substance of that subject is static or in a state of change, and, importantly, what exclusions occur when a subject is foregrounded rather than assembled in parallel with other subjects. That is, a 'line of composition' should be non-linear and reflect non-hierarchical complexities and

multiplicities. This way, Braidotti posits, 'the subjects' ethical core is clearly not their moral intentionality but their relational capacity' (p. 28).

For the purposes of this thesis, the concept of the posthuman subject allows for creating a screen map of subjectivity for Brown Lake that extends Plumwood's concept of an active voice in nature by reiterating the ethical nature of the relational in light of the capacity of the non-human subject to exist as a complex assemblage of relations, that is, as a poly-centred, polyphonic, posthuman subject (Braidotti 2019; Braidotti & Mannevuo 2007). Furthermore, Bradotti's generative and elucidatory framework for a critical posthumanities provides a dizzying cartography of knowledge and ethics with which to think about the Anthropocene, about interconnections between human and non-human subjects, about the nature of subjectivity, along with the supra-disciplinarity of posthuman studies, as it makes nomadic journeys across disciplines such as the digital and environmental humanities (Braidotti 2017b, 2019).

While it is not the purpose of this exegesis to analyze the subtle and complex thinking behind Braidotti's critical posthumanities, there are several key insights that are useful to include in its conceptual toolbox. Her assertion that affirmative ethics are relational offers a way of looking at Brown Lake's ecosystem as relational; ethics therefore are borne out of a relational force that exists between all the elements which make up or 'compose' the lake. Her call for transversal assemblages of new subject compositions and cartographies further points to her conception of subjectivities as being co-existent, parallel, and in horizontal relations rather than hierarchical ones. From this emerges her mantra, 'We-are-in-*this*-together-but-we-are-*not*-one-and-the-same' (Braidotti 2017b, p. 25).

Beyond extending Plumwood's ideas of nature being in dialogue with others, what is also important for this thesis is Braidotti's (2017b) conception of posthuman knowledge, which affirms that 'we need to connect critique to creativity and invent new ways of thinking, ... because we cannot solve problems in the same language we used to create them' (p. 20). In addition, by asserting that 'the affirmative ethics of the posthuman subject is zoe/geo/techno-bound egalitarianism, based on respect for the nonhuman' (p. 27), Braidotti makes it possible to connect nature, the human, and the non-human on a level playing field. Thinking of Brown Lake's complex, heterogenous subjectivity through the posthuman lens has allowed me to navigate the multiple relations at play at the lake by framing them using the conceptual tools of parallelism, perspectivism and pragmatism. These tools were engaged critically across the creative methodology of this thesis. In the

next chapter I will articulate practical examples of these tools in the feature film *Quattro Volte* (Frammartino 2010), as well as in the moving images works of artist Su Yu Shin.

Braidotti's (2017b) assertion that posthuman knowledge generates connections across subjects in ways that create new subject cartographies has been crucial for my creative endeavour in this thesis to relocate cinema in the form of 'screen maps' that navigated Brown Lake. Brown Lake thus becomes a subject that exists through relationships that are everchanging and in flux. For Braidotti, 'Cartographies are a mixture of documents and monuments, networks and relations, set in the present—which is both the record of what we are ceasing to be and the seed of what we are in the process of becoming' (p. 32).

Writing the Otherwise

> We need to grasp thinking in a different way; we need, as Deleuze might put it, a new 'image of thought' We need to recognise that thought is not, after all, an especially human privilege. (Povinelli 2016, p. 85)

To complete my conceptual toolbox for thinking through the subjectivity of the non-human, I draw on cultural theorist and filmmaker Elisabeth Povinelli's (2016) proposal that an 'analytics of existence' and 'of being otherwise" might be formulated through the aesthetic practice of filmmaking' (p. 27). Povinelli's 'being otherwise' can be best understood as providing a counter-narrative to what she conceptualises as 'geontopower' - the governing principle of late-liberal settler societies. Geontopower, says Povinelli, operates through the regulation of the distinction between Life and Nonlife, which is moderated by the three figures and tactics of the Anthropocene – Desert, Virus, and Animist. These 'ghost figures' gesture to practices of the Anthropocene that can be broadly defined as resource extractions (desert), capitalistic or terroristic opportunisms (virus), and animistic but somewhat fetishized conceptions of land (animist). The 'otherwise' of geontopower exists outside of these figures – and is that which breaks down the boundaries between life and non-life. Povinelli (2015) investigates, 'how we might be governed otherwise or what we might seek to be governed by' (p.169).

In her essay 'Transgender Creeks and the Three Figures of Power in Late Liberalism' (2015) and later in her seminal text *Geontologies* (2016), Povinelli attempts to answer this question by raising the example of a coastal tidal creek in Northern Australia named Tjipel, to which a dreaming of the Karrabing Collective is attached. Their

dreaming identifies the creek as being transgender[21] since Tjipel, as the story goes, was once a young woman, who dressed as a boy, who was then raped, and subsequently became a creek. As Povinelli explains, Tjipel the creek has become the source of a conversation between three other women: an indigenous woman Linda Yarrowin, member of the Karrabing Collective, connected to Tjipel's dreaming as custodian of the land surrounding the creek; the former Australian prime minister, Julia Gillard, who must decide whether mining takes precedent over connection to country; and Gina Rhinehardt, the Australian mining magnate, who sees Tjipel as inanimate. 'Part of the problem Tjipel faces is what various people *make of* her, or are attempting to turn her into – what they think she is at her core and how much power they have to make her conform to their practical reason' (Povinelli 2015, p.175).

Povinelli (2015) argues that the transgender creek, as a subject-place-arrangement, offers an 'otherwise' of existence with humans, one that is contingent on relations of mutuality and care. In Povinelli's conception of Tjipel, the creek is attributed the agency to modify her form(s) and arrangement(s) of existence when relations of mutuality and care with humans change. Povinelli's concept affords a 'non-life' entity such as Tjipel the ability to 'think' and wield power over humans by changing her form when human conditions of care for her change.

Again, what is important for this thesis is that Povinelli (2015) attributes agentic subjectivity to a place that might otherwise be considered through the figurings of geontopower as both inert and static. As a means of making visible this 'otherwise' – where distinctions between life and non-life fall away along with distinctions between human and non-human – the filmmaking practices of Karrabing Collective, with whom Povinelli collaborates, extend an understanding of place by 'writing' an analytics of its

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[21] There is a coastal tidal creek in northern Australia where a young girl lies face down. She came to this creek as a young, beautiful teen age girl (a *tjipel* in the language of the area) who decided to dress as a young man, equipping herself with male clothes and hunting implements including a spear and spear thrower. As she traveled down the coast, she did various things, including spearing a wallaby. But the heart of her story concerns a sexual encounter she had with an old man. As she passed between two coastal points, a bird told her an old man was coming, so she lay belly down in the sand to hide what parts of her body would reveal. The old man, thinking she was a young man, insisted (s)he get up and cook the wallaby. She put him off claiming to be sick. He eventually tired of waiting and left with the wallaby. But as he walked away, another bird told him that the young man was actually a teenage woman. He rushed back and a fight ensued. He won. She remains there. But she doesn't remain there by the creek. She is the creek. If you knew where or how to look, you would see her watery outline, her hunting implements turned to reefs, and the other parts of her encounter with the old man scattered nearby. Tjipel's encounter with the old man made, and is, the local topography. She now divides the two coastal points, marks the boundaries between two languages and social groups, and joins this region to other regions up and down the coast. (Povinelli 2015)

existence into being through the practice of making screen works. Thus, Povinelli's conceptual figurings of the Anthropocene have provided me the means to write the 'otherwise' of Brown Lake as an agentic subject into being through the aesthetics of filmmaking.

Geopoetics | Opening new worlds

> The question now is whether any 'deep purpose' is still possible, whether anything like a real turning of the times is possible, anything like a new epoch of being. This is where geopoetics comes in, saying: perhaps. (White 2004, p. 229)

Braidotti (2017b), Plumwood (2009), and Povinelli 2015) provide ways of de-centring the human and vivifying the non-human by recognizing its subjective agency, its relationality, its ability to dialogue, its ethical and generative nature, it's capacity to 'think', and its sensitivity to human behaviour. Linking Povinelli's figuring of place as an 'otherwise' of geontopower to the concept of geopoetics serves as a conclusion to this chapter's work of establishing a conceptual toolbox, and it frames the genealogy of screen works concerned with navigating place and planet differently that follows in the next chapter. As a companion piece to the conceptual toolbox, 'geopoetics' offers a bridge between theory and practice. If geontopower is what limits conceptions of place as 'non-life', then the concept of geopoetics is what delimits it. Geopoetics as a practice was conceived by Kenneth White (n.d.), who defined it in counterpoint to geopolitics:

> Geopolitics is concerned with the power-relationships between State and State on a global scale, conceiving of space exclusively in terms of exploitable resources. Geopoetics is a deeper, more radical enterprise. Its concern is not territorial power-mongering among States, but the state of the human being in the universe, the relationship between human being and the planet Earth, presence in the world. Geopoetics is the antidote to world-poisoning.[22]

While geographer Eric Magrane (2020) has recently produced a comprehensive survey of the field with his book *Geopoetics in Practice*, it is the insights offered by geographer Angela Last (2017) in her essay 'We Are the World? Anthropocene Cultural Production between Geopoetics and Geopolitics' that are particularly useful for building a bridge between theory and practice in this thesis. She points to a renewed interest in geopoetics

[22] https://www.institut-geopoetique.org/en/articles-en/37-an-outline-of-geopoetics

by artists seeking to make works about the human and the geologic in the time of the Anthropocene, and she gestures (after Glissant) to the capacity of geopoetics to act as a 'disruptive aesthetics' in the pursuit of decolonising the earth (p. 161). This idea of a disruptive aesthetics supports and extends Povinelli's suggestion that filmmaking with the Karrabing Collective became an 'analytics of existence' (Povinelli 2016, p. 25) and an innovative aesthetic imaginary (Lea & Povinelli 2018, note 3).

Last (2017) draws on the work of French Philsopher Simone Weil (1909–1943) to build an argument that geopoetics might be understood as an act of creative attention between the human and the non-human.[23] Citing Australian feminist philosopher Elisabeth Grosz (2007), Last points out:

> Geopoetics pays attention to the material, poetic and (geo)political. ... Geopoetics could be understood as concepts, that whilst they may have economic value in that they are entangled with cultural production, still constitute a means of 'opening up new worlds.'[24]

In this sense, creating a poetry of place through the perspective of that place might be read as an attempt to open up a new world. This idea of opening of worlds also aligns with Braidotti's assertion that the generative nature of posthuman affirmative ethics creates new possibilities and new languages by assembling complex entities together. Geopoetics brings with it a necessity to practice, while at the same time having the capacity to house a geopolitic, but one closer to a 'terrestrial politic' (Latour 2018, p. 89) that resists falling into the 'sphere formed from the multiple exclusions of the protagonist-superhero of the western pysche' (Plumwood 1993, p.3) through its engagement with the situated and the poetic[25], in other words, by writing from somewhere rather than nowhere.

To conclude the conceptual framework of this thesis, I extend Last's (2017) concept of geopoetics by weaving it into the field of screenwriting poetics and the Screen Idea (Macdonald 2013). There are similarities between text-poetry and cinema-poetry; both work with affect and percepts, communicating ideas through images, sensation and sounds to produce feeling in human audiences. However, for the purposes of this thesis I engage with the practice of geopoetics as a 'disruptive aesthetics' (Last 2017)that brings with it the creative attention and situatedness (Weil 1973) that may have little profit value

[23] Simone Weil 1973 p.149
[24] Feminist Workshop, Duke University Duke University, Durham, N. Carolina https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mwHoswjw5yo
[25] See Franco Berardi – *Chaos: Breathing and Poetry* (Berardi 2018)

but may open up new worlds (Grosz 2007). Embodied by a Screen Idea (Macdonald 2013), I have used the disruptive aesthetics of geopoetics and what I will term *posthuman screen poetics* to develop and realize the creative component of this thesis: two 'screen maps' of Brown Lake that seek to countermap the figures of the Anthropocene (Povinelli 2016) and remake image worlds of the otherwise that is that place, with the filmmaker acting as engaged analyst or diplomat.[26]

[26] http://modesofexistence.org/extrait-de-lentretien-a-la-revue-critiques-bruno-latour-sur-le-diplomate/

CHAPTER TWO

Cinema | Cartographies of Place

> Poetics is the only way to respond to the era where we can barely breathe.
>
> Berardi (2018)

> Places do want to talk, normally
> and they do open up, if you are patient.
> I love to listen to them.
> A camera then can become a recording device,
> (eventually, not right away)
> To capture the place's story, or history
> And gather details of its account.
>
> Wim Wenders (2013)
> *Inventing Peace*

Anthropocene and Cinema – Dystopia or preferred futures?[27]

This creative practice research is situated within the field of contemporary screen practices that respond to the storytelling challenges presented by the 'connector term' of the Anthropocene as cultural debate. Building on the proposition by Latour (2018) that cinema offers a means to house a 'terrestrial politic' (p.86) and extending Fay's (2018) notion that 'cinema helps us see and experience the Anthropocene as aesthetic practice' (p.4) this chapter critically engages with an evolving body of cinema/screen practice that moves beyond what film theorist Girish Shambu (2020) refers to as the 'old cinephilia' to a 'new cinephilia' capable of rising to the challenges outlined in Chapter 1

[27] 'preferred futures is a term used by Julia Scott Stevenson in *Virtual Futures: A Manifesto for Immersive Experiences* (Scott 2019)

Shambu (2020) defines the 'old cinephilia' (or passionate interest in films) as one that evolved post-World War Two. Originating in France, it is most concerned with the pleasures derived from the aesthetics of film (*mise-en-scéne*); it focuses on the (anthropocentric) feature film narrative, and privileges the value of the film director as 'auteur'[28]. 'Old cinephilia', in this conception, is a type of filmmaking often dominated by white male filmmakers that has come to be seen as *the* way of considering cinema, as opposed to *a* way of making for the screen. 'Traditional cinephilia privileges the form of the narrative fiction feature. Other valuable forms, such as serialised television, short films, web series and videos, experimental work and even documentary films are not accorded the same pride of place' (Shambu 2020, p.81).

The 'new cinephilia', as defined by Shambu (2020), is polyphonic, since it includes voices of filmmakers who are variously women, queer, indigenous, and intersectional, and it derives both pleasure and value from film aesthetics as well as from representing the lives, experiences, and worlds of the marginalised, both human and non-human, within film. According to Shambu, 'The new cinephilia takes up So Mayer's call for 'representational justice', aiming for a true inclusiveness, and embracing the broadest possible variety of moving-image forms and artists[29] (p. 82). In this type of practice/conception the situatedness of the screen work, the politics of representation, the temporality and the territorialization of time and place become all-important.[30]

Situating the creative component of this thesis, the two 'screen maps' within a small field of screen works that engage with place in this second chapter I link the disruptive aesthetics of geopoetics with 'new cinephilia' (Shambu 2020). As Shambu posits, the old cinephilia is concerned with the aesthetic conventions of feature films, dominated by traditional types of narratives and mostly directed by white males. The new cinephilia 'finds pleasure in diversity and additionally, in a deep curiosity about the world and a critical engagement with it'. Shambu adds: 'The new cinephilia radiates outward, powered by a spirit of inquiry and a will to social and planetary change' (p. 32).

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[28] See Andrew Sarris – The Auteur Theory (Sarris 1963)

[29] So Mayer, Political Animals: *The New Feminist Cinema* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2016).

[30] 'An other cinema' (Raymond Bellour), "othered cinema" (Erika Balsom), "artists' films" (Maeve Connolly, among others), "cinema d'exposition" (Jean- Christophe Royoux), "le temps exposé" (Dominique Païni)—these are just a few of many terms commonly employed to define ubiquitous practices of artists making films and/or exhibiting them in galleries, museums, and cinemas. (Luka Brakias)

This chapter focuses on a genaeology of screen works that can be broadly understood as a cinema that speaks to the new cinephilia and is powered by a spirit of inquiry and a will for social and planetary change. Taking note of moving image forms that privilege 'nature in an active voice' (Plumwood 2009), aesthetics that expand the notion of subjectivity to embrace human and non-human perspectives, and filmmakers' attempts to create ethical visions for the future where what matters is the 'relational capacity and force' of everything (Braidotti 2017, p.28), I focus specifically on place-based narratives, whose forms resist cultural commodification (Last 2017), and establish a broad assemblage of screen works whose creative artefacts this research project builds on and extends.

This emphasis on place is especially significant because, under the mantle of the 'old cinephilia', as cultural theorist Claire Colebrook points out, mainstream screen narratives arising from engagement with the Anthropocene tend toward the dystopian by proposing that for 'humans' the Anthropocene spells the end of the world, rather than the end of a prevailing status quo[31][32] (Colebrook 2017c, 2017d). In her lecture 'Fragility, Globalism, and the End of the World'[33] (Colebrook 2017b) Colebrook cites *Blade Runner 2049* (Villeneuve 2017) as exemplar of this tendency to thnk of the end of the world as the both the destruction of the planet and the annihilation of a human future. Pervading these films' narratives is the suggestion that it is the end of the world because the human status quo has been disrupted; yet, Colebrook asks, 'What is this status quo that means the world will end without it? What is the "world" that is being viewed and who does that "world" include?' (2017a 10.00-14.00 mins) Instead, Colebrook gestures towards the questions: Might we celebrate the end of the 'world' in these dystopian films, and might we read this 'end' as a disruption of narratives that keep, not just the human at the centre, but a certain type of human attitude? The posthumanist Braidotti might ask: 'Why is there a centre anyway, if we are all in this together?' (Arlander, Braidotti & de Assis 2018). And if the status quo is centred on a 'master story' (Plumwood 1993), then what are the forms and aesthetics that can be engaged in screen works to disrupt that status quo?

[31] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o1jB7Cl4y0k "We Have Always Been Post-Anthropocene" April 12, 2014

[32] To say that the 'world' has ended or that these are 'end of the world' scenarios, or to say that it is easy to imagine the end of the world, is really to say that they depict the end of abundance *for us. (Colebrook 2017a)*

[33] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_lOQpyu84WA "Fragility, Globalism, and the End of the World," November 6 2017

In his book *Narratology Beyond the Human*, literature academic David Herman (2018) also examines how experimental narratives that use multiple genres and storytelling techniques are important because they open up possibilities of radically new ways to experience the world. This chapter of the thesis is concerned with looking at how diverse filmmakers have enacted formal, aesthetic and ideological disruptions to a status quo that reads the Anthropocene as a dystopian challenge. They have used the Anthropocene as a 'connector' term to raise questions about the future of the planet. While it is not within the limits of this thesis to do full justice to Colebrook's work around aesthetics in dystopian cinema in the Anthropocene[34], the screen works discussed in this chapter have experimented with potential counternarratives to the kinds of individualistic, and auteur-driven filmmaking that Shambu, Mayer, and Colebrook allude to. Since this research project is concerned with finding creative means to activate an 'opening of worlds', using an ecofeminist and posthuman conceptual toolbox and drawing on the practice of geopoetics to frame non-traditional screen practices, the review of works in this chapter interrogates an array of perspectives that offer ways of conceiving of a 'preferred future' (Scott-Stevenson 2020, p.2). That is, filmic perspectives that gesture towards a reorientation of human and non-human relations and a 'representational justice' for all (Mayer 2016, p.15).

[34] Colebrook also challenges the position of the posthuman and the ecofeminist in her more recent work on the Anthropocene, (Colebrook 2019) though it is not within the limits of this thesis to take up that challenge

Figure 1 Still from *Burial Mound* (Ana Mendieta 1974) (Galerie Lelong, New York – Courtesy)

Figure 2 Still from *Creek* (Ana Mendieta 1974) (Galerie Lelong, New York – Courtesy)

Nature in an active voice – A small genealogy of ecofeminist works

Two striking ecofeminist films from the 1970s that are deceptive in their simplicity are by the Cuban ecofeminist artist Ana Mendieta (1945-1985) . Set in creeks and forests, *Creek* (Mendieta 1974b) and *Untitled – Burial Pyramid* (Mendieta 1974a) can be considered antecedents of contemporary ecofeminist screen works such as the ecofeminist hybrid poetic video essay. They recognised the need to rethink human relationship to the earth, aesthetically and ethically, well before the term Anthropocene arrived. In *Creek* (1974), Mendieta brought her human body into dialogue with earth by framing it in relationship to a creek. The artist allowed her immersed body to be buffeted and swayed by the swirling waters. Mendieta literally put her life on the line and showed its vulnerability. Both her body and the creek are ephemeral and in flux. The camera's gaze flattens the relationship of the human, putting it in horizontal connection to the earth. This simple locked-frame moving image work is potent in its ability to reframe the human and non-human relationship.

Untitled – Burial Pyramid (1974) is another locked-frame film. Within the frame we see a mound of rocks. At first it seems as if they are breathing, but after some time we see a female human face appear as one of the rock falls away from the mound. Little by little, as the rocks 'breathe' they fall away to reveal a human body. There is something about watching the rocks 'breathe' and the body appear from them that changes the way time works in this image; it suggests an understanding of deep time and human time rubbing up against each other directly. It suggests the liveliness of the non-human rock, yet the ephemeral nature of both the human and the non-human gives viewers a feeling that we are seeing traces of former relationships between the two. Mendieta said in an artist's interview from the early 1980s: 'My art is grounded on the belief in one universal energy which runs through everything, from insect to man, from man to spectre, from spectre to plant, from plant to galaxy' (Kate Horsfield 1987).

Within the Australian canon, an early example of an ecofeminist moving image work is *Jabiluka UO2* by artist Bonita Ely (Ely 1979). Made in the same decade as Mendieta's films, its primary concern is with place and its relationship to human activity. The films by both Mendieta and Ely put a woman's body in the frame in connection with the materiality of place, attributing to nature an active role in the drama, even if the human body remains a central part of the frame. *Jabiluka UO2* (1979) considers opposing human attitudes to place, almost like a precursor to Povinelli's figures and

tactics of the Anthropocene. Again, this film consists of a locked image. Within the frame we see the female artist Ely sculpt a conical mound, inscribe it with an ochre spiral, and finally place a grass fringe around its base. In the distance, two men mark the ground with a straight white line, moving directly towards Ely. As they get closer, she stands between them and her creation, in the hope of deterring the men, who, nonetheless, stomp across her mound, flattening it before continuing on. According to Ely:

> The performance *Jabiluka UO_2* was generated by observations of the domination of Aboriginal people by white Australians, by environmental issues associated with mining uranium, and observing the conflict of two cultures whose values, cultural practices and power bases were as opposed as any cultures could be – true binary opposites.[35]

Figure 3 Still from *Jabiluka UO2* (Bonita Ely 1979)

Today there is a re-engagement with ecofeminism. After long been critiqued as being too essentialist, it has now come to be seen as a precursor to intersectional discourse. (Gaard 2011). Likewise, new digital technologies have liberated feminist and underrepresented voices alike to make screen works simply and quickly, as well as to distribute them widely online. Moving away from the arguably essentialist practice of placing the female body in the frame with nature, the contemporary poetic hybrid video essay has emerged as a form

[35] Bonita Ely, artist's statement, Milani Gallery, Brisbane 2013.

that allows for diverse, activist, feminist voices to engage in social critique while constructing a hyperlocal poetics of place.

Marwa Arsanios' single channel video essay *Who is Afraid of Ideology Part 1* (Arsanios 2017) uses narration by a female poet who critiques the practice of war and its deleterious effects on women and on nature as she travels through the war-ravaged landscape of North Syria. Whilst a critique of war, the lens-based image-making offers a striking engagement with place. The mix of the Kurdish women's stories of resistance told orally and set against poetic land images affirms connections between damaged women and damaged places. Voiced thoughts such as 'my first ecological teacher was my mother' and a description of how a mother would 'sing *to* the mountain, not *about* the mountain' emphasize the dialogical nature between the marginalized human and the non-human and gesture to an 'unlearning of knowledges' that propagate war[36]. At another moment, the narrator explains that the women in the mountain community have a 'right to exist in nature' and explains 'many indigenous people have this'. In tandem with the female narrator's voice, poetic images of the mountains and fields framed by a camera lens allow a reading of the landscape as agentic and protective, as we hear the woman's incantatory voice say, 'Nature performs itself differently' (Arsanios 2017).

Another example of the narrated poetic video essay is *Dystopia of a Jungle City and the Human of Nature* (Maldonado 2019)[37] by Brazilian artist Carla Maldonado, who collaborated with the Cipiá Indigenous Community Center in Manaus, Brazil. The four-channel video pairs footage of the Indigenous community's day-to-day life with layered forest sounds as the female narrator speaks about Brazilian president Bolsonaro's far-right policies that have allowed for environmental degradation and oppression of the site's indigenous people. *To Calm the Pig Inside (Ang Pagpakalma sa Unos)* (Arong 2020) is a poetic video essay by Philippino woman Joanna Vasquez Arong, who explains over grainy black-and-white images that in 2013, Typhoon Haiyan, also known as Yolanda, raged across the Philippines for days, leaving behind a trail of devastation. Vasquez Arong recounts stories about the natural disaster and injustices resulting from corruption in her country. She recalls the social solidarity after the disaster and how her spiritual connection to place continues to play a significant role in her life.

[36] https://www.e-flux.com/journal/93/215118/who-s-afraid-of-ideology-ecofeminist-practices-between-internationalism-and-globalism/ For transcript of testimonials of Kurdish Autonomous Women's Movement

[37] Dystopia of a Jungle and the Human of Nature https://www.carlamaldonado.com/work/djchn

What these examples of the ecofeminist, poetic hybrid video essay have in common, beyond the female voice narration and poetic imagery, is that they all bring into view the interconnections and assemblages of nature as being a part of the narrative of the marginalized, rather than as a mere backdrop. This understanding of place as having its own identity that is in dialogue with the human is a key feature of each film Nonetheless, perhaps as a result of the human narration, the geopolitical maintains privileged over the geopoetic and human concerns frame the non-human. Whilst poetic, these works exist as documents, offering traces of what has been, as forms of resistance to ideologies and practices that have ravaged nature and women.

Figure 4 Still from *Whose Afraid of Ideology? Part 1* (Marwa Arsanios 2017)

Place as Subject – Cinematic docudrama

Moving from non-fiction to docudrama, a screen work that motivated the exploration of 'place as subject' in this thesis was the feature length cinematic docudrama, *Quattro Volte* (Frammartino 2010), an 88-minute film by Italian filmmaker Angelo Frammartino. It derives its title from the idea posited by Greek polymath Pythagoras (ca. 570 to ca. 490 BCE) that all beings have four lives that the soul moves through – the mineral, the vegetable, the animal. and the human – and 'thus we must know ourselves four times' (Phillips 2016). *Quattro Volte* aims to not just describe the transmigration of the soul across these four incarnations but also depict them in an interconnected 'kinship' (Past 2019). Frammartino said he was motivated by the question, "Can cinema free itself of the

dogma which dictates that human beings should occupy the leading role? In an interview, he explained:

> 'The film is based on the ideas of animism and reincarnation, and Calabria is very much an animist region. Pythagoras supposedly said that each of us holds within us four successive lives, each one enmeshed in the others. Man is made of mineral, because he has a skeleton; he's a plant, because he has blood flowing through his veins like sap; he's an animal, because he has mobility; and he's also a rational being. So in order to fully understand himself, man has to understand himself four times.' (Phillips 2016) para 6

In this regard, *Quattro Volte* (2010) distinguishes itself in representing non-human subjectivity on screen. There have been several excellent readings of this work, specifically from the perspectives of thinking animals and animal agency (McMahon 2015) (Past 2019) and from the perspective of Frammartino's contribution to the evolving canon of slow cinema (Chayka 2011; Romney 2011). For the purposes of this thesis, what is useful is to consider, however, are the tactics employed to express 'place as having posthuman subjectivity' through its kinship relations – a mode of existence that director, Frammartino, activates across the narrative. The director uses:

1. framing to make the viewer consider parallels between a human face and a landscape,
2. the perspective of the camera to align with the point of view of a goat, a tree, a piece of charcoal and a goatherd,
3. the juxtaposition of images, and
4. a non-human sound design that achieves what film theorist Laura McMahon (2015) calls 'horizontalist aesthetics – a mode of cinematic presentation that works against speciesist hierarchies of being' (McMahon 2015, p. 108).

Frammartino, by employing these aesthetic choices decentralises the human and reveals connections between beings and non-beings, bringing them into a kinship with each other. His 'horizontalist aesthetics' make visible the invisible on screen – that is, the unseen and changing nature of the spirit/soul as it passes from shepherd to goat to tree to charcoal. In posthumanist terms, this aesthetic choice makes visible throughout the film 'what we are ceasing to be and the seed of what we are in the process of becoming' (Braidotti 2017, p.6).

As an example, *Quattro Volte* (2010) opens with an image of smoke and dust arising from a charcoal-burning hut. Initially we are outside the hut, which is punctured with holes. Through an edit, the camera moves inside the hut. It is dark, but a thudding sound of shovel on charcoal persists like breathing or a heart beating. In this short sequence, several formal themes commence. There is the theme of transmigration of a soul, since once inside, the hut feels coffin-like, both suffocating and peaceful. Is this what death might feel like? Frammartino revisits this motif throughout the film – every time the spirit flows from one materialism to another, he evokes this theme of flow/movement through blunt editing and continuous, repetitive sounds. A further motif is the introduction of a camera perspective that takes the gaze of the non-human. The camera takes the point of view of the charcoal, a perspective to which Frammartino returns at the end of the film. We are immediately habituated to a non-human perspective of the charcoal *before* we align with the human perspective of a goatherd.

Figure 5 Still from *Quattro Volte* (Frammartino 2010). Charcoal burning

Simultaneously Frammartino sets up the trope of porosity of matter (Romney 2011). The inside and outside of village life is constantly represented as porous and shifting. In the opening shot of the film, the charcoal hut has holes in it, the smoke comes out and then the camera goes inside. By following the plight of an inanimate object – smoke/dust/ash – we move in and out of material states of being.

Later, the death of the goatherd and the birth of a kid are connected with exacting precision. Using a well-known film convention, the 'Kuleshov effect', in an unconventional way, Frammartino allows connections that might otherwise not be seen to be understood. A blurred shot from a goat's point of view of the goatherd breathing his last - offers an intimate, interior view, but then we move outside. Is it the spirit passing? The camera looks from on high, as we watch a funeral procession carry the goatherd's coffin across the landscape he walked throughout his life. When his body is interred behind a rock, we revisit the same dark claustrophobic sounds of death or passing, and Frammartino employs a blunt edit to show the birth of the kid.

Through framing and editing, Frammartino creates a kind of 'parallelism' (Figure 6). He constructs a world that is non-hierarchical and invites attention to interconnections across species. The non-linear, polyphonic narrative structure suggests life is always in flow, in movement – always changing, always becoming the present. There is virtually no human speech but there is a constant cacophony of sound in the film – the sound of the spade on the coal, the bells of the goats, the barking of the dog, the buzzing of the flies, and human voices that meld into the song of the day – but nothing is hierarchical or taking a primary position. As Past (2019) notes,

> For Frammartino, the human plays a decidedly supporting role, in a film that arguably has no place for leading actors. By almost entirely eliminating human dialogue, the film emphasizes other critical ways of being: gestures, gazes, and material presence. (Past 2019, p.10).

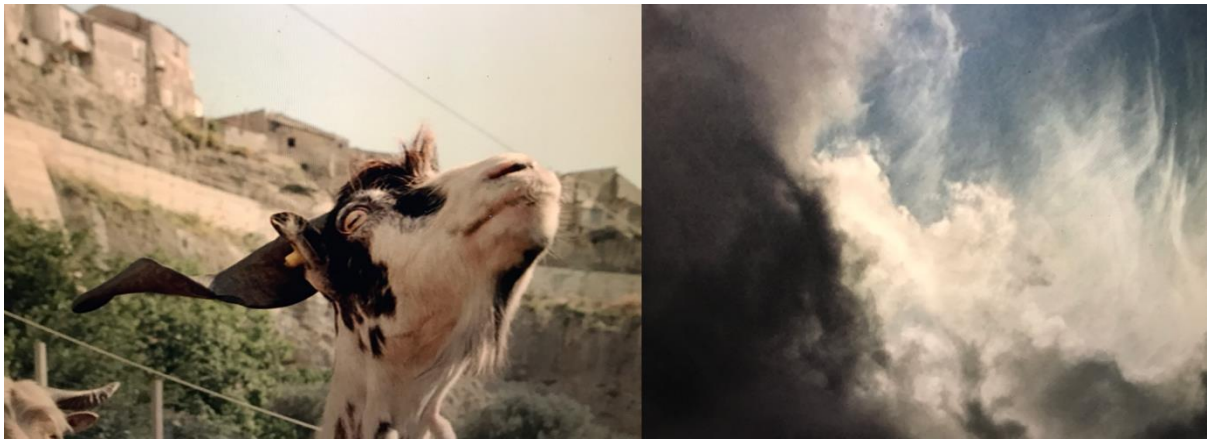

Figure 6 Stills from *Quattro Volte* (Frammartino 2010): Goat POV and example of parallelism

While the horizontal aesthetics of *Quattro Volte* (Frammartino 2010) are breathtaking in their outcome, two other films also merit attention. An example of place as posthuman subject can also be found in *Taming the Garden*, (Jashi 2021) where a grand old tree is removed from its place of origin and transposed to the garden of a wealthy billionaire, a former prime minister of Georgia, who is curating his own forest of old growth trees. As the tree departs its town of origin, the villagers mourn[38] (Figures 7 and 8). *Honeyland*[39] (Stefanov & Kotevska 2019) is a documentary drama about a woman's relationship to the bees who live near her home and with whom she shares her life and their honey. She is the last female bee hunter in Europe and must save the bees and return the natural balance. Both films are examples of what Val Plumwood would call 'philosophical animism', the putting of nature in an active voice and according it a posthuman subjectivity. They suggest that 'thinking and knowing are not the prerogatives of humans alone but take place in a terrestrial world' (Braidotti 2017, p.21).

[38] When Bidzina Ivanishvili, the billionaire former prime minister of Georgia, decides to create a garden on his Shekvetili estate, teams are sent to the western coastal region to coax and coerce the locals into parting with dozens of mature trees, which are transported across the country by road and sea.

[39] https://www.imdb.com/title/tt8991268/

Figure 7 Still from *Taming the Garden* (Jashi 2021) and tree leaving its home.

Figure 8 Still from *Taming the Garden* (Jashi 2021) and tree leaving its home.

Posthuman Perspectives – Artist moving image works

Less conventional forms of cinema that relocate online or move into the white cube space of a gallery or museum can present different ways of experiencing story, rather than being bound to conventional patterns. Some cogent examples that reconsider narratives of place on screen include works by artist/filmmakers, Ali Cherri, Malena Szlam, Robert Nugent, and Sam Smith. Curator Erika Balsom suggests:

> We might understand contemporary art as a potential laboratory for film, a place in which its social, technological and aesthetic history can be picked over and recycled. A place where artists and filmmakers can reconsider what cinema is and can do.'[40]

Another very different approach to representing or reinterpreting place through screen practice can be found in the moving image works of Taiwanese artist Su Yushin Yu, whose work is concerned with how place becomes territorialized by certain types of representations. In *Water Sleep II Akaike River Under Xizang Road* (Yushin 2019), an essay film, the artist goes in search of a river that was lost, by re-examining several historical maps of Taipei.

> With maps and cartography, what is interesting about them is that it is a way of worldbuilding. Classic cartography is a way of operating in the world – but there must be new ways of mapping and collaborating with the world – there is also a problem of scale too – that is how to have a view from within and a view from nowhere.[41] (Su Yushin Yu 2019)

Another work of Yushin that addresses the challenges associated with having a situated view of place is *Frame of Reference* (Yushin 2020) (Figure 9), a multi-screen work that was installed at the Taipei Biennale and is composed of data from different digital recording tools used by scientists to assess the Critical Zone in Taroko Gorge in Taiwan[42]. Yushin assembles different scientific methods of filming – methods that do not require the presence of a human being – as a way of highlighting the problems of framing and the limitations of representation, as well as pointing to the bias in technologies. As Yushin says, 'In this infrastructure to see "within the Critical Zone" where is the body of the observer?'[43] (Su Yushin 2020)

[40] https://www.e-flux.com/video/418682/panel-1-in-between-white-cube-black-box-and-online-screens-curation-and-exhibition-of-artists-films/ The State of the Moving Image. In Between White Cube, Black Box, and Online Screens: Curation and Exhibition of Artists' Films

[41] https://www.suyuhsin.net/water-sleep-II-Akaike-river-under-Xizang-Road

[42] For more information of geoscience in Taroko Gorge - https://www.gfz-potsdam.de/en/section/geomorphology/infrastructure/field-focus-sites/taroko-national-park

[43] Artist statement https://www.suyuhsin.net/frame-of-reference-I-II

Figure 9 Installation view of *Frame of Reference*, Taipei Biennal 2020, You and I Don't Live on the Same Planet. Photo by Yuro Huang, Courtesy of Su Yu Shin.

The Digger (Cherri 2015), set in the Sharjah Desert in the United Arab Emirates, follows the Sisyphean daily rituals of a man, alone in a remote landscape, who persists in digging out the sand around a ruin in order to keep the ruins intact (Figures 10 and 11). The framing of the man against the magnitude of the desert makes him and his physical efforts appear tiny and insubstantial in comparison to the scale of his surroundings. This is one short film in a series of place-based moving images works by Lebanese filmmaker Ali Cherri that are concerned with 'geographies of violence'[44] and the politics of representation. As a representation, *The Digger* is mesmerising in its ability to document the persistence in the face of insignificance, of a man determined to maintain visibility and presence of his culture by protecting a ruin. During an online E-Flux panel on 'Eco-futures and the moving image', Ali Cherri commented:

> We need to build a story of land, taking note of all the stories that are inscribed there. How is it possible to talk about a violence that is invisible? Filmmaking is a possibility of revealing this, in that it can create the conditions for the future to come – creating an opening, a small door into a new world.[45]

[44] Artnet interview with Ali Cherri https://news.artnet.com/art-world/ali-cherri-profile-2129535
[45] E-Flux Panel – The State of the Moving Image. 09/19/21
https://www.e-flux.com/video/418711/panel-6-eco-futures-and-moving-nbsp-image/

Cherri's screen work around land and its unseen histories acts as a counternarrative to what he describes as the 'metapower' of digital representations of world events circulating via Google, drones, satelites and surveillance technologies, and which operate like a god (or a terrorist) hovering above everything that happens while rendering invisible the material realities of marginalized humans and the geographies of violence that pass unnnoticed. As Cherri says, 'The future is not temporal but a question of space. This is the territory of the future'[46] (E-Flux 2021). In contrast to the ecofeminist, poetic video essay, Cherri states that he is more concerned with trying to create a fiction – that opens up the future – rather than just documenting traces of what remains.[47]

Figure 10 Still from The Digger (Ali Cherri 2015)

[46] Ibid

[47] 'My work is about how our imagination can take us beyond our conditions, Artists can thus create the conditions for these new worlds to evolve.'

Figure 11 Still from *The Digger* (Ali Cherri 2015)

Beyond using moving image works to re-map territories of place, works such as *Picnic Places* (Nugent 2020) (Figure 12) and *AntiPlano* (Szlam 2018) (Figure 13) both offer representations of place that are beyond the human, but in slightly different ways. *AntiPlano* is a geologic film-poem that enacts an encounter with the volcanic Atacama Desert in a purely visceral way. While not operating within the documentary mode, it made me think of the mesmerising footage of live volcanoes recorded from the 1960s to the 1990s by two French volcanologists, Katia and Maurice Krafft, in the recent documentary *Fire of Love* (Dosa 2022), where the camera, as recording device, allows the human viewer to come face to face with a geological phenonemen that exceeds human scale. The value in this experience is perhaps one of humility, whereas in both *Antiplano* (2018) and *Fire of Love* (2022) it is clear that the human will never be able to withstand the forces of nature that are a volcano and an ancient landscape.

Picnic Places (Nugent 2020), while more ironic in tone than *Antiplano* (2018), raises similar questions about the power and longevity of place alongside humans' 'mis-understanding' of it. The film presences man-made structures in a desert environment that have been long abandoned, suggesting that the film exists in a time beyond human existence – as an artefact of the Anthropocene. A female voice narrates in the Romanian language:

> In studying what was left, the post-collapse archaeologists believed they could find the beginning of the end. Instead, they found evidence of curious architectural forms near fossilised roads, across the interior of an ancient landscape. These

relics were once called roadside picnic stands. (Nugent 2020)

Figure 12 Still from *Picnic Places* (Robert Nugent 2020)

Figure 13 Still from *Altiplano* (Malena Szlam, 2018)

While the formal and aesthetic strategies of these artist moving image works differ, each filmmaker has represented a reality 'beyond the human' in relation to place. Tonally they are dissonant, but each focuses on coming to terms with differences in scale, visibility and time between the human and the geologic.

Analytics of Existence – Hyperlocal and messy

Another form of counter-filmmaking is through the film collective. Film can act as a tool for educating, decolonizing, and opening up a new world. As French film theorist and curator Olivier Hadouchi noted on an E-Flux panel titled 'Moving Image Activism and Disobedience on Screen'[48]: 'A collective is a way of dealing with identity, putting questions differently. It is anti-auteur, its destroys that idea. Each collective has a different identity, a collective identity as singularity but with a multiplicity of praxis.'

The Rojava Film Commune's way of participating in its grass-roots revolution of identity was to make films. Founded in 2015 and based in the autonomous region of Rojava (the common name for the Kurdish controlled Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria)[49] . Rojava's grassroots, stateless democracy is based on women's rights, ecology, and equality in all spheres of life. This political project has challenged the patriarchal system, empowered ethnic and religious minorities, and inspired the opening of local democratic spaces. All decisions on social issues, from infrastructure and energy to education and domestic violence, are discussed through public assemblies and made collectively. Despite facing the most ruthless threats, this population has been writing a new page in their history through filmmaking.[50] The commune produces local films and runs a collective film academy that trains anyone within the community to make films. They are not concerned only with making political documentaries, but rather with narrative, poetic, and cinematic films about ways of living in the aftermath of a war zone. Silent cinema has been an inspiration for them; the films of Charlie Chaplin, particularly his political comedy *The Great Dictator* (1940), have provided the foundation for learning how to make screen stories.[51]

Daren Bi Tene/Lonely Trees (Hinde 2017) (Figure 14 & 15) is one such film which builds on their inclusive, autonomous, community of different nationalities, comprising Syrian, Assyrian and Kurdish citizens. The film acts as a means of salvaging the multitude of folksongs and oral histories of the region and creating an art film that blends these songs and histories together in a narrative that privileges ecology, equality, and feminism. While the film is markedly different from *Quattro Volte* (2010), it

[48] E-Flux Panel online 09/18/2021 https://www.e-flux.com/video/418694/panel-3-moving-image-activism-and-disobedience-on-screen/

[49] https://www.artforum.com/print/202007/alan-gilbert-on-the-rojava-film-commune-83689

[50] https://www.e-flux.com/live/314758/rojava-film-commune-forms-of-freedom/

[51] For more reading:

nonetheless speaks to local customs, sounds, songs and stories that come as much from the land and its ecologies as from the humans singing about them. "Our lives cannot be explained with books, only with songs" (Abdullah Öcalan).[52]

*Daren Bi Tene/ Lonely Tree*s (2017) is a forty-three minute film, but the Rojave Commune have made many films that range from a four-minute film, *Masi* (2017) about a boy buying a fish and then deciding to free it instead of eating it, to a 30-minute story, *Kerah Koh* (*The Unsharp Knife* 2016) about refugee women collecting herbs.

These films are a means of survival and collectivity. They are made specifically for local audiences, but nonetheless have now been shown around the world. The commune most recently presented its work in a travelling exhibition titled 'Forms of Freedom', which opened in Athens in 2018 and was shown in Zagreb in 2019 and New York in 2020.[53] In terms of research for this thesis, what is interesting is that these filmmakers act as 'diplomats' – in Latour's (2013) sense – for a place imbued with complex stratigraphies of culture, violence, ecologies, and identity. The films act as ways of re-making a world with images and of re-aligning the relationship of humans to the non-human aspects of place in a heterogenous manner.

Figure 14 Still from *Daren Bi Tene (Lonely Trees)* (Hinde/Rojave Commune 2017)

[52] Actor interviewed for this article https://issuu.com/side-gallery-and-cinema/docs/collective_now_5/s/12321529
[53] https://www.artforum.com/print/202007/alan-gilbert-on-the-rojava-film-commune-83689

Figure 15 Still from *Daren Bi Tene (Lonely Trees)* (Hinde/Rojave Commune 2017)

Another example of a collective re-making its connection to place through images is the Karrabing Film Collective.[54] This is a grassroots cooperative of friends and family members, including Elizabeth Povinelli, whose lives interconnect along the coastal waters west of Darwin, Australia, across Anson Bay, at the mouth of the Daly River, and who through their films have become part of a transnational network of curators, artists, and filmmakers (Lea & Povinelli 2018). *When the Dogs Talked* (Karrabing-Collective 2014) (Figure 16) is one of their early films that mixes documentary and fiction to introduce a satirical, 'improvised realism' to this drama about the complexities of maintaining a community that has not passed the judicial 'test' of native title claim but nonetheless attempts to make sense of their connection to Country. This hyperlocal film, with 'messy' or 'rough' aesthetics, provides a means of self-organization and social analysis for the Karrabing people. As a founding member of the collective, Povinelli has described their filmmaking as an analytics of existence. (Lea & Povinelli 2018, p.42).

> Their medium (film) is a form of survivance – a refusal to relinquish their country and a means of investigating contemporary social conditions of inequality. Their films represent their lives, create bonds with their land and intervene in global images of Indigeneity.[55]

The members of the collective create and perform stories that presence their daily lives:

[54] https://www.artandeducation.net/classroom/video/462480/elizabeth-povinelli-karrabing-film-collective-images-as-assembly

[55] https://karrabing.info/karrabing-film-collective

> 'How we been living ...we try to show it to other people, how we been struggling through life,' says one of their members, Gigi Yarrowin. (Lea & Povinelli 2018, p.38)

Not unlike the Rojava Film Commune, but with their own regional, cultural, historical and socio-political specificity, the Karrabing Collective's filmmaking is a means of maintaining connections to place, re-examining oral traditions, and asserting a selfhood and collectivity that has been challenged by the prevailing power structures within which they reside. Rather than caring for Country, through their films they are 'keeping country alive'.[56]

Figure 16 Still from *When the Dogs Talked* (Povinelli 2014). Opening scene. Karrabing Film Collective

[56] https://metromagazine.com.au/keeping-country-alive/

Figure 17 Still from *When the Dogs Talked* (Povinelli 2014). Karrabing Film Collective

Opening New Worlds – Immersive works

In 2015, music video director and cross media innovator Chris Milk gave a Ted Talk[57] about Virtual Reality (VR) and spoke of it as the 'ultimate empathy machine'. Milk posited that screen experiences that could move beyond the screen 'rectangle' and put the 'viewer' inside a story had the potential to change people's perceptions of each other. His first VR documentary, *Clouds Over Sidra* (Milk 2015), which featured a 12-year-old Syrian girl living in a refugee camp in Jordan, had been shown at the World Economic Forum[58] held in Davos, Switzerland. A collaboration between Vrse, his VR company, and the United Nations, this screen work was made to provoke empathy and activate social change.

Collisions (Wallworth 2016),[59] a VR documentary film about Nyarri Nyarri Morgan, a Martu man from the South Australian Desert whose first contact with Western culture came when he witnessed an atomic explosion in the desert, was similarly affecting in both content and in form (Figure 18). The filmmaker and visual artist Lynette Wallworth narrates the story of her return to the desert with a projector and a screen half a century after the atomic explosion. Wallworth shows Nyarri Nyarri archival footage of the bomb, including interviews with those who actioned its detonation. Uncanny in its revisiting of place, the screen work offers both a time capsule and a profound 'collision'

[57] https://www.ted.com/talks/chris_milk_how_virtual_reality_can_create_the_ultimate_empathy_machine?language=en

[58] https://www.weforum.org

[59] https://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/the-screen-guide/t/collisions-2016/35033/

of cultures around a place. For the Martu community, the desert is a 60,000-year-old homeland they have been charged with caring for, and for another community, the US army, it is a 'wasteland' testing ground for weapons of war. While Wallworth employs additional CGI techniques in tandem with the documentary to achieve a poetic quality, the narration and interviewing of Nyarri Nyarri keep the film within a documentary mode.

Felix and Paul, creative directors of the eponymous studios,[60] also merit mention as frontrunners in this form of social impact and documentary type of VR, having made films of US presidents Barack Obama and Bill Clinton while also filming entertainment acts such as Cirque de Soleil in 360 degrees.

The other side of documentary VR is computer-generated imagery (CGI). This type of VR was initially associated with gaming and more mainstream animations such as *Crow: The Legend* (2018), directed by *Madagascar* director Eric Darnell and voiced by John Legend and Oprah Winfrey. For this thesis, I was interested in finding a messier way of making VR and of finding a language that fell between documentary and the more polished, but artificial feeling, of CGI fictions.

While working on my first VR film, *Prehistoric VR* (Lang & Wright 2017), Rob and Bruce Allan at the Australian company Triggar VR showed me raw footage from a parabolic rocket journey into space. They had been working with the European Space Agency (ESA) to document the launch of the Maxus 9 in Kiruna, Sweden.[61] The footage had just come in and I was invited to experience '12 minutes of weightlessness'[62] as I travelled as the camera had done, away from the Earth and into Space. It was an experience that genuinely changed the way I felt about the planet, and the film expanded my sense of being in the world to other planes of existence. It was an 'aha' moment – possibly the sort referred to by Chris Milk. I'd had a bodily experience unlike anything else previously presenced by a screen work. Perhaps paradoxically, this hi-tech journey inspired me to experiment with my low-tech VR encounter with Brown Lake. I will return to this later.

[60] https://www.felixandpaul.com

[61] https://www.esa.int/Science_Exploration/Human_and_Robotic_Exploration/Research/Maxus-9_provides_a_little_microgravity

[62] ibid

Figure 18 An image from within *Collisions* (Wallworth 2016) virtual reality experience.

Photo: Animation artwork by Jossie Malis. Spirit Cloud imagery by Lynette Wallworth

In the late noughties, VR became more accessible due to the rapidly evolving technologies, and commercial interest from companies, such as Google, Sony and Canon. Filmmakers like Chris Milk, as well as musicians and artists used these more accessible VR technologies to experiment with creating immersive, virtual experiences. *Chalkroom* (2018), a collaborative work by musician Laurie Anderson and artist Hsin-Chien Huang used the capacity of Computer Generated Imagery (CGI) to counter its often slick, smooth imagery, and instead employed VR to express the materiality of chalk, in the form of a labyrinth of drawings and text on a blackboard (Figure 19). This experience allowed the reader to fly through an enormous structure made of words, drawings, and stories. 'Once you enter, you are free to roam and fly. Words sail through the air as emails. They fall into dust. They form and reform.'[63]

This work made me think about how I might use the technology of VR in an even messier way, using live action puppetry alongside recycled or natural materials such as carboard, wax and wood. Whilst stop-motion animation has this sort of hand-made materiality, which viewers are nonetheless able to suspend disbelief about, VR at that time seemed to sit mostly between the poles of the documentary and the smoothly finished images produced with CGI. Stop-motion animations, while they remain within the rectangle, were the closest forms of storytelling that resemble this hybrid of reality and speculative fiction. The film *Sororelle* (Even & Mercadier 2019)(Figure 20) comes close to reaching a skilled mix of puppetry and materiality in a story about water, land, and flooding. *Bidabaan (The Dawn Comes)* (Strong 2018) also traverses different planes of being in a story about an activist and a tree with an animist spirit. But VR narratives from the perspective of place had yet to make their entrance, except for Lynette Wallworth's finely crafted VR film *Awavena* (Wallworth 2018), set in the Amazon (Figure 21). This film, using a mix of CGI and lens-based imagery takes the viewer on an experience of place in a hallucinatory and visceral way. Led by Hushuhu, the first woman shaman of the Yawanawa, Wallworth was able to use VR like medicine to open a portal to another way of knowing'.[64]

[63] https://laurieanderson.com/?portfolio=chalkroom

[64] https://www.acmi.net.au/whats-on/lynette-wallworth-awavena-past-exhibition/

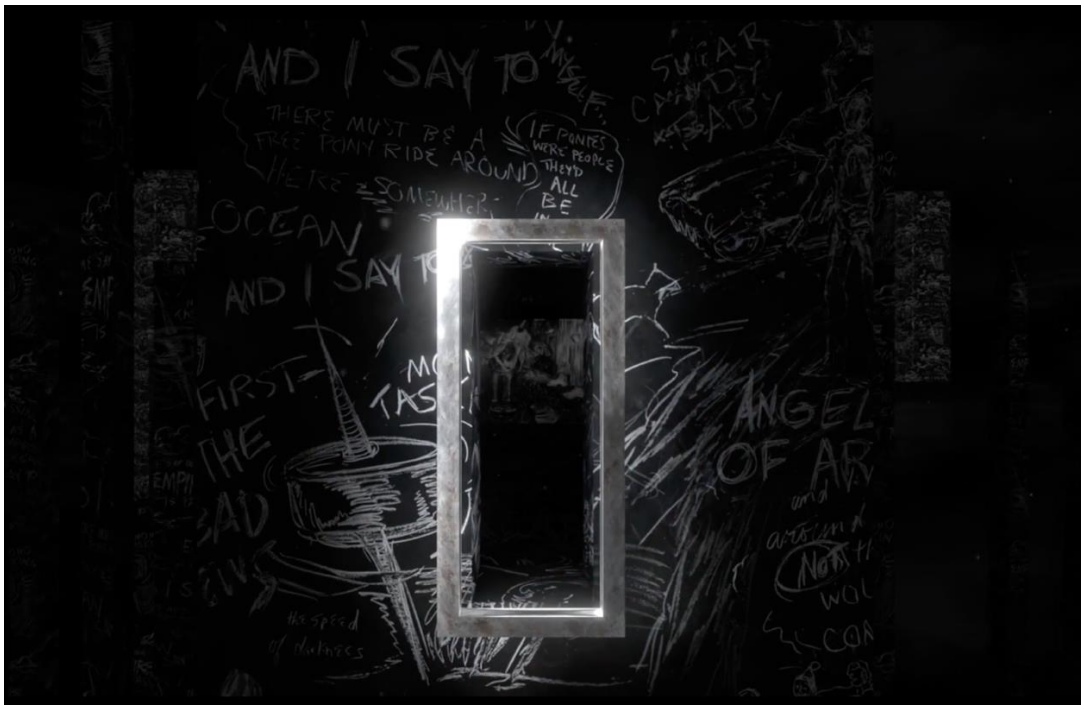

Figure *19* Still of Chalk Room (Laurie Anderson & Hsin-Chien Huang 2017)

Figure 20 Still of *Sororelle* (Even & Mercadier 2019)

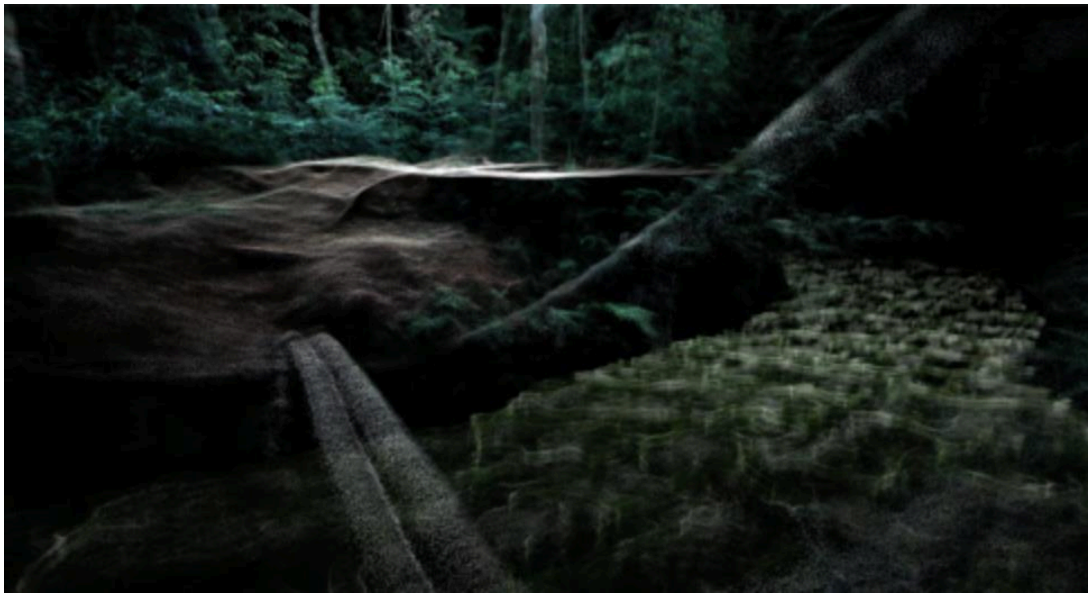

Figure 21 Still of *Awavena* (Lynette Wallworth 2018)

Screen Maps as Changescapes

To return to Brown Lake as an entangled place that raises questions about how human interactions with nature might be read in ways that are not limited to human perspectives, what emerges after this review of screen works that challenge the unsettled concept of the Anthropocene is this: employing disruptive aesthetic strategies in place based narratives offers the potential for an 'opening up of worlds' through site specific, hyperlocal, non-traditional, ethical, image making. Some of the disruptive aesthetics reviewed in this chapter belong to a genealogy of thought whose underpinnings can be located in the conceptual framework of this thesis – ecofeminism, posthumanism, geopoetics.

If we want to find sustainable modes of being on the planet, we need to create narratives that articulate our relationships to it in a different way. That is the purpose of my research and this thesis: how to come to know a place differently, and how to produce knowledge in a form that can communicate different modes of seeing, hearing, experiencing, and embodying our relationship to the non-human and specifically to Brown Lake, a body of water on an island off the north-east coast of a late-liberal society called Australia. The originality of this thesis lies in its interdisciplinary approach and its attempt to 'connect' the effects of cinema, the unsettled concept of the Anthropocene, and the entanglements of the human and non-human at Brown Lake.

The new knowledge produced in this thesis resides in its complementary and component parts: first, the 'stratigraphies of understanding' of Brown Lake set out in the

next chapter, that is, its geological interconnections, geography, hydrology, environmental history, and its indigenous and settler cosmologies – all the layers that suggest an entangled liveliness of the place; and second, the 'cartographies of place' proposed in Chapter 4, that set out the disruptive aesthetic strategies employed in the production of my creative research artefacts. By de-centring the human, and re-centring this lake as the protagonist in two 'screen maps', I attend to a knowledge gap around a specific, complex and geologically heterogenous place. Revealing Brown Lake's agentic power and subjectivity through a new cartography that I term a 'screen map' – an immersion, an encounter, an event – this research is attempting to shift how viewers encounter Brown Lake – by creating a 'posthuman screen poetics'

Presencing place differently by affirming a dialogical relationship to the lake, and activating what geographer Julia Scott Stevenson refers to as images of a 'preferred future' (Scott-Stevenson 2019, p.2) the two cartographies of place as 'screen maps', rather than being screen stories, sit between story and experience, trying to elude either documentary or pure fiction, yet iterating the phenomenon that I propose is housed by my screen idea of Brown Lake as a 'changescape' (Gibson 2015). As creative and cultural researcher, Ross Gibson suggests:

> 'A changescape helps you think and feel so that you are engaged with the flux-infused world, so that you feel informed about the world's maintenance and motivated by its momentum rather than distressed by its entropy' (p.9)

I argue later in Chapter 4 that Brown Lake, as an agential, posthuman subject, traverses each screen work, and makes visible its subjectivity as a series of 'endless events'. These screen maps as changescapes are 'designed to produce cognitive and sensorial wealth rather than material profit' (p.9)

Conclusion to the Chapter

In this chapter I have sought to connect place-based cinematic and photofilmic screen works with theoretical discussions of ecofeminist and posthuman responses to the challenges presented by the Anthropocene to place and, to cinema. In this review of the field, I acknowledged the value of hetergeneous cinematic and relocated photofilmic forms, and examined screen works that, actively re-read and/or create interventions in master screen narratives through 'polyphony and representational justice for all' (Shambu 2020).

Building on the rationale of the previous chapter, I have focused on the aesthetic and ethical strategies that reveal nature in an active voice, posthuman subjectivity, interconnections between beings and non-beings, an ethic of care and affirmation for the more than human, and a purpose for creating work beyond cultural commodification. While the artistic and filmic practices examined in this chapter draw from a wide range of conceptual concerns and media, what we can identify as a linking thread is the desire to engage with nature and the non-human in material and visible ways, to locate aesthetic strategies that disrupt and resist dystopian narratives, and instead gesture towards a 'preferred future' (Scott-Stevenson 2019). This chapter frames the proposal of this thesis – to re-make image-worlds through screen maps – as having a genealogy in contemporary screen practices, as well as presenting a genealogy of my own creative practice. By examining contemporary screen practices through the lens of ecofeminist and posthuman discourse, I have been able to contextualize the theoretical and conceptual concerns that inform my creative practice. This has allowed me to situate my work within a larger continuum of artist/filmmaker practices that respond to the 'connector' term that is the Anthropocene.

In setting this context, it was useful to first acknowledge a small genealogy of ecofeminist moving image works that put 'nature in an active voice'. This was followed by a brief analysis of place as subject through the use of 'horizontal aesthetics' (McMahon 2015) in several cinematic docudramas, all set in regional localities. I then turned to the posthuman perspectives of moving image artists with works that challenge accepted histories of place and use multiple viewpoints and media to express the lack of stability of any 'one' defining perspective, as well as pose questions about how and by whom maps are made. Ali Cherri's *The Digger* (2015) offers another view on the politics of representation, while *Antiplano* (Szlam 2018) and *Picnic Places* (Nugent 2020) offer perspectives on place that suggest geological temporalities beyond the human.

The site-specific work of the Karrabing Collective from Belyuen, Western Australia in *'When the Dogs Talked'* (Karrabing-Collective 2014) offers hyperlocal tactics and messy aesthetics as creative strategies to write themselves and their Country into existence. The Rojava Film Commune provides another example of keeping cultures and oral histories alive through filmmaking. Finally, a look at immersive works, including the VR work of Lynette Wallworth in *'Awavena'* (Wallworth 2018) offers further understanding of how seeing and experiencing place differently activate new relationships to it. This approach of focusing on screen works where place looms large highlights a

concern for imaging a different future that evidences the vitality and the 'agential power' '(Herman 2018) of place.

To conclude this chapter, I propose that it is possible to extend the perspectives offered by the genealogy of screen works set out above and to generate new knowledge, in the form of hyperlocal, hand-made, immersive, and relocated photofilmic forms produced as 'cartographies of place' that aim to reorient a viewer's perspective on Brown Lake.

CHAPTER THREE

Brown Lake | Stratigraphies of Understanding

> Ground your story in history, in community, in politics and finally in the moral problem of living on Earth. (Cronon 1992)

Place as Subject – Encounter with the non-human

Field Notes from the Here-ish – January 2017

A single paperbark cowers over pale sand that encroaches a water's edge once replete with tadpoles. Where the tea-stained water has gone this year is a source of much conjecture. A mystery, with as many causes as the myriad stories offered to explain the disappearance of the watery body of this Wallum Wetland.

Two black diving suits emerge from what remains. They quietly discuss the flints they've found. Easier now the levels are low. To find further signs from their ancestors.

As the sun descends, the lake offers a mirror image of sky against the rushes, crafting a live Rorschach from the brown surface of a few moments earlier.

A girl lolls along the paperbark's arm, concentrating on the moves of a Gubba girl who practises handstands on a mat of dry eucalypt leaves. She's further back towards the dusty track, near a goanna she cannot see.

Girl in the tree, listening to the adult voices in tannin water. Not the divers, the parents of Gubba. They're talking about strangeness of the freshwater lake, perched between ancient dunes, and held by humic layers. In this light it could be 100,000 years ago, they say. Cicadas drown out the rest of their excitement.

A green light from the nearby golf ball tower directs faraway planes home to Brisbane airport as damselflies find their own landing pad amongst the twig rush. They clutch in a heart-shaped tryst.

She jumps down, practises a handstand too. She tells the Gubba there is snake who travels underground between this lake and the men's one. From Brown to Blue. Or Boumiera to Kaboora. She's never been there. The two girls squeal in fearful delight whilst the adults nod awkwardly at the divers, who, having peeled off their synthetic rubber skins, reveal softer ones, with grey heads.

Above the dusk-lit din – the zips and techks of sedgefrogs defy the trill of the cane toads. They all agree. Brown Lake has mysterious qualities. They should head off now. Humans are not allowed to stay at the lake at nightfall. That's not a municipal regulation but local lore since forever.

A battered 4WD arrives, fishing lines on top. Five men get out, lost in their mateship dialogue, oblivious to the delicacy of the moments before. Taking their hi-vis potbellies for a cool off in the women's lake, they are oblivious to either law or lore. Though they lament that it's a pity they can't bring their jet skis anymore.

Brown Lake sighs. Her body only just recovered from the day's activities.
She is full of stories, and they are not all human

How do we come to know place?

This uncanny sunset witnessed at Brown Lake in January 2017, for the briefest of moments, suggested an experience of time and place *from the outside*, 'from outside the narrative of self, where every sentence starts with an 'I' (Plumwood 2012, p.17) . The collision of light, of children hiding high in trees, of wind curls on the water, of baby frogs wriggling in the sand, dragonflies navigating the rushes, of the last motor vehicle leaving, of a goanna clinging to paperbark, of an artist friend quietly recounting a first nation cosmology of the lake, made me forget my human self. Beyond human – beyond human time, just a feeling of being in the world in a different way – with a just a small sense of perceiving a non-human reciprocal gaze (Herman 2018) – as if I witnessed the event of that sunset from the point of view of Brown Lake. A haunting moment, even if benign,

that made me think about Val Plumwood's encounter with a crocodile, which she described in her essay 'Human Vulnerability and The Experience of Being Prey' (Plumwood 1995), and during which she understood that she was not inside the narrative as the protagonist but outside of it as the crocodiles' prey. 'In that flash, I glimpsed the world for the first time "from the outside," as no longer *my* world, as raw necessity, an unrecognizably bleak order, indifferent to my life as my death' (p. 30)

So, while not in danger in the same way, I consider myself 'from the outside' and imagine Brown Lake as a personality, perhaps even with legal rights like Mount Taranaki or the Whanagi River in New Zealand.[65] How might I, as a human, imagine its consciousness? Affectively? Perceptively? Poetically? A stream of questions follows: Who is this Lake? What does its body contain? Why is it called Brown? When you put both words together what happens? Brown Lake. Where does it reside? Relationally, Imaginatively, Politically, Culturally, Geographically? What stratigraphies of history are present in a place? Geological, Topographical, Environmental, Cosmological? What crossings and intersections might these histories reveal? Is Brown Lake sentient? How and what does it perceive? And beyond immediate experience, my compulsion as a filmmaker asks... and in a screen narrative – how might the camera and an assembly of its recorded fragments find a way for Brown Lake to represent itself?

Whilst I round up children and pack them into a car, I try to imagine, Brown Lake – as a relocated photofilmic fiction – one that documents a material reality, yet is able to perceive a world beyond what is humanly visible, that has a quality of 'aliveness' (Millard 2014), that sets out a sequence of human/nonhuman dialogues rather than a complete narrative, that creates a geopoetic of place, people, animals, plants. Brown Lake as a series of events and encounters, of this always transforming body of water in relationship? I conjure this time-based work, with Brown Lake playing the role of a changescape that 'ignites your sensorium first and then your cerebullum' (Gibson 2005, p.11), as a stream of consciousness which ran around my mind that afternoon.

How do we come to know a place? Is it by knowing facts about it, or is it by relating to it? Speaking about it or with it? How do perspectives change according to the languages of landscape we choose to engage with? As Gibson (2015) notes 'a changescape works best not only when you are inside it but when you know it inside yourself somehow' (p.11). This third chapter explores the stratigraphies of understanding that are

65 https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/22/new-zealand-gives-mount-taranaki-same-legal-rights-as-a-person

entangled in Brown Lake and proposes that to reorient our understanding of Place – how we might consider Brown Lake as an encounter – we might imagine ourselves in dialogue with it, cultivating our capacity to notice what a place has to say to us. To realign ourselves with the non-human. As Kombumerri and Wakka Wakaa scholar from South-East Queensland, Dr. Mary Graham (2009) noted:

> Although the importance of Place as a category is rarely acknowledged in Western Thought, research shows that value and identity often are, for non-Indigenous as well as for Indigenous people tied up with place.... In human experience then, Place looms large, providing, sometimes dominating, the backdrop and sometimes the foreground as well. ... Place informs and influences judgment and imagination. (p.76)

Brown Lake, as place, is entangled. This chapter aims to explore its de-coherent stories through a series of field notes assembled across the last six years. Part informational, part anecdotal, they chart a relationship to the lake that has changed over time. They are not completely chronological since I tried to give them some thematic flow. During 2020 and 2021, I was unable to visit the lake, except for a 3-day trip to film some extra footage for the moving image work.

A Brown Lake on an Island of Sand Dunes

#Field Notes from Moreton Bay Research Centre – March 2017

Aquifers

North Stradbroke Island, known by its Indigenous custodians as Minjerribah, is the second largest sand island in the world. Along with K'gari (Fraser & Bribie Islands) and Moorgumpin (Moreton Island), it forms part of one of the biggest sand dune systems in the world and is associated with the longest downdrift sand accumulation system in the world (Patton, Ellerton & Shulmeister 2019). Massive sand dunes started to form here 300,000 years ago. A CSIRO geology report (Ward 1978) regarded the island as

> part of a drowned landscape, formed by partial submergence of a land surface that included several high areas of blown sand. They originated when the sea was far out on the continental shelf, in an early glacial age. (p.98)

Anchored north and south by outcrops of volcanic, sedimentary, and metamorphic rocks that are exposed at either end of the island, the rest laying around 60m below the island's surface. The two protrusions provide the bedrock for an overlapping, transgressive, parabolic dune system.[66] These dunes are also called u-shaped, hairpin, or blowout dunes and are also characterized by being covered with vegetation. These windblown dunes were formed across four stages from the Pleistocene era 300,000 years ago, with the younger dunes developing during the Holocene 6,000 years ago, their shape and connection to the groundwater acquifer evolving a dynamic hydrology that promotes a rich and unique diversity of life in the sand dunes and surrounding wallum wetlands (Barram 2016)

The island depends on a high average rainfall that regularly replenishes the groundwater. Much of the groundwater is stored in a large regional aquifer beneath the island's highest dune, Bippo Oyerpunya. Many other smaller aquifers are contained in layers of less permeable sand 'perched' above the main aquifer, their extent and location not yet fully known. Importantly, the aquifers act to prevent salt water from the ocean intruding into the island's groundwater and sands. Instead, the fresh water of the lens-shaped aquifer floats naturally on top of the salt water and its gravitational force exerts an outward pressure on the sea water.

It is thought that stygofauna, animals that live without light in underground water, may comprise a subterranean ecosystem within the aquifers, having been first discovered in similar conditions in Western Australia in 1991 (Eberhard et al 2005) Stygofauna are rare aquatic creatures that can exist in highly acidic, high-oxygen, unpolluted water. Since their discovery, these invertebrates, which evolved exclusively in underground water, have been recorded across the continent. A life in complete darkness means these animals are often blind, beautifully translucent, and often extremely localized – rarely living anywhere else but the patch they're found in. The recent discovery of new Northern Territory species has implications for all extractive industries affecting groundwater.[67][68]

[66] For an explanation of parabolic dune see https://sedimentology.uconn.edu/2017/02/07/major-types-of-dunes-where-and-how-they-form/#

67 https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-02-17/betaloo-micro-organism-new-species-fracking/13159678

68 Stygofauna are the ultimate climate change refugees. They would have inhabited surface water when inland Australia was much wetter. But as the continent started drying around 14 million years ago, they moved underground to the relatively stable environmental conditions of subterranean aquifers. A CSIRO study provided direction to reduce risks to stygofauna, ensuring their ecosystems and groundwater quality is maintained. https://publications.csiro.au/rpr/pub?pid=csiro:EP158350

Above the ground, Minjerribah's wallum wetlands – the word wallum deriving from the indigenous word for the Wallum Banksia, a characteristic shrub of heath-covered dune ridges – occur as lakes and lagoons fringed by sedgelands, permanent and ephemeral creeks, coastal swamps and heath on wet peat, and seasonally waterlogged sand plains. Fed in the main by a constant supply of groundwater, the wetlands contain some of the world's most naturally acidic fresh water and provide habitat to support a unique assemblage of animal and plant species. Some of these species are extremely rare and have evolved to live in this low pH freshwater environment.

Brown Lake, the largest perched lake on Minjerribah, forms part of a system of 27 perched lakes in the hydrologically complex island. Each perched lake is unique in its form and manner of connecting to the underwater acquifer that can lie anywhere between and 10 and 180 meters below the sand dunes. Fringed by swamp ecosystems of sedges and rushes, the perched lakes' waters are stained by tannin, a brown pigment found in leaves and other parts of the surrounding vegetation. The ancient lakes are contained within large, saucer-shaped basins of impermeable layers in the sand, which mostly extend beneath the adjoining dunes well beyond the lake's edges. These indurated humic layers probably formed around 100,000 years ago because of chemical reactions between sandy soil, fine organic matter and water (teewah sands). Known as aquitards, they support the lakes and swamps perched above the main island aquifer by slowing water from percolating into the acquifer below. The shape, size and interconnections of most perching lakes, generally, is not well understood.

Brown Lake is thought to have formed in a depression between capped beach ridge dunes around 150,000 years ago, where an aquitard developed in surface soils which then retained rainfall and surface runoff. The brown water of the lake has a low pH (acidic) and is stained by dissolved acids and natural humic organic matter and tannin from the surrounding sedges and paperbarks. Unusual and rare biota inhabit the lake's three stratigraphies of water: anoxic, cold, and warm. For many years it was the only know location for a primitive freshwater sponge that is important for understanding sponge evolution in the Australian region. All these details about Brown Lake create a picture of what the lake might look like in a scientific magazine, as benign interlocutor of natural wonders; but how might Brown Lake be expressed in other ways?

Brown – A colour of complex imprecision

 # Field Notes – Jan 2018 – Everywhere-ish

> Thinking brown pushes us into hybrid spaces that span living and nonliving matter, aesthetic values and biological drives. (Mentz 2013)

There are many brown lakes in Australia. The Brown Lake I am writing about demonstrates 'a hybridity that frustrates order making systems' and compels me to think about how screen practice might connect 'the living, non-living matter, aesthetic values, and biological drives' (Mentz 2013, p. 193). The very naming of this body of water as 'brown' hints at a hybrid of cultures, human and non-human, Aboriginal and settler, living and dead. Boumiera is the Aboriginal spirit name of this place,[69] whilst brown is the colonial way of naming the lake. For millennia this carrier of water and life was identified by its spirit name, but more recently by its 'colour name'. Brown acts as a colour of complex imprecision in the analogous context of Brown Lake's water, as well as in the context of skin colour; there are so many shades of brown. Human visitors to the lake – Indigenous, foreign, migrant, or colonial –and their purposes there provoke reasons to closely interrogate what the valency of brown is, as well as ask what makes something brown? One day while filming, I overhear a pale-skinned swimmer say as he entered the lake, 'This brown water is weird', and yet, as Mentz (2013) commented, 'To be brown is to be human; there is no nonbrown strain of human pigmentation' (p.194).

Brown Lake likewise carries different browns in its water: pale, mid tone, and dark. It also contains those stratigraphies described above: warm, cold, and anoxic. When you take a glass of water from the brown lake, it is less brown and almost transparent; the staining by the tannin from tea-trees disappears up close. All these observations connect to questions around not only what the aesthetic practice of 'thinking brown' might reveal, but also what multiple subjectivities it might blend. How might *thinking brown* open up different worlds to the ones previously seen, heard and experienced? How to communicate that on screen? And what does the blending of separate elements, a process that reflects the craft of producing filmic forms, offer up as an *otherwise* arrangement that Brown Lake might reveal? Focusing on the organic and inorganic nature of brown, literature professor Steve Mentz (2013) notes:

69 There are many different spellings for the lake – Bummiera, Bamira etc. The Jandai language dictionary suggests using whichever one you prefer.

> Drawing brown out requires extracting sense from stinking goo. It comes at us from both sides of our world, the living, and the dead. ... Brown is the colour of intimate and uncomfortable contact between human bodies and the nonhuman world. (p. 193)

The stinking goo of brown challenges the view that narrows and excludes non-living and dead matter as something separate from our living human selves. It opens up possibilities of writing into existence entities beyond the human. It insists on the presence of multiple subjectivities. It suggests endurance. Brown's complexities resonate with the hybrid position I am in as I search to situate the agentic subjectivity of Brown Lake on screen. 'Thinking brown' goes beyond the human and asks us to consider how the act of extracting sense from the 'stinking goo' can make visible the temporal and embodied relations across layers and lines of being and non-being. In this hybrid world, all encounters, joinings, and dispersals are temporary. We cannot go away, and we cannot connect forever either (Mentz 2013). The lake is neither wholly connected nor entirely independent to those it is assembled with. Life and non-life are endlessly in dialogue with each other.

Beyond the human lies an ecosystem that runs through Brown Lake: an interplay of dead brown matter in the form of fallen tea-tree leaves and decaying bodies, lace monitors, keel back snakes, rare acid frogs and others that act as a nourishment for the live plants and animals that populate the area. Brown, often seen as a dull, is the colour of matter that animates life.

In September 2010, long before this thesis began, I sat at Brown Lake for the first time, on pale white sand, amongst the sedges, with friends from the island. I listened to them explain the significance of the body of brown-tinged water that lay before us. Brown Lake on Stradbroke Island was once known as Boumiera on Minjerribah by its first human inhabitants. Of cultural significance to the Quandamooka people who compose the Dandrubin, Gorenpul and Noonuccal tribes, it is a lake that in local traditions only women can speak about, and a place only women and children should visit. The protocol for entering the dark water involves a female elder singing out in Jandai language to the lake and waiting for a sign from the lake that it is safe for her and her children to do so. This ritual demonstrates respect for the spirit of the lake and Mother Earth – a recognition that the spirit is in presence, the ancestors are in presence and that they can hear you. A decade later, with native title, though not sovereignty, restored to the

Quandamooka people a Burning Ceremony was held here. An elder named Evelyn Parkin celebrated the first women's cultural burn at the lake in many years. She explained to those assembled:

> You would speak in language to the spirit – if there was a sign like ripples that meant 'no' they would turn you around and go home. We believe in spirit and in the ancestors. They hear everything we say, and they know who you are.[70]

In scientist Donna Haraway's (2008) words, 'The truth or honesty of non-linguistic embodied communication depends on looking back and greeting significant others, again and again' (p.27). This is a practice Haraway describes in *When Species Meet* (2008) as *respecere,* meaning a co-constitutive natural cultural dancing, holding in esteem, and regard, open to those who look back reciprocally. 'Always tripping, this kind of truth has a multispecies future' (p. 27). This kind of truth also has a multispecies past, one where the notion of respect amongst beings and non-beings was a regular part of greeting rituals – a call and a response acknowledging the co-existence of entities.

My friend at the lake that day in 2010 is a Gorenpul elder from Minjerribah. His wife is of Anglo-Indian heritage and grew up the nearby locality of Redlands. They met at the local high school on the mainland and have been married for over 30 years. Like my friend, his mother was an activist for Indigenous sovereignty on Minjerribah for most of her life. Through his grandmother, cultural knowledge and protocols were passed on to mother and son, and now to her granddaughter by way of oral traditions. Both their traditions and protocols are concerned with care for place and its inhabitants – animals, plants, minerals, spirits – and their ecosystems. This oral storytelling knowledge system is what Australian archaeologist, Annie Ross (2019) describes as 'traditional ecological knowledge' (TEK). There is a deep respect – respect that extends to a 'nonlinguistic embodied communication' that connects my companions to this place. As Ross concludes in her paper on TEK, ' It is time for Indigenous and western scientists to work together, to recognise each other's values, for the long-term future of our shared planet'[71] (Ross 2019)

Sitting next to the lake that day – in sweltering heat – watching the dragonflies skim its brown surface, I had no expectation that I would swim in the acidic freshwater for

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70 https://www.des.qld.gov.au/our-department/news-media/mediareleases/2020/women-gather-for-special-cultural-burn-on-minjerribah (downloaded 03/04/22) 'If there was a sign like a ripple that meant 'no' and we had to turn around and go home. If it was calm, we could swim' *(2020 Tape 0623 Found at 08;52;50)*

71 From blog- https://www.nps.gov/subjects/tek/annie-ross.htm

the first time. I had been told by my partner, a lawyer who acted on behalf of our friends in the Quandamooka native title claim, that I should dress appropriately, in a way that was respectful of local protocols. At the time we were newly partnered, both divorced, with eight children, brown and pale-skinned, between us spanning three ethnicities: Anglo, Burmese, and Aboriginal Australian. Not unlike my partner and me, our friends also live between different cultural traditions. And while they had successfully campaigned to have the use of recreational jet-skis and boats banned from Brown Lake out of respect for the place, they nonetheless tolerated people who now come to swim at the lake. They invited me to do so. I was at first reluctant to accept their offer, but then I did.

The water is cool and clean and dark. At the edges it looks rusty. Tiny black tadpoles swim around frantically. As I wade into the water, and swim at their behest towards the middle of the lake, there is only darkness beneath me and a great sense of fear at what may lie under my feet. Boumiera has a male complement Kaboora. According to Quandamooka cosmologies of place, there is a snake spirit that moves between Boumiera and Kaboora (Brown and Blue), whose resting place is the center of the lake I am swimming towards. I am alone in the water. I think of the stinking goo beneath my feet, of the snake spirit and the fact that no one has 'sung out' to the lake before I entered. My friends don't swim, and my partner only dips his toes. They insist that I go further. Their permission doesn't make me feel less awkward about finding myself in the middle of a women's lake being watched by surrounding paperbarks and passed over by a damselfly, a Dune Ringtail, whose species is unique to this lake (Barram 2017).

My head goes under, I see only brown, feel layers of sensation, warm water around my shoulders, cold water at my feet, negative space beneath that. I swim towards the reeds on the other side of the lake, increasingly certain that the lake is the one in control of this situation. My breath loses its rhythm, panicked by some unknown force – mine, or that of the brown water? I stop, turn around, and make for the soft sandy shoreline where the other three humans laugh and joke at the fact of my having been 'spooked'. In truth I am not spooked, but rather, humbled by the lake and its non-human inhabitants. I recognize that the lake and I are inextricably connected, though I feel as though I am a guest extending myself to understand its protocols. A growing *respecere* for this ever-changing place pervades my mind and body, visceral rather than intellectual, my mortality in synch with the goosebumps on my skin as I look back at the lake and acknowledge its being-ness. I think of Haraway's (2008) comment: 'Wounds to self-

certainty are necessary if not yet sufficient' (p. 12). I understand the value of this wound. It is a gift – from my friends and from the lake.

Complexity is the name of the game. I recognize the nature of the hybrid space I am standing in. Brown *is* the colour of intimate and uncomfortable contact between my human body and the nonhuman world. This first visit to Brown Lake casts spells on me – a colour spell and a naming spell. Troubling and enlivening a new language of seeing and understanding, it changes my relationship to Brown Lake. Knowing the lake's indigenous name, Boumiera – the rituals applied to it, the responsibilities of those who frequented it – extends the muddied histories of the human, while the non-human reveals further stratigraphies of place. This hybrid, entangled place of thinking 'brown' forces me to blend myself *within*, rather than consider myself separate *from*[72], my pale skin off-kilter and my certain sort of humanness off-centre, reoriented, realigned. Light shimmies through the water as if the lake is laughing at me. Environmental philosopher Deborah Bird Rose (2017) suggested that seeing nature in an active voice

> comes with a burden: the commitment to bear witness to the shimmering lively powerful interactive worlds that ride the waves of ancestral power. This commitment calls to engage in forms of scholarship that encourage 'passionate immersion' in the lives of both humans and nonhumans. (p.53)

On that first visit to Brown Lake, I bore witness to a something I still don't fully understand. What I did glimpse, though, is that 'we do not know what brown is, but we are in it' (Mentz 2013, p.210).

Starting with clumsy tools – Lake as feminine identity

#Field Notes – June 2017

I want to bring you closer. Closer into Brown Lake. Bring you close onto to the bitumen road that leads there from a small town called Dunwich, where the ferry comes in across the Moreton Bay waters and leaves mainland Brisbane behind. Close, past the hill that veers off to Rainbow Street, not named rainbow for the serpent, but for HMS Rainbow, the first colonial ship of war that was moored in Moreton Bay in 1827[73]. A street that

72 Tim Morton says the goal of ecological thinking is the 'love the inhuman, squalid brown mixtures represent blended things that are hard to love but important not to ignore/ (find page)

[73] http://www2.redland.qld.gov.au/AboutRedlands/History/OurSuburbs/Documents/NSITimeline.pdf

houses itinerant miners of sand, and the odd migaloo[74] tourist or two, where the fibro bungalows look back across the bay at sunset, dreaming of home. Further along, a wide road that leads to Back Beach, and Stradbroke Golf Course is flanked by gigantic poles carrying power, visited by the occasional kangaroo. If you don't pay attention, you will miss the turn off, as I have done many times – a small sign heralding Brown Lake in white letters against a poo-brown background. Closer in, along a stony, sandy, unsealed track surrounded by paperbarks and tawny frogmouths, just when you wonder when Brown Lake will show herself, you arrive.

Close, onto her pale sand and in towards her clear brown water. The air is cooler here, the soundscape finer, the space feels fresh, orderly though not officious. The edges between amber liquid and millions of fine silica grains, demarcated by dark brown fractals of sludge, mark the water's movement across the day. The spiny sedges sway, the dune ringtails busy themselves despite you, and, if it's the end of the day, the cicadas have started their thrum. There she is. As ecological philosopher Tim Morton (2018) says in *Being Ecological,* 'A realm of unspeakable non-human beauty not confined to normative anthropocentric parameters begins to open up' (p. 60). The discreet butter bean curves of the lake, contained by tea trees, make it feel intensely private here. Though if you turn your gaze south and look to the hill behind, a Dulux White golfball-shaped tower emits a thin green light, suggesting a kind of small surveillance facility. It sits atop the island's highest sand dune – the now re-made Bippo Oyerpunya.[75]

Brown Lake is unphased by the tower, and instead provides herself as home for the nesting ibis and busy trails of quiet ants. Brown Lake is a humble, unfussy place, rudimentary even. Not that easy to get to, not as showy as the North Stradbroke Island with its beaches, surf and salt water. Yet her quiet beauty, her clarity of purpose, her eucalyptus smells, her frog songs and gentle movements, give way to a strange unfamiliar sense of arriving home to a familiar loved one, even though that makes no sense to me at all. Despite my foreignness here, I feel a connectedness to her once I arrive. Buddhist philosopher Tich Nhat Han says our ancestors are in our bodies –animal, plant, mineral – just like Pythagoras did.[76] I figure myself as a weed here. I don't belong but perhaps will find some usefulness, not unlike the colonial goat weed, which can be used to heal wounds when applied in tandem with paperbark.

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[74] Migaloo is a term used by local Indigenous community for whitefellas, after the white albino humpback whale

75 Reconstructed after being mined for sand (Mary Barram 2016)

76 Pythagoras's idea of the soul passing through four states of being.- human, animal, plant & mineral

Yet, despite her self-sufficient nature, Brown Lake is still losing water. Incrementally, imperceptibly, her resources are dwindling, despite best efforts to keep her delicate ecologies afloat. Many argue about what is making her lose water, but an anticipatory sense of what Glenn Albrecht terms 'solastagia'(Albrecht et al. 2007)[77] pervades each yearly field trip I make here. I can't restrain the repetitive thought that if this scenario were a Hollywood movie, we would be working in the murder mystery genre with Brown Lake cast as the dead or dying girl, the murderer absent, everyone in possession of an alibi, many red herrings, and the big reveal yet to happen.

I prefer to imagine her differently and would re-cast her as the femme fatale in a film noir narrative.[78] Maori Filmmaker/Artist Shannon Te Aro posits that 'a complicated idea always starts with a simple scenario'.[79] In his work 'Ka mua, ka muri' (2020),[80] he uses tropes of the road movie genre as a conduit to a more complex story where the things that happen teach the characters stuff they didn't know about themselves[81]. I am not writing a road movie, but I suspect Brown Lake might reveal her substance if we journeyed with her differently.

And while it may seem anthropocentric and trivial to frame Brown Lake this way, Jane Bennett (2010) argues in 'Vibrant Matter' that anthropomorphising has its virtues. Finding a way to describe qualities that we have not been habituated to recognize requires patience and effort and stumbles. Finding connections that we feel extend our perception of place can likewise be fraught. As Australian critical theorist Claire Colebrook (2019) cautions, a posthumanism that endorses interconnecting the 'human' to absolutely everything else has a flattening effect that can turn into a form of maintaining the same kind of anthropocentric 'nowhere' perspective that it is professing to disavow. Somewhere between Bennett and Colebrook, is the pragmatism of Morton's (2018) suggestion to 'start where we are and use some of the inadequate and broken tools we have and see how they get modified by working at scales unfamiliar to us for which tools are not designed' (p.210). For the purpose of coming closer to Brown Lake's agentic subjectivity, I discuss Brown Lake using third-person feminine pronouns to move closer towards her

77 Solastalgia is a concept developed to give greater meaning and clarity to environmentally induced distress. As opposed to nostalgia – the melancholia or homesickness experienced by individuals when separated from a loved home – solastalgia is the distress that is produced by environmental change impacting on people while they are directly connected to their home environment.

78 A femme fatale is a woman who doesn't submit to men's desires.

79 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MP4ICwZQqA8 Shannon Te Ao - Ka mua, ka muri

80 whakatauki means "walking backwards into the future"

81 https://tropedia.fandom.com/wiki/Road_Movie

centrality as the main character of this thesis and as a way to start where I am, using the broken and inadequate tools I have at my disposal to dialogue with her.

Lake as a Body of Water

 # More Field Notes 2017–2020

Before the Covid-19 pandemic I often crossed state borders to visit Brown Lake, though I never went there again with the couple who introduced me to the lake that first time. Brown Lake continues to change. Her brown water recedes from visit to visit. There is a sinewy paperbark near the waterline on the small beach next to the car parking area, bowed over as if the strain of remaining upright is too much. When my children were small, they would hang from its bent spine and jump into the water. Now there is a gap of several meters before the water's edge begins. The paperbark, curls outwards, as if trying to farewell a departing relative. The farther away the water, the more the paperbark seems to extend towards it. Acquiring a new role, the paperbark has become a marker for loss. Its rhizomatic roots cling steadfastly to the shifting sand.

As mentioned earlier, perched lakes are held above the water table by an impermeable organic layer known as Teewah sands. These are dark sands. unlike the pale sands above them. Having a layer of tea tree leaves harden into a stone-like membrane means the lake's impermeable floor is not connected to the underground water aquifer below it. Instead, this body of water, being characteristic of a dune lake, relies upon rainwater and runoff from the surrounding tea trees and paperbarks. In a process of self-sustaining reciprocity, the leaves from the trees gather at the bottom of the lake, creating a container of freshwater that allows the trees to survive in sandy conditions that might otherwise be devoid of the nutrients they require to thrive.

Each perched lake's water system is unique, dependent on the variables at play in each specific locale. As the Queensland government website explains: 'The topography, stratigraphy (layering), permeability and other properties of the local semi-permeable layer can be very complex and heterogeneous, making these systems highly diverse, complex, and difficult to predict'.[82] It is precisely Brown Lake's lack of predictability, her complexity and diversity, that gives her a unique and multifaceted subjectivity, since it is

82 https://wetlandinfo.des.qld.gov.au/wetlands/ecology/aquatic-ecosystems-natural/lacustrine/non-floodplain-perched-lake/hydrology.html

the composition of actants in her eco-system that constitute her identity. Feminist and educator Astrida Neimanis suggests that we are all bodies of water: 'We are both, inextricably and at once composed of wet matter, yet also swim in the discursive flocculations of embodiment as an idea, a politics, an ethics.'[83] Swimming, floating, flowing, feeding, transforming, Brown Lake's body of water, like our own, is never still. It moves vertically as part of the precipitation cycle and horizontally as part of the nourishment cycle of its surroundings.

Not unlike an island, this perched lake's heterogenous environment has allowed unique species to evolve in her watery body: the tiny and rare acid frog, a sponge, a distinctive worm, and the eponymous dragonfly. The spike rush and the swamp daisy are also unique to this area, as is the now threatened yellow swamp orchid. These wildflowers, which once bloomed on nutrient-leached dunes, are unfamiliar to me, though I have seen a black-and-white photo from the 1940s of a Quandamooka man wearing a colonial suit in counterpoint to his long white beard and carrying an armful of wildflowers. Abundance for sale. Message to the Future. Nature become Commodity.

Brown Lake is also bordered by blue gums and swamp mahoganies. There are sometimes koalas, gliders and flying foxes in these trees, yet most prominent are the lace monitors clutching the tree trunks and the curlews tiptoeing amongst the mounds of fallen leaves. Once fishless, the lake now also hosts invasive species of exotic pests; the Firetail Gudgeon and the Eastern Gambusia are now predators in her body of water. The infamous cane toad does daily battle with the native keelback snake, whose special powers include being able to ingest cane toad poison. Povinelli's Anthropocene figure of the virus is embodied in these guests. Some of Brown Lake's less resilient resident species have languished in the shadows of these new arrivals. Water nymphs no longer gestate on her surface, and the pobblebonk frog is now prey for Bufo Marinus. Nonetheless, this heterogenous collection of relationships, whilst changing, is still able to function *because* of the lake's complexity, diversity, and unpredictability. Brown Lake actively responds to the attentions paid to her[84] through her ability to adapt. The question remains, though, for how long? Is there a limit to her resilience or can she keep changing forever? Will the cycles of her body of water remain intact? Or will she, as Anna Tsing (2015) suggests in *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, transform into new arrangements, a pocket of livability, just like the post-industrial forests of America have adapted to host the exotic

83 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dqa3bHnCWVE

84 Deborah Bird Rose writes about active attention in her essay 'Dialogue with Place' (Rose 2002)

matsutake mushroom. And would this be a good thing or a bad thing? Should we accept and learn to live with the contaminations of a world in ruins (Stengers 2021)?

When I found the only existing hydrology report on Brown Lake, a PhD project (Watts 2004), I noticed a newspaper article in the appendix that recounted the same story of water loss. It has a photograph of children, not unlike mine, playing in the tree, twenty years earlier. In the article, a local woman named Eileen O'Loughlin, who had lived on Stradbroke Island since 1927, recounted that she had never seen the water so low, and that trees were now three to five meters further away from the water: 'There were trees right here near the water and thick reeds which aren't here now.' She added that she was worried that the children would not be able to learn the responsibilities associated with visiting the lake. An ethics of care. How many generations of children have played in this tree? How many women have educated them in the rhythms of the lake's water? I noticed that one of the children, Teegan Burns, was now running the North Stradbroke Island Museum. In 2020, Teegan curated an exhibition about wage strikes staged by Aboriginal workers on the island. History as restoration. A transformation of ethics as care.

Watts's (2004) hydrology report reviewed the constancy of the lake and her cycles of water replenishment by measuring two sets of data only: rainfall, which has been measured daily at nearby Dunwich Post Office and Dunwich Weather Station for over a hundred years, and water extraction by South-East Queensland (SEQ) local government. A small amount of that water is supplied to residents on the island, the rest to the mainland. To supply Redlands residents, Seqwater draws around 28 million litres a day from Stradbroke Island's aquifer[85]. This freshwater is used not just for drinking, but also for flushing toilets and laundering.

Surprisingly, there is no mention in that report of the impact of sandmining, an activity that had been underway for more than fifty years prior to 2004 and that requires large amounts of water. Sandmining on the island has created great divisions within the community. Amongst its allegedly deleterious effects is the weakening of the structure of the sandstone that contains Minjerribah's unique freshwater and its ancient stygofauna, those blind, translucent creatures who perform the busy work of keeping it clean.

The report about the condition of the water in this high dune lake, the largest on the island, was inconclusive. While able to provide data about the maximum depth of the

85 https://www.redlandcitybulletin.com.au/story/6528988/residents-fear-straddies-sacred-lagoons-drying/

lake (10 metres at the centre) and to reiterate its vital statistics,86 it did not discern whether the water level was receding because of limited rainfall (the El Nino effect) or whether it had some contact with the water aquifer and was thus affected by the millions of litres a day being piped off to the mainland. Nor did it conclude whether the limits of the Teewah sands, which may or may not be impermeable, extended the length of the entire lake. The scientific outcome was that there was no conclusive reason for the lake to be losing water (Watts (2004). I noted, however, that Watts referred to the fact that she could not use a motorboat to measure the depth of Brown Lake because these had been banned. I think of my Goenpul friends and grin.

Looking at a cross section of a perched lake's shape, my now teenage daughter points out to me that its shape bears an uncanny resemblance to a uterus. She asks whether, aside from the freshwater and good shelter the lake provides, one of the reasons it became the women's lake for the Quandamooka people was because they understood her shape. Considering anthropologies of water, Queensland-based sociocultural anthropologist, Sally Babidge (2019) points out in a paper on Indigenous values toward water in Moreton Bay and catchments ecologies. that:

> Traditional Custodians' values towards estuarine and marine waterways in SEQ are multi-dimensional. Indigenous cultural values of water encompass more than spiritual and customary objectives and extend beyond cultural heritage paradigms. Aesthetic values were strongly associated with ecosystem health, a point of difference from studies of non-Indigenous values towards water. As expected, identity is closely associated with the values and so a strong sense of personal loss was associated with damaged waterways. (quoted in Pinner et al. 2019, p.29)

If aesthetic values are associated with ecosystem health, then how might accommodating a greater understanding of aesthetic values reorient the late-liberal cultures of extractivism87 from utilising water as yet another commodity and instead create a space for understanding the stratigraphies of meaning and value that water has, not only as a resource but also as a cultural and social identity?

Whilst Seqwater representatives consistently reassure the community about water extraction, claiming they only collect 50% of extraction capacity, there are many in the local community who feel that it does not take adequately take into account the

86 It evolved from underlying dunes out of the Pleistocene era, 300,000 years ago; it runs 1km in length on a north-south axis; its aquitard sits 20 meters above the water aquifer; and it has a low PH acidic water.
87 Term coined by Sally Babbidge in (Pinner et al. 2019)

Indigenous values towards water, that beyond the aesthetic, include humanistic, naturalistic, moralistic, ecologistic, utilitarian, symbolic and spiritual values. (Pinner et al. 2019 p29-46)

Personhood of Place – The self that finds itself

Field Notes # 2017–2020

> Surely the stories we tell must be woven with the stories we acknowledge others to be telling. (Rose 2015)

The New Zealand government's decision in 2014 to grant legal personality to a natural feature, Te Urewera, the mountainous region bordering Hawkes Bay and the Bay of Plenty, made it the first country in the world to grant the same legal status to a place as to an individual human. In 2017, legal personality was also granted to Whanganui Awa, the Whanganui River. Later that same year, the government ~~("the Crown")~~ and Maori custodians, Taranaki iwi ,[88] signed a Record of Understanding to state their shared intention that legal personhood would be granted to Taranaki Maunga (Mount Taranaki).

These two actions of 2014 and 2017 gave Te Urewera and Whanganui Awa 'all the rights, powers, duties, and liabilities of a legal person'.[89] Similar to how a registered company or incorporated society has its legal identity separate from those of its individual shareholders or members, governing boards made up of representatives of iwi (Maori organisations) and the New Zealand government were set up to act in the interests of these places. As a move away from commodifying their bodies towards honouring their personhoods, reframing the paradigm of a business to embody a cosmology of place was a revolutionary step. Marrying colonial legal structure with Maori connection to place/ancestors has provided a means of reorienting the relationships between the human and the non-human. It has centred the personhood of place within an arrangement of relatedness rather than separation.

When Val Plumwood moved to Plumwood Mountain in the later part of her life, she changed her surname from Routley as a gesture of belonging to the mountain. This signalled a human belonging to place, rather than the other way around. I learned of a

88 https://www.govt.nz/browse/history-culture-and-heritage/treaty-settlements/find-a-treaty-settlement/taranaki-iwi/taranaki-iwi-deed-of-settlement-summary/ (Taranaki Iwi is one of eight iwi of Taranaki (the other seven are Ngāti Tama, Ngāti Mutunga, Ngāti Ruanui, Ngā Rauru Kītahi, Ngāruahine, Te Atiawa and Ngāti Maru).
89 ibid

similar gesture during an ecofeminist seminar in 2021,[90] where academics and art practitioners met to discuss Plumwood's (2008) article 'Shadow Places and the Politics of Dwelling'. A former colleague of hers recounted how she had recently 'married' the river on a rural property in New South Wales, Australia, where she resided. We were in discussion about the shadow places that exist on Earth as a result of the privilege of later liberal settler societies, and I wondered how I felt about Plumwood's 'marriage', given she, not unlike myself, was a white, middle-class woman living on unceded Aboriginal land.

The discussion also made me think of two urban-centred documentary films: *Jumbo* (2020) directed by Zoe Wittock,91 in which a woman falls in love with a fairground ride; and *Strange Love* (2008),92 which is about a woman, Erika Eiffel, who married the Eiffel Tower93 in 2007. Both films portray the reorienting of the human and a levelling with the non-human – attempts at bringing two seemingly disparate entities together, acknowledging the possibility of encounter and exchange with the more-than-human.

What I understand about these marriage gestures is their desire to communicate genuine commitments to be in 'dialogue' with the Earth and the places that, for better or for worse, we find ourselves situated within, or on 'the piece of ground that grows you up (in the same way...as it grows a plant or a tree)' (Rose 2013, p 106)[94]. To return to the woman who married a river in NSW, Australia; any Non-indigenous person living in Australia cannot avoid the fact that we exist in the aftermath of colonization, but we can make attempts at different types of restorative justice, with the Earth and with Indigenous people. It remains unfinished and ongoing business. Our task is to act with gratitude, respect, and responsibility. As Deborah Bird Rose (2002) suggested, we might understand some of these complexities as boundaries *to cross* rather than boundaries *to keep things apart.*[95]

90 https://theediths.org/roundtable-series/
91 https://www.imdb.com/title/tt6818118/
92 https://vimeo.com/19783541
93 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erika_Eiffel

[94] Quoting: Plumwood,V. 2008, "Shadow Places," p.145.

[95] Rose states ' Boundaries exist to connect difference, and thus to facilitate interdependence. (Keeping things apart) constructs boundaries as ways of resolving difference, whilst (boundaries to cross) dialogical mode is always in process: it sustains difference and relationship' (2002, p314)

Every time I visit Brown Lake, whether I swim or not is immaterial. What is important is that I offer my active attention to her (Rose 2013), that I stand in place and take a moment to notice and appreciate the different subjectivities that reside within her arrangements, that I listen to the stories of the beings and non-beings who are speaking many languages, most of which I do not understand. There is much to learn. To visit Brown Lake is a gift, the gratitude for which can only be expressed in a reciprocity of care for her. Care through attention. Whether I am an outsider or not becomes less important than the question of the responsibility I take for acknowledging the self of Brown Lake and her multiple relationships. If I extend that care to attempting to tell her story through screen practice, then she will present herself, and it will be my task to listen, to record. Aesthetic values coupled with ethics can play a role in communicating the values associated with place. Creative practices, creativity with critique, can be an embodiment of the will to change the status quo around cosmologies of place:

> 'Art is the process of making sensations live, of giving autonomous life to expressive qualities and material forms and through them affecting and being affected by life in its other modalities' (Grosz 2008, p.103)

Equally important for me is to wholly appreciate that there are other protocols to observe, not least of which are the ones set down by the Quandamooka people. In a statement accompanying her artwork *Water Is Life*, (2020/21), a work that examines the use of Minjerribah's waters by those who seek to extract them as a resource, Quandamooka artist Megan Cope says, 'Water is sacred. Our people have many names for water, we understand its complexity and its sovereignty'.[96] In Australia, the sovereignty of Indigenous people, let alone actual places, has not yet been legally recognised. Native Title goes some way to redressing the imbalances between Indigenous and non-Indigenous understandings of place, but it can often be fraught by the limiting bureaucratic and colonial structures within which it is placed. Citing the case of a rock called Old Man Standing, Povinelli (2016) points to the commodification of governmentality and the way it creates definitions of Indigeneity that aren't necessarily aligned with the complexities of lived Indigeneity. She notes: 'Where Indigenous people agree to participate as an Animist voice in the governmental order of the people they are included as part of this sovereign people. Where they do not, they are cast out' (p.37-38).

96 *(Artist statement) on artist website: megancope.com.au*

The separation and hyperseparations (Plumwood (2001) enacted by late-liberal settler societies over the last few centuries have disembodied many humans from their connectedness to the earth and de-centred their relationships with the complex arrangements of species that live in those places. Yet 'place looms large for humans, from both an indigenous and non-indigenous perspective' (Graham 2009, p.76). To imagine a place as an equal legal entity would impose boundaries around how to interact with that place and demand that protocols be observed. Each time I visit, as I stand looking at her, I wonder at the possibility of Brown Lake ever being her own legal entity. I notice instead signs that suggest she feels as though she might be losing herself.

Invasive Species – Monocultures of mining

 # Field Notes 2017–2020

> When human beings ignore natural processes, their antagonistic attitude towards nature leads not only to the destruction of the environment but also to self-destruction. (Braidotti, Charkiewicz, Hausler and Wieringa 1994, p. 149)

The anoxic water at the bottom of Brown Lake means there is no oxygen and it is difficult for fish to reside there. The lack of fish in the water has made space for twenty-four species of dragonflies and damselflies to live as nymphs in the freshwater. Of these, the Brownwater Skimmer and the Dune Ringtail are specific to Brown Lake. If you watch the activity of dragonflies for a few hours, you will notice their big eyes and how they watch the world. The longer you watch, the more you sense yourself being presenced by them. How you are seen or sensed can only be understood as disturbance, since their lives would be just as playful without you. These burlesque insects make love often and have the shape of a human love heart. Their skeletal makeup has not changed in millions of years, yet according to recent scientific research, they possess a neuronal activity that enables a selective attention function similar to that found in the human brain. This selective attention allows them to perceive and catch their prey in split seconds.[97] They read human movement as if it were in extreme slow motion.

Dragonflies and damselflies may appear gentle but they are, in fact, ancient hunters. These closely related species shared an ancestor over 250 million years ago – long before dinosaurs – and they provide a glimpse into how an ancient neural system can

97 https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2020/01/200116121845.htm

control precise and swift aerial assaults.[98] The research around them is now being used to assist in the development of the cognitive capacities of robots and may contribute to the design and engineering of how war drones might destroy human beings without ever encountering them. Reading the titles of research papers, I think of Bruno Latour and his insistence that science employs storytelling narratives too, and that they are anything but neutral (Latour & Porter 2004).[99] When I see titles such as 'Dragonfly Neurons Selectively Attend to Targets'[100] and terms such as 'Small Target Motion Detector' (STMD), I feel a long way away from a bucolic National Geographic narrative.

Nearby at the Moreton Bay Research Centre, where I stay during field trips to the lake, I peruse the walls that describe the science projects being conducted there. One in particular catches my eye; it's on the perception of the mantis shrimp. This crustacean has one of the most complex visual systems in the world. Mantis shrimp have four times as many colour receptors as humans; we have three – red, green, and blue – and they have twelve. Not only do mantis shrimp sample light we can't see, they also sample light we do see in a completely different way. As a result, they can engage with much more incoming visual information than we can. Researchers have also discovered a neural connection between the reniform body[101] (eye stalks) and brain region that may allow mantis shrimp to store visual memories. It's clear that dragonflies and mantis shrimp – tiny, ancient creatures who we barely pay attention to – have existed in almost the same form for millions of years with perceptive powers and potential memory systems that are far more sophisticated than our own. These extraordinary capabilities within their tiny brains will likely be mined for anthropocentric means in the name of scientific advancement.

While I am in the kitchen at the research center, I meet the two young female students I saw earlier giggling at Brown Lake. They tell me they have been looking for a native freshwater worm and a unique sponge. They have had no luck but don't seem perturbed. The invasive, exotic, and predatory fish Eastern Gumbusia is a likely cause of the worm and the sponge hiding, just as two rare acid frogs and two species of turtle, both of whom inhabit the lake's environs, also try to escape notice from cane toads. From

98 ibid
99 https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/25/magazine/bruno-latour-post-truth-philosopher-science.html
100 https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fncel.2022.857071/full
101 A kidney-shaped region of the brain, called the "reniform", that exists in the mantis shrimps' eye stalks and allows the shrimps to interpret what they see with the help of their other senses.
https://www.forbes.com/sites/priyashukla/2019/11/26/a-kidney-shaped-region-of-the-mantis-shrimp-brain-allows-them-to-store-complex-visual-information/?sh=7bb0d0eb2e4f

these students I also learn more about the keelback snake[102] [103], *Tropidonophis mairii*. Best known for its ability to ingest cane toad poison, this non-venomous snake has another special power, even more endearing than the first: nest site philopatry.[104] Nest site philopatry means that as adults, the young to return to their place of birth to breed. Female keelbacks return to their place of birth when they are ready to lay their eggs.[105] They prefer sites containing old eggshells, which may even have been the shells they emerged from as hatchlings. Research shows that keelback hatchlings used spatial learning to return to their place of birth. Snakes around Brown Lake understand place too, and ancestry.

I am astounded by how teeming with sophisticated systems of life Brown Lake is. I wonder how, beyond scientific research, we might habituate ourselves to be more attentive to the vibrancy that every place emits. If this aspect of Brown Lake were a movie, I think, it would be the planetary version of Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*. (1968). Instead, it would be called *2022: A Place Odyssey*.

But not all humans share the same perceptions of place. The three figures of geontopower proposed by Elisabeth Povinelli (2016) make clear that the figures and tactics of the Anthropocene have different forms. Others may see a landscape as inert rather than vibrant; in Povinelli's words, a Desert. An early geology report from the Department of National Development, Bureau of Mineral Resources, Geology and Geophysics (Gardner & Cuthbert,1948), observed that the Mesozoic sandstone and grit that form the headland at Dunwich and the sandstone floaters just north of Blue Lake that may also belong to this period possess *economic deposits* (my italics) of heavy minerals. This report laid ground for the later assertion that this mineral rich place might be 'best regarded as part of a drowned landscape formed of eroded dune sands and high fixed dunes' (Ward 1978, p.98). Dead, drowned but marketable as a mineral resource.

A year after the 1948 report, mining for the 'economic deposits' of minerals found in the sand dunes did indeed begin along the beaches of that coastline. Men mined by hand, using picks and shovels to collect minerals. In the process they dismantled ancient oyster shell middens, parts of the delicate stratigraphy of Quandamooka culture not recognized for their historical and cultural value at the time. Once the coast was

102 https://www.sunshinecoast.qld.gov.au/Environment/Education-Resources-and-Events/Environment-Resources-and-Publications/Native-Animals/Nesting-Keelback
103 https://qbi.uq.edu.au/article/2020/01/qbi-researcher-honoured-vision-discoveries-mantis-shrimp
104 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philopatry
105 Undertaken by University of Sydney researchers

depleted of its minerals – and its middens – mining was moved inland to the high dunes where sand was extracted by massive dredges that relied upon water from the underground aquifer to loosen the minerals. It was a resource-heavy undertaking, with deleterious impact on the both the underground water table and the surrounding wallum wetland.

As a comparison, Fraser Island, another sandy island in Queensland that is home to perched lakes, was host to a mine for a much shorter period of time. An environmental report outlining the irreversible damage to the water table the sand mine would cause led to the then federal Environment Minister, Kevin Newman, successfully passing a bill on 10 November 1976 requiring the mine be shut by the end of that year.[106] This was because it would 'involve major permanent and irreversible environmental harm to the landscape, vegetation and lakes of the island and, consequently, substantially damage its value to the Australian people'.[107]

On Minjerribah, however, mining became a political issue that caused deep divisions within the community. Despite tenacious activism to shut it down both from environmental groups and indigenous rights activists, mining continued for decades until the last mine, Enterprise, 700 hectares in size, closed in 2019 after 70 years of extraction. The Enterprise was run by Sibleco, a Belgian company. The minerals in the sand mined at Enterprise made up just one per cent of what was extracted. These were Rutile, which is used to make titanium dioxide for white paint, and Zirconium, some of which is used for building nuclear arms.[108] [109] Australia is the main source of Zirconium worldwide. Who could imagine that an island as idyllic as 'Straddie' with its golden beaches might also be a source for drones (dragonflies) and weapons (minerals) of war?

At its busiest, sandmining occurred on 50% of the island's land mass and affected 25 per cent of the land on Minjerribah, despite the mine owner's responsibility to rehabilitate the wallum wetland under the Ramsar agreement[110], an intergovernmental agreement that stipulates wise use of wetlands and their resources. Scientific reports have subsequently criticized Sibelco's 'recreated' dunes (Gravina, McKenna & Glenn 2011).

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[106] http://savestraddie.com/newman-echos-sir-joh/

[107] See news article. November 11, 1976. *Sydney Morning Herald,* p. 1. 'Dec 31 ban on Fraser Is exports', by Michael Steketee.

[108] https://www.ga.gov.au/education/classroom-resources/minerals-energy/australian-energy-facts/uranium-and-thorium

[109] https://www.ga.gov.au/education/classroom-resources/minerals-energy/australian-mineral-facts/zircon

[110] https://www.ramsar.org/about-the-convention-on-wetlands-0 The Convention on Wetlands is the intergovernmental treaty that provides the framework for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources.

The regressive replenishment[111] system, by which wallum wetlands generate diversity of plants and species in a nutrient-poor sand, is complex and delicate, and it requires a long time, over the life cycles of trees and shrubs. When it came time for the mine company to remake the sand dunes they had disassembled, inevitably, they were artificially put together. The revegetation profile was low in plant species, provided little groundcover, became replete with weeds, and offered no canopy (Audet et al. 2013). One of the reasons attributed to this was the use of industrially processed sand to recreate the post-mine dunes. Given this sand had been depleted of mineral nutrients, amongst its other limitations, it had poor water retention. So rather than being able to grow eucalypts, which provide a greater diversity of plant species, monocultures of the pioneer she-oaks have thrived instead. This has left the façade of reconstructed sand dunes with ecosystems that lack diversity and thus support fewer animals.

The contortionist acts of the remade sand dunes with their lack of diversity make me think of the remade worlds around the globe such as the various Disneylands with their similar iconic Disney characters. I once visited Disneyland in Japan, where these characters spoke in the Japanese language and the figurines had Japanese features. Utterly uncanny, same but different, a little like eating food with artificial flavourings. A repeatable culture, a culture of mass reproduction, not diverse but repetitive. I also remember a visit to Shenzhen, China, as a film festival jury member.

Shenzhen is a 'man-made' world, a populous city close to Hong Kong, with the second-largest number of skyscrapers of any city on Earth. Because it is highly policed, I was only allowed out of the hotel complex with a chaperone who took me to two places. The first was a large sightseeing location where all the 'wonders in the world'[112] had been rebuilt. It was uncanny to walk among these architectural wonders mixed together. The Sydney Opera House and the Taj Mahal both were human sized but clearly not the scale of the actual buildings. The second site we visited was Splendid China Miniature Park (its motto: 'One step to learn China history, one day to visit all in China',[113] the largest

111 For further reading, *Stradbroke Island Nature Book* provides an overview of regressive replenishment.

112 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Window_of_the_World
Located in the western part of the city of Shenzhen in the People's Republic of China, it has about 130 reproductions of some of the most famous tourist attractions in the world squeezed into 48 hectares (118 acres). The 108 metre (354 ft) tall Eiffel Tower dominates the skyline and the sight of the Pyramids and the Taj Mahal all in proximity to each other are all part of the appeal of this theme park.

113 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Splendid_China_Folk_Village One step to learn China history, one day to visit all in China". This is the slogan of the Splendid China Miniature Park, which is the largest miniature park in the world. It houses 82 reproductions of China's iconic places. These miniatures are divided into three kinds: beautiful scenery, grand architecture, historical sites, and traditional dwellings. As there are more than 50,000 small vivid ceramic human or animal figurines, it is also renowned as "Lilliput of Shenzhen".

miniature park in the world. It houses 82 reproductions of China's iconic places, including beautiful scenery, grand architecture, historical sites, and traditional dwellings. As there are more than 50,000 small vivid ceramic human or animal figurines, it is also renowned as the 'Lilliput of Shenzhen'.

What struck me again was not just the discombobulating scales of things in Shenzhen, but the irony that scenery, architecture, history, and dwellings – the heterogenous nature of which had now been eradicated to make way for homogenous man-made structures – were now in an amusement park rather than in an actual embodied culture. It could be consumed as culture (scenery, architecture, history) but not embodied as culture (place as sentient, history as living, structure as embodied). To return to the 'regeneration' enacted by the mine owners to reproduce the Minjerribah sand mines, they may look similar, the façade maintained, but the shell middens are gone and the eucalypts can no longer grow.

Looking down on Brown Lake is the Straddie Golf Club, a sand miner's equivalent of an amusement park. Vaguely reminiscent of a mid-twentieth-century fun park facade, its green lawns stretch down to meet the brown water of the lake. When I visited it in 2020, the mine had closed and there were no golfers, so it looked like a photograph I have seen of abandoned West Coast summer vacation camps in the US, rooms lined with optimistic wallpaper and stacked with disused television sets. While at Moreton Bay Research Centre, I asked a scientist why he thought Brown Lake was losing water. It was an informal conversation. He rejected the suggestion that it was because of the mine. Instead, he ventured, it was because of this golf club. To keep the grass green, he said, nitrates are poured onto it. In turn, the nitrates become part of the runoff that goes into Brown Lake. His view was that these were compromising the water. Strange, I thought, the green of the golf course destroying the brown of Brown Lake. Later, I read in a pamphlet the mine had provided financial support to the research centre.

Bait and Switch as a Homogenizing, Anthropocentric, Inauthentic Facade – Anti-Art ???

A practice sometimes employed in the Hollywood paradigm of filmmaking is known as 'bait and switch'. The practice is to acquire a creative intellectual property from an author on the basis of an 'auteur' filmmaker being involved in its creative adaptation to the screen. This elevates the competitive position of the producer who wishes to acquire the

rights to adapt. Once the 'property' is acquired, the auteur filmmaker – who could not possibly adapt every property acquired by the producer, who is creating a business at scale – is switched out for a less-branded auteur director. That less-branded director will also cost less, so the producer is able to both scale their business and produce films for less money. Often, in the middle of this transaction is a creative executive who is claiming to be the 'voice' of the auteur on their behalf and who is also paid a lot less than the actual 'voice'. Extending this simile to Brown Lake, instead of getting the complex, unpredictable, heterogenous eco-system of the eucalypts, you get the she-oaks filling in for them on the sand dune façade. The monocultures of mining appear to facilitate restoration and care, but in truth, not only was what they take as inert in the first place always part of a complex system both inert and lively, but is it reasonable to expect those heterogenous arrangements to recompose themselves in the same way?

Naming and Its Vivifying Effects

Field Notes September 2018

> Naming as Writing into existence
> Opening New Worlds
> Multiple/Polycentred Subjectivities
> When names disappear or change so do the people and practices that are named or re-named. (McKibben 2011)

During 2017 our family moved to a new neighbourhood in Sydney, on Bigdigal Land. The move provided an opportunity to start a new garden. We decided we would embed as many plants as possible and trees that were native to our location. Given the sandy and acidic nature of the soil we were planting in, we wanted plants that did not require too much water. As a result, I regularly visited the council nursery, where the staff there were always willing to talk about plant and trees species. For the next few months, I walked around the area with my children, naming every tree and plant. This seemingly simple activity brought the neighbourhood alive for us, and within our urban environment we were able to maintain a connection to nature and to place. I also came across a newly published book, *The Lost Words*, a collaboration between nature writer Robert McFarlane and illustrator Jackie Morris (Macfarlane & Morris 2018). McFarlane began

the book with the following words: 'Once upon a time words began to vanish from the language of children. They disappeared so quietly at first that almost no one noticed...'

In December 2017, I visited Brown Lake again. On my way there I passed a new shop in Dunwich that had been opened by Quandamooka artist Delvene Collins. In the shop was a large photographic image of Delvene as a child, walking amongst wildflowers at Brown Lake with an older woman, her grandmother. Imprinted on the image was text that explained her story about childhood connection to place. The shop was full of linen cushions and tea towels printed with images Delvene had created that featured animals or plants associated with Minjerribah. In a corner I found a large book labelled *Jandai Language: A Dictionary of the Reconstructed Language of Quandamooka*. I asked if I might purchase the book and was told it was not for sale, but that I should head down the road to the Moorgumpin Minjerribah Elder Council building. The Elders' building was 150 metres away, past the post office and the North Stradbroke Island Museum. When I arrived there , I was quietly greeted by an elder, Uncle Norm. When I asked for the book, he began to tell me the story of how the Jandai language was lost and how it had been a slow project reclaiming it. In fact, it had taken 127 years. The restoration of the lost words was led by Aunty Margret Iselin, president of the Elders Council. Uncle Norm also offered me other books about the island, which I purchased, among them a small one, *Plants-Bush Tucker, Medicinal and Other Uses of Minjerribah,* which names and illustrates plants and bush tucker from the Wallum Wetlands. One of the authors was Margaret Iselin. I thanked Uncle Norm and took the books with me to read at the lake, hoping to walk around it and find plants that were named in English and Jandai within the slim volume.

I learned the words for 'good to eat' as 'tudleba', a word which appears often in the book. I also learned 'oodgeroo patya timpin luk kuyan' ('tea-tree flowers taste like honey') and, evidencing an ongoing ability to improvise with land care practices, 'Goories tudleba gka-gal of the Billy Goat Weed' ('Aboriginal people chew the leaves of the Billy Goat Weed'). Mindful to avoid sentiment and fetish, I am nonetheless moved by this act of patience and care of restoring words and knowledge, and even more so, by the story Margaret Iselin recounts about her two grannies in her introduction to the Jandai dictionary.

When Margert Iselin was five years old she was living on the Myora Mission. Her two grannies decided to teach her and a small group of children their Jandai language. However, in the middle of 1935 the government banned these language lessons. By the

time Margaret went to school at age six, lessons in Aboriginal language we no longer allowed. In an act of defiance, the grannies would take her walking through the bush after school and whisper the Jandai names of the plants and explain their uses. Margaret lived her life on the island, and as she grew up she lost her language. Her husband and her children worked at the Sibelco sand-mine. She was in favour of the mine because it provided jobs and brought better roads and infrastructure to the island. But as she grew older, Margaret decided that she wanted to retrieve the lost knowledge of her grannies and transmit it to younger people. She had grown up with a fear of speaking her own language and she now wanted to make up for that loss.

She started by producing the slim volume titled *Plants – Bush Tucker, Medicinal and Other Uses of Minjerribah* (Iselin & Shipway n.d)[114] with the aim of introducing the language used by the Aboriginals of Minjerribah and Moorgumpin and giving people insight into the ways the plants of the area were used as sources of food and medicines. From that small volume the idea of the dictionary grew. With the cooperation of the council members and a linguist, as well as from present day residents of Stradbroke, the Jandai dictionary was reconstructed from six main sources. Sibelco also provided financial support. Margaret Iselin passed away on May 5, 2018, at the age of 88. A year later, Australian singer/songwriter Katie Noonan (a long-time holidaymaker on Minjerribah) in collaboration with the great-granddaughter of Oodgeroo Noonuccal, Kaleenah Edwards, recorded a volume of Oodgeroo's most well-loved poems in Jandai language.[115]

Naming things gives them power and identity and, perhaps most fundamentally, it brings them back into existence. As Robert McFarlane (2018) suggests, when we don't know the names for things in nature they are lost to us, and unless we know different words for things, the practices and people attached to them become too easy to ignore. The project of restoring language and keeping words alive maintains connections between past, present, and future, and puts humans back into relationship with other humans, and in dialogue with the non-human. People are no longer invisible, and plants are no longer inert or 'weedy' – they become active participants in encounters and exchanges. They take on new values. As do those who are willing to learn these lost words. This will not

[114] Booklet sponsored by North Stradbroke Island Aborignal and Islander Housing Co-operative Arts, Queensland & Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Language Initiatives Program

115 https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/jul/15/rebecca-solnit-hope-in-the-dark-new-essay-embrace-unknown

happen without its complexities, but, as Rebecca Solnit (2016) has written, moving forwards by looking backwards can be an act of hope.

Margaret Iselin's Jandai dictionary has brought to life not just language but also place. When I look in the Jandai dictionary for the meaning of Boumiera, which in the dictionary is spelt Bamira – a legacy of having been translated and noted down by German, Spanish and English settlers – the word is interpreted as 'spirit'.

Native Title and QYAC – Boumiera as 'Brown Lake, Lot 152 SP297202 Reserve for Recreational Purposes'

 # Field Notes 2017 – On Restoration

'Brown Lake, Lot 152 SP297202 Reserve for Recreational Purposes'. This place has several identities as a result of naming. Notwithstanding my non-indigenous, migaloo identity, I acknowledge this place as being both recreational, and as being Boumiera, the women's lake where ancient protocols are respected and adhered to as much as possible – by myself, my children and by anyone who visits with me. When the children were very small, they were told they had to ask the lake's permission to enter and that they were not permitted to 'wee on its spirit'.116 Whilst a dilution of original protocols, this hybrid ritual served to engender respect for the agency of the lake, safety for the species who rely upon the lake's freshwater, and for a more-than-human understanding of place. I wanted them to disengage from the perception that the lake is there for their leisure and recreation alone and re-engage with the notion of being in dialogue with place. One afternoon, my daughter was stung by a bee, and while she screamed that she needed an ambulance, I explained gently to her to consider how the bee might have felt. The act of stinging her may have compromised its life, rather than hers. She continued to yelp but was later bemused at the thought of the bee being prevented from making wild honey by having stung her.

Now whenever, on subsequent visits, I watch tourists descend out of dusty buses and expose the brown water to glints of neon swimwear, I witness a similar awkwardness as the first time I swam in that water myself. The brilliance of brown water is made dull with synthetic colors as the coach driver explains in 'Strine'[117] the Indigenous cosmology of

116 An instruction in NSI information book to vistors
117 Strine – is a strong version of the Australian English accent

this place. I find myself thinking of Anna Tsing, who proposes there is no purity, everything is contaminated, we have to survive amongst the ruins while I consider all the small creatures here and wonder whether any of us should be visiting, myself included, if their survival is to be guaranteed.[118]

At Brown Lake the relationship that visitors and tourists have to the lake is slowly changing, however. Since July 2011 Brown Lake has been under the governance of Quandamooka Yoolooburrabee Aboriginal Corporation (QYAC). As a result of a native title act, QYAC have stewardship over this 'reserve for recreational purposes' and recognition of Brown Lake's indigenous cultural heritage has started to have some impact on the way it may be visited, notwithstanding the ambiguity of the lake's official stated purpose. Initially bins were removed, signs taken down and a children's playground dismantled, in a bid to deter families from using it as a place of leisure. Despite the disappointment of children, when we return several years later, we discover curlews camouflaged amongst the leaves, residents repatriated, spending sunny afternoons sitting around, where toddlers once hung from metal monkey bars. In her poem 'The Curlew Cried', Oodgeroo Noonuccal (1966) described these elegant birds as her people's tribe partner guiding them from life into death and relieving them of their fear. As I watch these deep time creatures I know that they are patiently waiting for us to leave.

There are also now days when the lake is closed to all visitors other than Quandamooka women. One late-winter afternoon when the lake was closed, a Japanese bridal couple hoping to use the Brown Lake as a backdrop for their wedding pictures were barred entry whilst the Gorenpul and Noonuccal women gathered there. And in August 2020 a group of women gathered for the state's first all women cultural burn[119]. One of the QYAC Management Rangers, Kathryn Crouch led the planned burn, its purpose being to regenerate culturally relevant native flora such as the swamp daisy. She recounted, "When I was a girl, we used to go there to pick the wildflowers whenever they were in bloom. It was fun and that's one of the strongest memories I have, being with my grandmother and my family'.[120] Next, women elders spoke about the lake, and Aunty Evelyn Parkin explained: 'We would speak in language to the spirit – if there was a sign

118 Human absence has rendered the border zone, between North and South Korea, one of the most diverse ecosystems in the world today. This demilitarized zone, known as the DMZ, is a bounded 155-mile-long, 2.5-mile-wide strip of land, that has been virtually untouched by humans for more than six decades. There is a fear, that if peace occurred between the two regions it would endanger the protected species who thrive there.
119 https://www.des.qld.gov.au/our-department/news-media/mediareleases/2020/women-gather-for-special-cultural-burn-on-minjerribah
120 ibid

like ripples that meant "no" and they would turn around and go home. We believe in spirit and in ancestors. They hear everything we say and they know who you are'[121] A year after the burning ceremony, in an article published in the *Catholic Leader*,[122] Aunty Evelyn Parkin spoke about the convergence of Aboriginal and Catholic spirituality:

> Walking in the bush and taking notes of all the plants and little insects and blossoms... just following Mum, she was always up the front and the children would be behind her, taking notice of things ... It was in that silence that I learned about the Spirit.

Many similar stories were told of women – grannies, aunties, mothers, older sisters – leading children through the bush and teaching them about local plants and their purposes, transferring not only knowledge but also perspective, and being in dialogue with all that is both lively and inert. This is an embodied way of learning how to be in relationship with place.

Val Plumwood, towards the end of her life, held indigenous ways of being in high regard. She did not wish to appropriate them, but she recognized human connectedness to non-humans (Rose 2013). Indigenous knowledge systems offer embodied and respectful ways of being with place. Plumwood also recognized that Migaloos (non-indigenous Australians) need acculturation and have much to learn from Indigenous people about the active voice in nature – if they are generous enough to share with those who have withheld so much from them. As Mary Graham concludes in her essay 'Some Thoughts about the Philosophical Underpinnings of Aboriginal Worldviews,123 'The world is immediate, not external, and we are all its custodians, as well as its observers' (Graham 1999, p.118).

A Carrier Bag of Fictions – Cross-cultural competencies

Field Notes 2021 – Relatedness – Zoom-ish

> Is there an opportunity to make kin, to tell multiple stories with something other/more than entities tied by genealogy and ancestry? (Haraway 2016)

121 ibid as video footage (2020 0623 08:52:50)
122 https://catholicleader.com.au/news/qld/evelyn-parkin-draws-on-convergence-of-christian-and-aboriginal-spirituality-in-new-speaker-series/
123 Ecological Humanities, Graham, Mary, Issue 45, November 2008

In this final section of the chapter I add another layer to the stratigraphy of Brown Lake's history. It relates to my research question and explores critical and creative methods of re-aligning the human and the nonhuman through cross cultural competencies and understandings. It also speaks to the practice of affirmative ethics that form part of the conceptual framework of this thesis – particularly the phrase used often by Braidotti (2017b) in her Tanner lectures: 'We-are-in-*this*-together-but-we-are-not-one-and-the-same' (p.43) This phrase is not intended as a flattening of difference but as an affirmation of the heterogenous nature of all beings and non-beings, who, when they come together in different arrangements, may open up new worlds and understandings. Affirmative ethics suggest a means of making kin differently to the ways we have done before. In some ways, while not the same, the concept intersects with Indigenous cosmologies of relatedness (Moreton-Robinson 2000; Rose 2013), both concepts allowing for the opening up of worlds by recognizing connections to both beings and non-beings

During a Zoom workshop run by the Australian National University (ANU) in October 2021 titled 'Deep Histories, Indigenous Futures', historian Ann McGrath pointed out that a feminist postcolonial approach to understanding place would be to ask who and/or what was missing in the narrative? Despite grappling with the mystery of what has been causing Brown Lake to lose her water, what I found missing at Brown Lake, along with her water, was a thorough understanding of the depth and breadth of the entanglements at play at the lake. That is the work of this thesis. I aim to provide that deeper, broader understanding of the lake by reorienting anthropocentric perspectives and by writing the subjectivitie(s) of Brown Lake into existence. To understand the 'otherwise' of Brown Lake is the work of this chapter.

During that ANU cross-cultural workshop, I actively listened to what the Indigenous researchers[124] had to say about Country[125] and how for them Country is everything, all embracing. *It plays the role of narrator*. Country is the keeper of knowledge, it is generative. Humans and non-humans co-emerge in the creative force of Country. They spoke too about how Country and its ontology of affect provides a stark contrast to Western knowledge production and its purported objectivity. As I listened, I acknowledged the possibility that my creative practice research to find the point of view of

124 'Deep Histories, Indigenous Futures', the second Kathleen Fitzpatrick Workshop of the ARC Laureate Project 'Rediscovering the Deep Human Past', brought together postgraduate students and early career researchers from across the country. https://re.anu.edu.au/deep-histories-indigenous-futures-ecr-workshop-wrap-up.
125 'Country (note the capitalisation)' *Jack Latimore* is an Indigenous affairs journalist at The Age. He is a Birpai man with family ties to Thungutti and Gumbaynggirr nations. https://www.smh.com.au/national/blak-black-blackfulla-language-is-important-but-it-can-be-tricky-20210826-p58lzg.html

Brown Lake may already be contained in the relations that Indigenous people have always had with Country. That said, my role in this research has never been motivated by a desire to appropriate an Indigenous cosmology. Rather it has been to both recognize my situatedness and reaffirm that I am working within a conceptual framework that operates (largely) outside of Indigenous cosmologies. At the same time, I have nonetheless sought to find common ground with Indigenous cosmologies when they align with the purpose of attributing agency to Brown Lake. This thesis cannot answer all the questions it raises, but the research I have carried out points to the need for any person raised within Western knowledge paradigm to be acculturated in Indigenous perspectives about Country. Hence, the work of this thesis is to highlight the specificity and heterogeneity of the hyperlocal and the importance of engaging with place in a nuanced, care-full and patient manner.

At the Moreton Bay Research Centre, along the wall near a corridor of dormitories, there is an enormous photograph of two women walking through mangroves. It's a very striking photograph – in black-and-white and quite clearly from the 1980s. When I first saw it, I recognized Oodgeroo Noonuccal as one of the women. She is walking with a taller White woman dressed in jeans and a t-shirt. They are deep in conversation, not looking at each other, just walking side-by-side through the mangroves, connected in time and space. I didn't realize who the White woman was until I listened, several years later, to an ABC radio interview about the North Stradbroke Island Museum[126]. It had been awarded a prize for archival work that preserved the history of the island. The director of the museum, a former manager at Sibelco, points out the museum had been sustained by sales of kumquat jam made by women who tended the archives and collected kumquats from the tree that stands in front of the museum's weatherboard building. One of those women, Ellie Durbridge, began to speak. She was, as I slowly came to understand, the woman standing next to Oodgeroo in the picture I'd seen.

First, she spoke with distress about how when the mine came in 1949 she was dead against it. She had watched, with fury, the men shoveling minerals from the beaches with their bare hands until mining was moved inland. The dredges that caused so much trouble with the sand dunes had taken away the histories held by the oyster middens. She stated playfully that her husband was a miner, that she was a greenie, and that this had caused decades of division within their marriage. She then recounted how she had

[126] https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/lifematters/life-matters-at-the-north-stradbroke-island/3111338 Broadcast Mon 5 Apr 2010 at 9:05am

marched in protest against a bridge being built from the mainland to Stradbroke Island. It was here she came into contact with Oodgeroo Noonuccal. With restrained passion, she told how Oodgeroo had given her the courage to stand up for what she believed in and for what she felt. She then went on to write a book titled *North Stradbroke Island* (Durbridge & Covacevich 2004). I have read that book; it is full of photographs that cannot be found anywhere else. During the radio program, the granddaughter of Oodgeroo, Petrina Walker also spoke. She had bequeathed all of Oodgeroo poems and archives to the museum because of her conviction that they needed to stay on Country. I suspect this contributed to the museum winning the award.

In 2019, a decade after the radio interview, and long after Ellie and Oodgeroo had passed away, an archive room was established and named after Ellie Durbridge. I think of the photograph of these two women and realize that they are still in conversation today – in the museum. Two women, cross-culturally competent, with a passion for place and a commitment to transferring their knowledge to younger generations, who believed in reciprocity of care.

When Does Place Turn Away?

Field Notes 2019–2021 – Now-ish

In 2019 I visited the artist Christo in his studio in New York. I was interviewing him about a site-specific artwork he made in Sydney in 1969, where he wrapped the coastline of Little Bay in a kind of white plastic. As he described, and as is clear from the archival footage, when it was covered it somehow became more alive (Lang, 2019). You could see the wind blowing across the sandstone; it became something other than what it was before, but it was still the same thing. The thrill of watching the inert cliffs become something active drew crowds of people who didn't know if they were experiencing art but knew that they were relating to place differently, seeing it as something lively rather than inert. Christo, is well known for bringing public places alive in different ways for a short amount of time as a way to stimulate people to think differently about them. He explained that in order to remain independent and be able to pay for the art works, he and his wife, Jeanne Claude, had nonetheless had to sell the designs for the public installations artworks as 'objects'. He wanted to outdo capitalism by using its mechanisms to make free public art. After a moment, he sighed and reflected that when the world of human ends though, they will not be finding archaeological ruins as they have done in the

past, they will be finding computer chips full of what happened in the past. A stratigraphy of ancestors in a different form. Lively or Inert?

Two foreign language films immediately come to mind: the Japanese film *Woman in the Dunes* (Teshigahara 1964) in which a widow is imprisoned at the bottom of a sand dune and forced to dig out sand with her bare hands in order to provide resources for the construction of nearby cities; and *Japón* (Reygadas 2002) a Mexican film in which an old woman offers up her aged body as a site for a younger man, a writer, to act out his sexual and existential anxieties. Her home in the mountains is being plundered for its resources – bricks to build homes for the men who wish to deconstruct hers. The woman acquiesces both sexually and materially. Forced to leave her home, she rides down the mountain in the back of a truck that also carries the bricks of her house. When the truck hits a bump, she is thrown out and she dies. Both films remind me of the Sisyphean tasks taken on by women to withstand the forces of androcentric acts of progress. They remind me of the layers of effort that have gone before, the lives underfoot, the contortionist acts of our contested geological epoch, and the anthropocentric misunderstanding of people and planet as endless resources. Both films make me ask what are the limits of resilience of women and of lakes? At what point do they just need to turn into something else?

What if we were to attribute Brown Lake's loss of water to her own prevailing sense of things? What if her body of water is withdrawing itself based on her own decision? Perhaps daily water extractions, nitrate runoff, aquifer compromise, air pollution from the mining, and the imminent promise (or threat) of tourism as regenerative measure after mine closure is more than Brown Lake cares for? Might it even be somewhat anthropocentric to take the blame for her leaving? Might she feel it is time to take a different form, since current human activity demonstrates limited care for her?

In 'Transgender Creeks and the Three Figures of Power in Late Liberalism' Povinelli (2016) raises complex questions about Tjipel, a transgender creek in the Belyuen area, who, as Indigenous oral histories recount, was once a girl who dressed as boy, but was raped by a man and then became a creek. Povinelli explains that as a creek Tjipel has sustained a constellation of human decisions which may cause her to turn away from them and become something else.[127] She suggests that maybe Tjipel wants to gradually decline into the inert. Maybe she is tired of all this becoming. That was then;

127 Further reading: Geontologies – Chapter 4

this is now.' (p.116). If we want to engage in conversation about the intentionality of Tjipel the creek, however, it is necessary to overcome the division between lively and inert. For it is precisely this division that Povinelli's Anthropocene figure of the Desert perpetuates and profits from. This figure is in play with Tjipel and also with Brown Lake; her 'drowned landscape' is full of 'economic minerals'. It does not possess 'life' so that it can be extracted. The miners want to be entertained with golf and green grass, so it's fine if nitrates run into a lake that is purely for recreational uses. The underlying water aquifer is just sitting there full of water, so why don't we ship it away to flush someone's toilet. Povinelli's (2016) suggestion is that, rather than life and nonlife, we need to consider what formations we are keeping in existence or extinguishing'

CHAPTER FOUR

Brown Lake/Boumiera and *Anthropocene VR* | Changescapes

> Places are best understood as endless events rather than locations or settings, as changescapes.
>
> Ross Gibson (2015)

Figure 22 *Mirror image of s*and at Brown Lake

Changescapes

As I take in the last light over Brown Lake, I sense her consciousness as agentic form, and myself as participating in a micro-event in her long and deep history across days, years, millennia. I notice the small movements around me, the ants on the paperbark, busily finishing their daily rituals, the curlews sitting in wait for the humans to leave before they can fully relax, the cicadas gearing up for their night rhythms, and the frogs motioning towards the evening. Brown Lake is the carrier of all this life, of all this activity, as she sits elegantly atop her own histories. A complex system rather than a structure, both aesthetic and practical (Gibson 2015). Filmmaker and academic Ross Gibson talks about places as series of endless events, not as locations but as 'changescapes', aesthetic forms that

dramatise change. His phrase comes to mind as I watch the light move across the tea trees. As Gibson proposes:

> Changescapes can help us know mutability by immersing us in it, by letting us be with it. Change is the theme of these aesthetic forms, and it is often their matter too, for they are usually comprised of fragile and ephemeral stuff that reacts to altering conditions in the larger world. Transformations happen at their boundaries, at the limits between the inside and the outside of their systems, and then the symptoms of change become manifest in them, so that mutability becomes palpably available for our contemplation, if we get amidst the situation. (2015, pp.vii-viii)

In my visits over many years to the lake, even as an outsider, I can see my relationship with her transform through the photographs of my children growing up amid the fluctuations of her tannin water as she shifts and persists while staying the same. I see her water disappear, slowly, as her contingent others recede. The thought that one day I may photograph children by an empty lake causes a feeling of suspense each time I arrive here. Children, camera in hand, and a strange knot of anxiety. Confusion and guilt too. Image technologies embedded in petrochemical production lines are hardly sustainable, yet here I am, with an instrument full of mined minerals and modern slavery in one hand, my daughter's small fingers in the other, ready to make a portrait of Brown Lake as a changescape.

I imagine Brown Lake – this endlessly transforming body of water – becoming dry ground. Would she still be Brown Lake? Would I record that too, and what would it mean, and how might it change anything for her predicament and our relationship? Recalling the story of Tjipel (Povinelli 2015), I wonder if the creek would become a recording on a computer drive or in the cloud because she has turned away. Is this the fate of Brown Lake too? Will filming her make her disappear, or just reappear as binary digital data in a cloud somewhere between Queensland and Quincy[128]. Would she still be a changescape? 'You can use a good changescape to feel the options as well as the obligations it presents, to speculate about possibility in a world of uncertainty' (Gibson 2015, p.11).

I feel an obligation to the lake and to my children, to all children living in worlds of uncertainty. But what if, as film theorist Adrian Ivakhiv (2018) proposes, images are

128 https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/23/insider/where-does-cloud-storage-really-reside-and-is-it-secure.html

also the way that we might remake the world? How might a camera and the assembly of its recorded fragments create Brown Lake as an image-world to fortify her beingness and to write her otherwise-ness into existence? What new image of Brown Lake, what relocated form in moving images, might assert her material reality, might reconstruct her lively non-human relationship with her human visitors, might shift perceptions and render her more than humanness visible? What arrangement of images might gesture towards a possibility of dialogue between the non-human and the human?

What screen poetics might iterate the systems of water, light, air, animals, and plants that house Brown Lake's terrestrial politic of care and reciprocity? And might learning to read these systems through a *screen map,* a term I will elaborate on later in this chapter, offer up a future-making device or a way to remake image-worlds in the Anthropocene, orienting an audience through movement, directionality and connectedness as Brown Lake plays the role of a changescape and I play the role of a 'changescaper'? A changescaper, Gibson notes, is more concerned with *systems* than *structures*.... and 'a system becomes a changescape when all this complexity is marshalled by human care for aesthetic rather than pragmatic ends' (2015, pp.10-11).

This chapter articulates my creative practice research as changescaper, and discusses the non-traditional approaches to screenwriting (Millard 2014; Macdonald 2013), film development (Maras 2009; Ross & Munt 2018), and production (Dooley 2021a; Mateer 2017) that were employed in the creation of my two research practice screen works, the cinematic virtual reality (CVR) film *Anthropocene VR* (Lang 2018) and the artist moving image work *Brown Lake/Boumiera* (Lang 2021). Central to engaging with writing into existence, Brown Lake as changescape is my 'screen idea' (MacDonald 2013). As screenwriting theorist Macdonald (2016) explained,

> The 'screen idea' is a simple term which refers to a focus on the work developing a narrative for the moving image. It is a way of referring to an as-yet unformed and dynamic, changing 'object'. To borrow from Pasolini, it is 'an object which is not yet an object'. (p. 25)

Through the prism of the screen idea, I revisit the 'conceptual toolbox' established in Chapter One to evolve a poetics of place (geopoetics) as a means to counter-map Brown Lake. My two creative research artefacts offer up screen maps of the lake. These screen maps experiment with centring the vitality of the lake, acknowledging its multiple subjectivities, which are always changing and in dialogue with each other. They act as

cartographies of place that gesture to, yet make peripheral, the ghost figures of the Anthropocene (Desert, Virus, Animist). Since the aim of this thesis is to find the voice of the lake through writing and filming it into existence, the screen idea offers a means to stay true to the creative practice research, even though the cinematic forms that express that idea may shift, persist, and evolve.

Furthermore, in this chapter I describe a principle of practice that evolved as I moved through the process of experimentation with form and content. Crucial to establishing my principles of practice was also understanding the 'new cinephilia' and its insistence on 'representational justice for all' (Shambu 2020). I am attempting to create a posthuman screen poetic that can reorient human understanding of place, emotionally and viscerally, in order to forge a greater understanding of the dialogue possible with the more than human. I want to use screen practice as soft diplomacy for opening up worlds, instigating behavioural change and generating positive social impact. The screen maps contribute to activating an affirmation of place and re-establishing a situated ethics of care for Brown Lake.

Figure 1 Still from *Brown Lake/Boumiera* (2021)

The Screen Idea

How I might conceive of Brown Lake not as a fetishised representation but as a fully centred subject, an agential image (Herman 2018) whose centrality shifts the Anthropocene story axis on place and its multispecies relations, remained a pressing research question throughout my creative process. A film like *Sweetgrass* (Barbash &

Castaing-Taylor 2010) might be its animal equivalent; in this film humans are peripheral and sheep have their own minds. When responding such storytelling challenges the screen idea becomes useful for articulating an ongoingness, a deliberately unfinished or explorative process. MacDonald (2013) has articulated the concept of the screen idea as 'an imaginary concept that names what is creatively striven for, even while that goal cannot be seen or shared exactly' (p. 4). Whether it concerns a person, a place, a concept, an event, an encounter, or anything that that captures the interest of a filmmaker, the screen idea is a conceit or way of talking about a potential screenwork, which may or may not have a conventional form. That is, the screen idea is something that is intended to become a screenwork, whether or not it exists in written form (Macdonald 2013).

The screen idea, then, acts as a kind of 'carrier bag' (Le Guin et al. 2019), not only for my research question but for all of the testing, scripting and material inventories associated with the imaginary concept of Brown Lake as changescape. 'The simple notion of the screen idea allows us to talk about what lies behind what is on screen, beliefs as well as practice' (MacDonald 2013, p. 6). Drawing upon Bradotti's affirmative ethics (2019) and Povinelli's analytics of existence (2016), my aim – to open up new worlds and write them into existence – is carried by the screen idea. Although it can be part of mainstream screenplay development, the screen idea might be considered essential to filmmakers who wish to engage in a non-industrial, non-mainstream, alternative approaches to screenwriting because it is not limited to one form. Instead, since it is 'testing an imaginary idea whose strength lies in *not* being a fixed idea' (2013, p. 17), it can travel across forms. This concept of an idea moving through forms provides opportunities to develop screenwriting modes that are flexible and responsive to changing conditions and circumstances and can be adapted to different production methodologies.

As filmmaker and academic Alex Munt (2016) points out in his analysis of Jean-Luc Godard's screenwriting process, Godard prepares his productions using 'scriptments' and image/text collages rather than traditional screenplays. Often Godard will take his screen idea across development into production and continue to find forms for it even after production. This means the screen idea also sets up a paradigm within which to evolve a principle of practice that suits the poetics of the screenwriting. As Macdonald (2017) points out, 'A poetics is an explanation of how an artwork is constructed [and] is always an attempt to make sense of a the doxa.' The posthuman screen poetics for *Anthropocene VR* (2018) and *BrownLake/Boumiera (*2021) are a poetics of place (geopoetic) that attempt to re-imagine the perspective of the everchanging lake. The

screen idea that traverses the screen maps contains beliefs about 'the effects that the final work will elicit in the spectator' (Bordwell 2008, p. 54) to the extent that its purpose is to reorient perspectives away from the 'anthropos' towards the more-than human.

Given the aim of this thesis is to respond to Plumwood's (2009) challenge to 'write an active voice in nature' through writing and filming into existence Brown Lake as changescape, the screen idea has offered me a means to stay true to the experimental nature of this creative practice research; it has allowed for multimodal and multifaceted ways of developing and producing the creative works, even as the cinematic/photofilmic forms that express the screen idea shift, persist, and evolve.

The screen idea may also be useful in creating ongoing iterations of a screen project, as well as affecting decisions about the way it is distributed and relocated. Given the increasingly compressed time periods in digital filmmaking between development and production and distribution, the screen idea accommodates adaptations to changing forms and shifting production methodologies. In this sense the screen idea is 'a central imaginary which can be viewed from different perspectives – like a crystal' (Macdonald, 2013, p.6). I cherish this idea of the crystal, and it was an image that I came back to time and again when I felt I was getting lost during this creative research.

Figure 2 Still of a frog from *Brown Lake/Boumiera* (2021)

Principles of Practice

Across both of my creative practice works, in my role of changescaper I tried to harness the complexity of Brown Lake by aesthetic means and creative attention. I used my own messy principles of practice, not as a hard or fast rules, but rather to get a sense of what practices would write 'nature in an active voice' (Plumwood 2009) during the screenwriting and the filmmaking stages. I articulate these four principles as follows:

1. **Hyperlocal:** Write from somewhere – Brown Lake is situated, specific, complex, heterogenous. Brown Lake has stratigraphies of understanding, geological, environmental, social and cultural. Honouring a specificity of place, feeling rooted in that place, brings its existence more intimately into connection with an audience. This is what creates a true 'geopoetics' of place since creative attention means 'giving attention to what does not exist' (Weil 1973, pp. 146-149). Non-existence in this sense means that which does register (as valuable) in the social world (Last 2017).

2. **Image as Thought:** Write into visibility – Brown Lake has its own mind (Povinelli 1995). Without anthropomorphizing, the viewer should feel they are *with* the point of view of the lake. This builds on the idea of writing an otherwise into existence. Just as in the film *Leviathan* (Paravel 2013), where a camera attached to the side of the ship watches the blood of sea creatures pouring out in a kind of transposed body horror, in my research, the camera, as protagonist in the narrative, is the 'eye of the lake', whose gaze can turn away from humans.

3. **Posthuman POV:** Build a polycentric perspective – the point of view belongs to Brown Lake yet shifts according to its interconnections. It is polyphonic. As an encounter, it is an assemblage of events. There is a dialogical relationship between lake, plants, animals, humans and technology (Rose 2015). I suggest in the screen maps that the lake's body of water carries the 'mind' of the lake.

4. **Community:** Make as non-profit shareware to promote collectivity – this comes from Braidotti's (2019 manifesto of affirmative ethics and also is alluded to in Last's (2017) analysis of geopoetics. It is important that the creative practice works produced are not made with profit in mind, but become both virtual and material forms of public art, always in forms that are open and accessible to the public.

The following five principles pervade and support the purpose of the screen maps of *Brown Lake/Boumiera* as a changescape:

(i) Shift the subject–viewer relationship and open up a new way of seeing place by decentering the human.

(ii) Engage different typologies of lens-based moving images. That is, investigate new 'regimes of vision' (Ross & Munt 2018, p. 193). The two typologies for this research are cinematic virtual reality and artist moving image. These act as relocated photofilmic/screen forms (Casetti 2015).

(iii) Reorient feelings (affects and percepts) about human and non-human relationships.

(iv) Construct a geopoetics of place as a posthuman screen poetic (my term). The screen maps of Brown Lake shift the axis on anthropocentric storytelling.

(v) Promote story-encounter (dialogical) rather than storytelling (monological).

Figure 3 Google Map of Brown Lake

Finding Story

Industrial filmmaking is comforted by 'Story', as has been argued by filmmaker and academic Kathryn Millard (2007). It expresses this love for story via the artefact of the screenplay. Breaking that down, in an industrial and mainstream development process screen + play = a measurable production document, rather than screen + play = playfulness on screen. As noted by Millard there is plenty of literature (self-help and

otherwise) about how to write a 'good' screenplay. Much of this literature and many of the ideas put forward about what constitutes a good screenplay have now been bureaucratized by government funding bodies in countries such as Australia and Canada in order to provide quantifiable assessment of applications by filmmakers for government-backed resources. However, Millard's (2014) manifesto for sustainable screenwriting offers more generative modes of screenwriting; I will return to this later in this chapter.

Within the industrial landscape, which I have traversed for several decades as a writer/director, the screenplay provides a document that can be broken down into calculable units and questions, including but not limited to *production* and *distribution*. Producers ask: Is this castable? Can we attract a high-level cast (or 'unknowns'), sets or locations? If locations, how many and how far away? How many days of shooting? Any VFX, or all shots in camera, what camera? How much data to wrangle? How much preproduction time? How much time in the edit? All these questions relate to how much money this film will cost to make in an industry-standardized context. A 'good' screenplay allows 'production people' to take 'control' of the process by managing any 'uncontrollable' creative elements (often the screenwriter, the screenwriting process and the director, but increasingly the production designer and cinematographer as well).

The other side of the 'good' screenplay is its marketability, so distributors ask: What's the story, what genre? What value does the attached writer/director have in the marketplace? Is this studio, festival or streamer material? What do we have attached to this screenplay that will elevate its value – cast, creatives of note, underlying IP? Are there any 'letters of interest' that might elevate its value? What relationships do we have that may help leverage this screenplay in the marketplace? This part of the screenplay equation is about how 'sellable' the screenplay is for those who 'take out' the screenplay package to buyers.

With the screenplay enabling decisions about cost and sellability, and thus assessment by government funding bodies or film producers, it is, as Millard has humorously suggested, the Bible of industrial filmmaking. This is a system of developing an idea for the screen that iconoclastic writer/directors/thinkers, Godard amongst them, have been sceptical about since the 1960s (Munt 2017). Although independent filmmakers often need to mediate their way between industrial and the alternative modes of production to get their screen projects made, many nonetheless seek to express their ideas for a potential screen story through modes of development that exist outside the industrial, and often bureaucratic, landscape of the mainstream screenplay. As previously

noted, the screen idea is one such a mode, as it eschews the narrow conditions imposed by the conventional screenplay template while allowing for a process-driven approach to the poetics of screenwriting during the development process. There are, however, other processes that support a pluralistic approach to developing and making screen works and finding stories.

Screenwriting through 'scripting' (Maras 2009), for example, allows for a process that carries story ideas through images, sounds, graphs, drawings, notes, music composition, and maps. In turn, this assemblage of 'thinking/feeling/perceiving' a singular and complex concept can support the evolution of a film narrative that may be either generic or heterogenous. It may possess a more experimental narrative shape, or it may reside within a conventional story form, such as a three-act structure. Increasingly, mainstream productions incorporate some of these elements of 'scripting' and digital screenwriting into their preproduction process, including pre-visualization, as a way of 'elevating' their productions while remaining within the advanced capitalist paradigm of the US studios and streamers.

Yet Millard (2014) points out the democratizing forces of digital screenwriting practices, providing examples of how they have emancipated the process of production, as well as the context and content of cinematic stories. From *SweetGrass* (Barbash & Castaing-Taylor 2010), which takes the point of view of sheep, to *Beasts of the Southern Wild* (Wallis et al. 2013), where cinema verité combines with magical realism to become a social impact campaign, Millard summarizes what she gleaned from distinctive case studies taking note that 'the proliferation of screens and digital composing practices has made improvisation, adaptation and the hybridisation of art forms and genres even more central to writing' (Millard 2014, p. 12). For this research project, throughout the process of making both *Anthropocene VR* and *Brown Lake/Boumiera*, my screenwriting practice was emancipated by practices of improvisation, adaptation, and that, examples of which I offer later in this chapter.

There is a liberating force that emanates from Millard's (2014) 'Manifesto for Sustainable Screenwriting' (p. 184). This manifesto lays ground for a different kind of cinema, one that does not rely on being made for consumption or that overly consumes resources in production, but rather one that can be made outside the mainstream in order to generate new ideas and conversations. Rather than rely on a production-formatted script, this digital mode of screenwriting can find its story through a gathering of materials – in Millard's words, an 'accretion' – where accretion is 'a process of gathering,

evaluating and piecing together elements, as a way of giving expression to the world of the story' (2014, p.181). Beyond 'accretion', which became a mini mantra for my screenwriting practice in this creative research project, two of Millard's manifesto suggestions (numbers 10 and 11) also proved useful:

> 10. Develop prototypes. **Work quick and dirty.** Your script can be a map, sketches, photo-texts, a wiki, a list, scenes that form part of a jigsaw, a graphic novel, a video trailer, a short film – whatever works. (2014, p.184, my bold)
>
> 11. Recycle everything – ideas and resources. **Adopt adhocism**, bricolage, and improvisation. (2014, p.184, my bolding)

Accretion, working quick and dirty, and adopting adhocism are all useful ways of working intuitively and instinctively. Another mode of 'scripting' referred to by film academic Steven Maras is the concept of layering: 'filmmaking by layering means you write, direct and edit all at once' (Kelly & Parisi 1997, quoted in Maras 2009, p. 182). Maras points to the process used by filmmaker George Lucas, who explained that the separation of conception (screenplay) and execution (directing) is increasingly collapsed, in some measure as a result of digital technologies. Having personally met the VFX supervisor who worked with Lucas on his Star Wars films while I was employed at a big studio production in 2021, I was fascinated by the pre-visualization element of 'scripting' (Maras 2009), whereby, in preproduction, directors are given parts of VFX scenes to watch in virtual reality (VR) headsets before a frame of the film has been shot. Otherwise, the postproduction planning may inversely influence the preparatory aspects of the story and screenwriting process.

The version of 'layering' used in my creative practices research project is not supported by the kinds of budget that Lucas or other studio film projects command, but the concept of layering, even at a lo-fi level, can allow for creative flexibility and story development. The arte povera style of *Anthropocene VR* gestures to this, as I outline later in this chapter. In fact, in both creative artefacts of this research, filmmaking by layering is a key feature throughout development and production, and even distribution.

Figure 4 Computer screensaver of *Brown Lake/Boumiera* (2021). Still of tadpoles

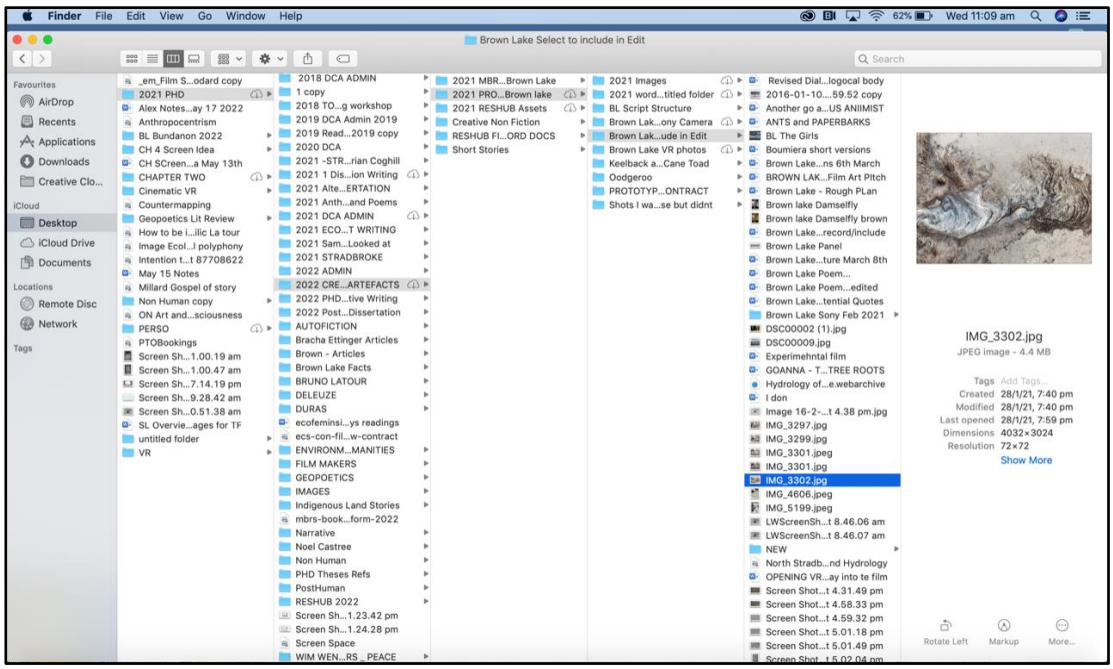


Figure 27 Digital notebook of Brown Lake files (2021)

Figure 5 Accretion of notebooks 2016–2022

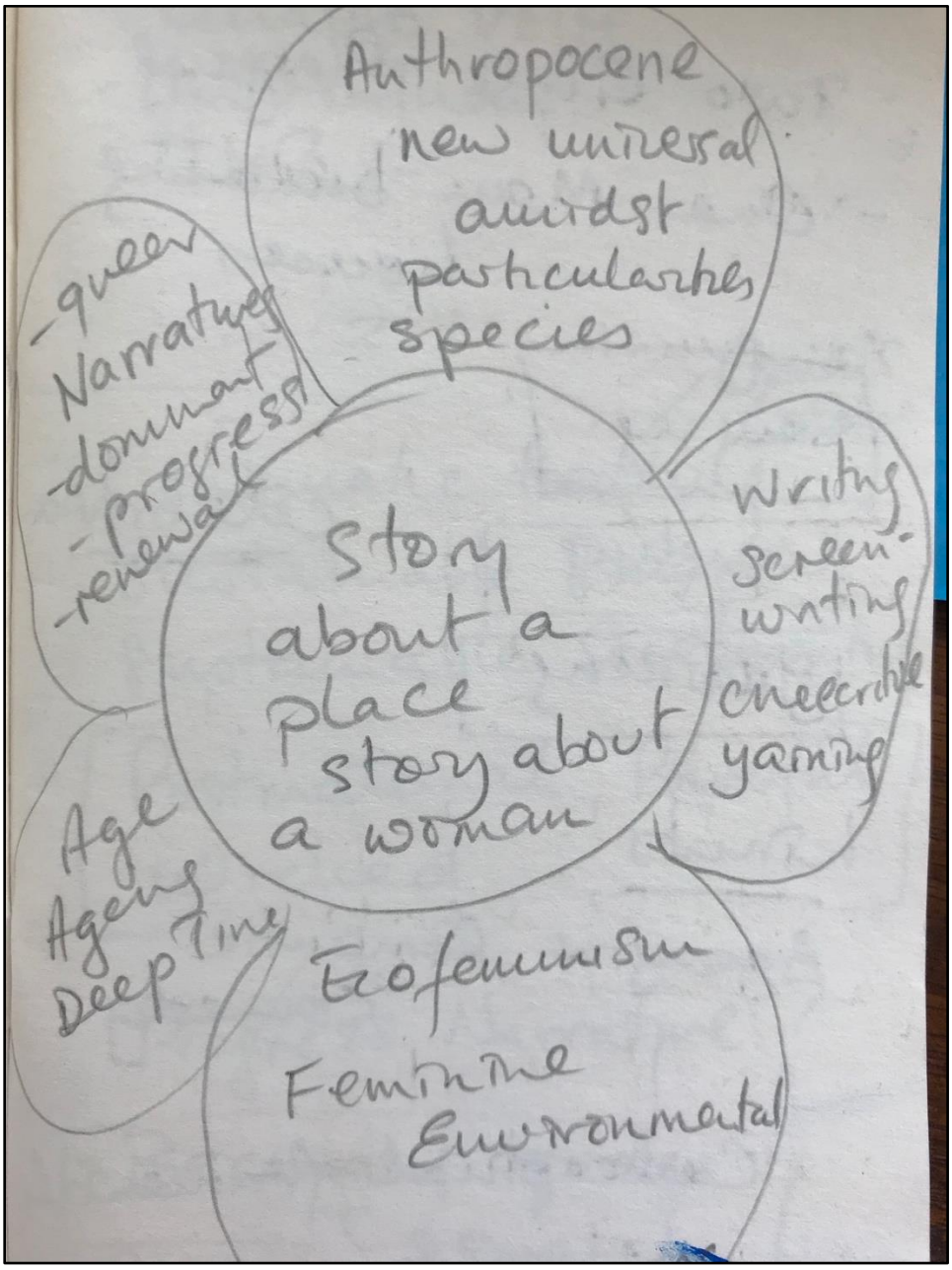


Figure 6 Handwritten notes (2017)

OPENING OF AN UNFINISHED SCREENPLAY FOR BROWN LAKE (2019)

100,000 years on an Island recounted in 3 minutes … by a child (an unreliable narrator who is reciting a mix of dreamtime narrative, colonial and geological history)

Handmade puppets, in a shifting diorama that has been created with several layers of cardboard boxes, move in time with the child's condensed narrative…

'Our Island was a refuge from the ice age - With crabs, oyster shells, fishbones and sea lettuce squashed together - it made sandstone that held water in swamps and places where worms grew, and a few lakes formed above the sea where the carpet snake lived with our spirits'

Crab, Oyster and Fishbone puppets collapse beneath a worm- holed sandstone made from cardboard. A snake emerges.

'Nearby was the Frog Mouth Owl - our kinship animal. In the ocean the dugongs and the dolphins swum near the precious Quampy shell, and we were responsible for taking care of them and of old Mother Earth. Then came new people black and white, a mission who bought Jesus and the dugong factory, and a leper colony'

More hand-made Animals swim past a diorama of the island, as Jesus on a stick and a shoebox 'dugong factory' arrive.

'The dugong oil ran out and then a mine with its dredge came. The dredge was a guzzler and stole the sands so one lake died and then our people got native title and started reclaiming sacred places like Brown Lake - the Women's Lake where the carpet snake lives and the jet ski's still wanted to come until the lake said 'no way - I need my water clean so I can take care of the dragonflies who been here for 10 million years, and the frogs, curlews and cicadas, the paperbarks, the cottontrees and goannas and honey bees and children like me who've been here a long time too'

A cardboard drawing of Brown Lake, next to the model of a sand dredge.

** Add kids image of lake on cardboard

All this puppeteered in a naïve way by several children and a speaker. We see the soft, caramel face of an awkward young girl who, having finished her story looks at camera expectantly for a response as any child would in a class presentation. She is like a giant next to the diorama. This is 'Kookie' (Curraweena) She is our conduit to Brown Lake.

THIS IS SLOW CINEMA. THIS IS ECOCINEMA. THIS IS FEMININE CINEMA

Figure 30 Writing sample for an unfinished screenplay (2019)

Scripting Geopoetics

My process of 'screenwriting' for Brown Lake, having embraced the screen idea and armed with the conceptual toolbox to find form for 'nature in the active voice', was stalled for a time because I became paralysed by thinking about writing a feature length screenplay (see Figure 30). Despite regularly engaging with contemporary moving image practices as an audience member, several decades of working as a director/writer across feature films and TV series had habituated me to 'imagine' the film through a mainstream mode of storytelling. Yet the more I considered the feature film form, the more I realized, as the black, queer, feminist scholar Audre Lorde wrote, 'the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house' (Lorde 1984).

I knew that a posthuman screen poetic would require a different way of scripting and realizing my film's form. To break out of the paralysis, alongside reading the works of thinkers such as Jane Bennett (*Vibrant Matter*), Graham Harmon (*OOO: A new theory of everything*), and Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (*Stone: An Ecology of the Inhuman*, 2016) to extend my own 'imaging' of non-human subjectivity, I turned to the geological research and the social and environmental histories of Brown Lake to better understand the morphology of Brown Lake as a body of water.

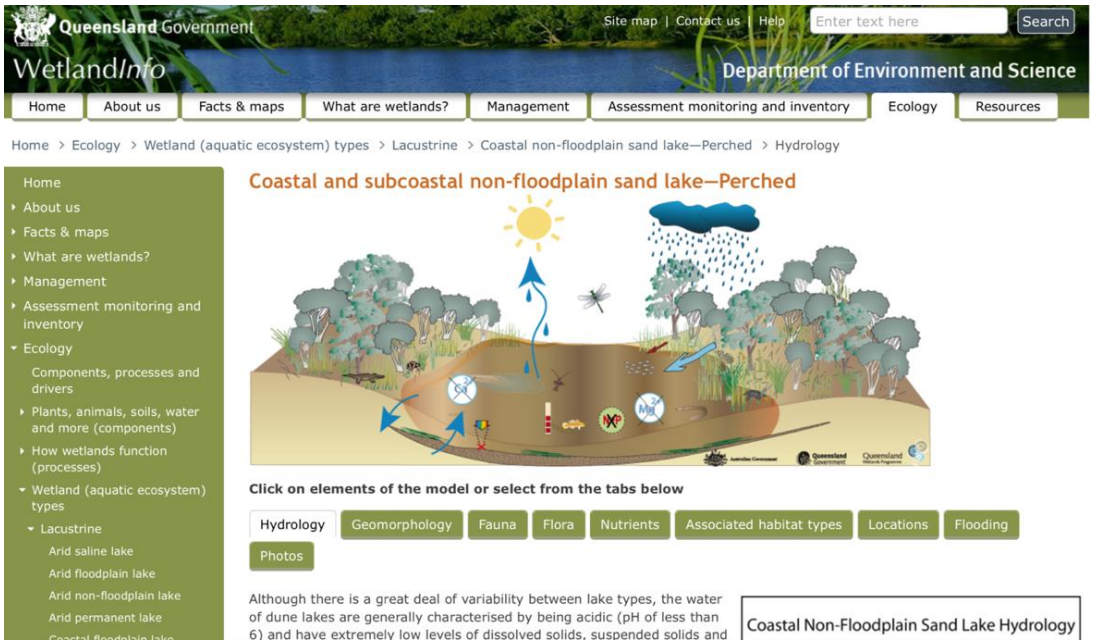


Figure 7 Coastal non-floodplain of perched sand lake hydrology[129]

129 https://wetlandinfo.des.qld.gov.au/wetlands/ecology/aquatic-ecosystems-natural/lacustrine/non-floodplain-perched-lake/hydrology.html

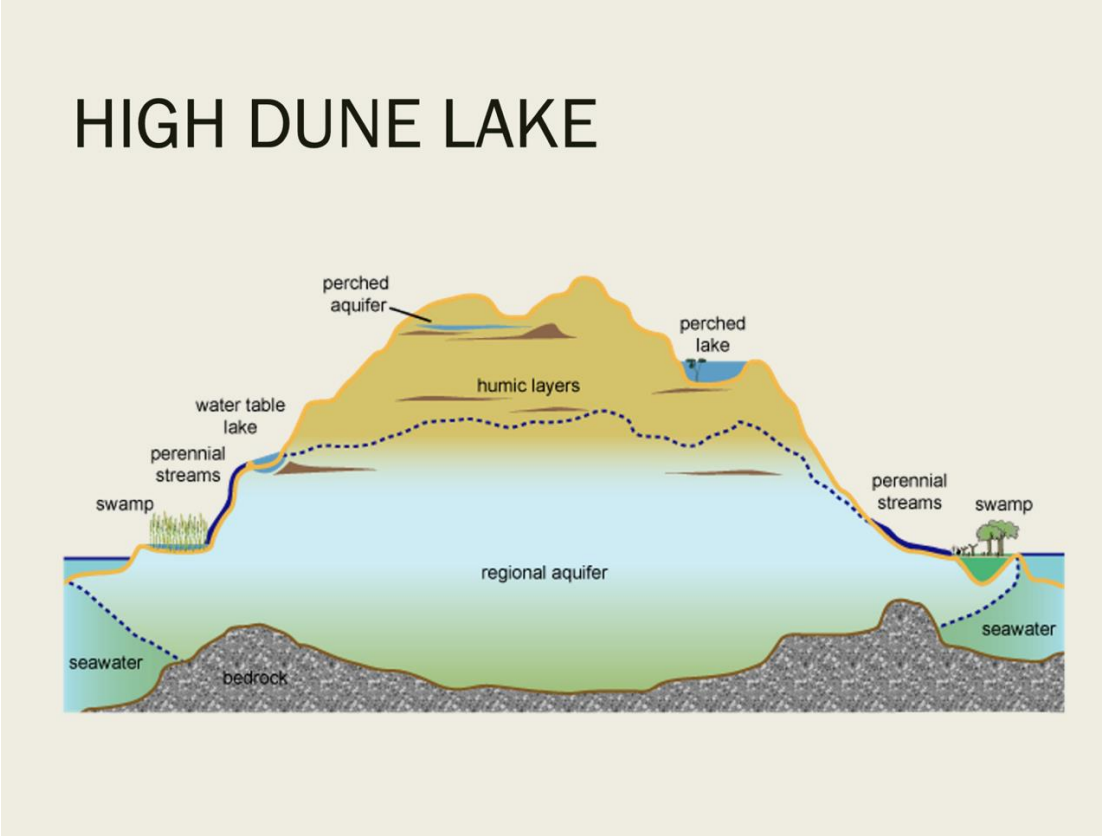


Figure 32 High dune lake diagram

130

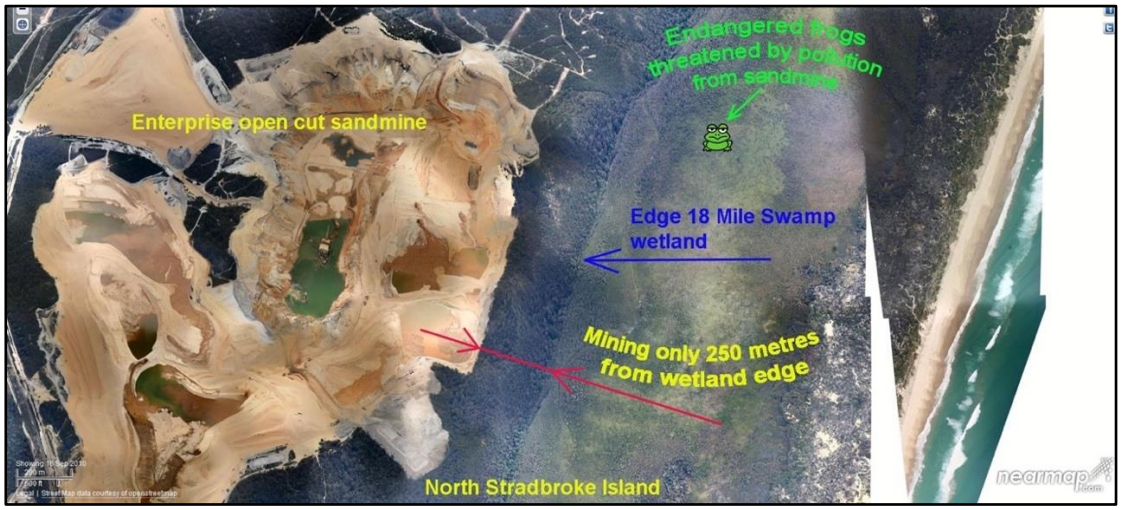


Figure 8 Map of sand mine near Brown Lake (2017)

In the beginning, this process felt somewhat child-like. I extended my research by attending an environmental history workshop run by environmental scientist Libby Robin and historian Tom Griffith at the Fenner School of Environment & Society, Australian National University. This was an illuminating and innovative scholarly experience, where each participant was asked to 'perform' their environmental history of place. However, it didn't instantly yield the creative results I had hoped for. If anything, I became more engaged in reading about environmental history, which was a new discipline to me and completely engrossing. Creatively, I remained stuck until the pressure of time prevailed.

I once had the privilege of meeting the film director Stanley Kubrick. We drank iced tea in his trailer during the last film he made, *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999). He had just spent the day doing 127 takes of the same shot and was not satisfied with the results. We spoke about ways of making films and he concluded, 'Either make them very slowly or very fast, nothing in between.' For both screenworks in my creative practices research, even though there was a long time between making them, I was under the pressure of time to produce a script or some kind of document that would communicate their physical conception because I was always working on a tight budget and with technical support people who had limited availability.

This rhythm is probably consistent with how many lo-fi filmmaking endeavours get made. From a personal practice/idiosyncratic point of view, I found it somewhat useful. Being a person who 'overthinks' and intuitively draws from an eclectic range of experiences, the pressure of time forced me to act more instinctively and seemed to work better for the outcome of my two creative projects. I will now briefly describe the background experiences that led to the genesis of these projects, the CVR *Anthropocene VR* (Lang 2018) and the artist moving image work *Brown Lake/Boumiera* (Lang 2021).

The first experience relates to the idea of privileging the audience response to a work, putting it front and centre, imagining how they might be immersed in a work as an experience, before committing to the story. In 2016, I was Head of Directing at the Australian Film Television and Radio School (AFTRS). Filmmaker and artist Lynette Wallworth was the artist-in-residence there, and she had just made the VR film *Collisions* (Wallworth 2016). We were able, despite the more mainstream nature of the coursework for writer/director students, to run a two-week workshop for a small group of students to create an exhibition of immersive screen works. The purpose of the workshop was to challenge directing students to consider in greater depth the affective impact their story

might have on their audience by spatializing the storyworld of their screen work and activating an audience response.

We had a soundstage, a computer systems designer, and had been able to purchase a Kinect sensor system. Given the students came from a practice of writing more conventional screenplays and often being slaves to 'Story' first, Lynette and I hoped this creative strategy would invert their writer/director process and open them up to different forms of practice. They had to first define their screen idea, then imagine how an audience might experience that idea before working through how to make it: no screenplays; very physical; lots of testing; writing by making.

In their paper on CVR, Munt and Ross (2018) discuss artist moving image scripting practices and the way space mediates how a work is understood by referring to Whitney Art Museum curator Chrissie Iles's practice: 'For Iles, content becomes space and space content, confronting a new audience 'by surrounding them with images and sound rather than physical walls' (p. 193). This is what was happening for the students in the workshop. Meanwhile, Lynette and I discussed activating audiences through immersive practices, and the importance of placing a participant within an experience to create a sense of presence, as she had done with sensors in her work *Evolution of Fearlessness* (2011). As Lynette had recently made *Collisions* (2016), we also discussed the unfinished threads that each creative work leaves as links to the next one. More recently, film theorist Kath Dooley (2021) has noted Wallworth's explanation of VR:

> The thing about VR that is so powerful is that it leaves a different memory from conventional film. It feels closer to something that has happened to us, and it registers in the same part of the brain as dreams. It has a very powerful pathway to the subconscious. (Wallworth, quoted in Baum 2020)

The second experience involved developing and realising the first virtual reality film that I co-wrote, co-directed and co-produced, *Prehistoric VR* (Lang & Wright 2017), in collaboration with Erth Physical and Visual Theatre, AFTRS, ACMI and VR company, Start VR. This was when new VR technologies were emerging and there were vibrant discussions about the 'storytelling' potentials of VR but very few screenwriting templates. As Munt and Ross (2018) articulate, 'The question of the screenplay, its form and function, within this rapidly progressing field has, however been overlooked by the genuine excitement, and novelty, of a new digital model of audio-visual production' (p. 192). At that time, though, a younger audience had also been overlooked. Children

under 13 years were not permitted to attend a VR 'experience', as evidenced when the Australian Museum offered *First Life VR* with David Attenborough[131] (Attenborough, 2016).

Having also just attended an Erth-produced show with giant animal puppets for children called *Prehistoric Aquarium*[132] (Wright 2016), I wondered whether a hybrid form of live action and puppetry in an arte povera mode in VR might be permitted for young people. I was enchanted by the materiality of the show, and the suspension of disbelief that children are capable of. Much of the VR content I had watched was either live-action documentary or animated/CGI-oriented gaming. However, there are many definitions of lens-based virtual reality: live VR, filmic VR, traditional VR, and CVR (Ross & Munt 2018, p. 192). I was most interested in experimenting with CVR, which is an immersive virtual reality experience 'where individual users can look around synthetic worlds in 360, often with stereoscopic views, and hear spatialized audio specifically designed to reinforce the veracity of the virtual environment' (Mateer 2017, p. 15).

There wasn't yet a hybrid approach, or really any standardized approach to developing VR projects at that stage, and I wondered whether it might be possible to achieve the kind of 'presence' (Gröppel-Wegener & Kidd 2019) that Kath Dooley (2021) refers to in her work on VR. I wanted to transform the story of prehistoric sea creatures from a live theatre experience into a CVR film via a screen idea. The screen idea was quite simple: this is the story of Australia's prehistoric sea creatures, designed for children. This would allow me to develop the story for VR in a manner that was suitable and sensorially exciting for children, keeping in mind the effects the final work might have on young audiences. I approached Erth with the suggestion. They were already thinking about the same thing.

I did some cursory research into the effects of VR on children, which at the time was inconclusive, but there was some suggestion that VR would be disorienting to young people. Nonetheless, I acquired some cardboard VR goggles and under careful supervision showed several VR films that I downloaded from a NYT app to my own children (both under 12). I was struck by how they responded to people in the VR films when seen through the goggles. It was as if they were in conversation with them.

131 https://australian.museum/about/organisation/media-centre/david-attenboroughs-virtual-reality-experiences-come-to-australian-museum-from-8-april/

132 https://www.erth.com.au/prehistoric-aquarium

When scripting *Prehistoric VR* into existence, Scott Wright and I didn't start out by writing a screenplay. Again, as Dooley (2021) has noted, since there is no standard approach, 'CVR practitioners can be observed as working creatively to find novel solutions to the task of planning and presenting their projects so as to communicate ideas to colleagues and stakeholders' (p. 58). Our way of starting the creative process was by filming the theatre show with a cutting-edge VR camera, the Sony Nokia Ozo.[133] Considered the best technology at the time, it housed sixteen separate camera lenses like sixteen eyes, although it was large and rather cumbersome to wrangle.

After filming, we looked at the roughly stitched-together 16-lens footage to determine which parts of the show were most exciting kinetically and visually. We built our story out from there, focussing on which scenes might work best, bearing in mind the 360-degree aspects of CVR, which means that the viewer can look anywhere at any time. Initially we didn't get too caught up in camera heights and angles, though this changed once we had a story, a studio and a performer. At first, we settled on the most visually compelling sequences, working out where the camera would be placed and how to choreograph the action around the camera. From there we started to weave the sequences together into a journey that the audience (children) could be taken on. At that stage how to transition those sequences became key. We chose to stage the transitions rather than try to edit them in camera.

We then made decisions about who we thought the character of the VR camera best reflected. Given its 'regime of vision' (Ross & Munt 2018, p, 194), the VR camera moves beyond a rectangular frame, so the story is less controlled by the filmmaker/artist; instead, the camera takes the viewer on a journey. According to Ross and Munt,

> The 'new' challenge for CVR screenwriting is to think about how narrative can occur across space, as moving image media and how it can draw on a wider historical analysis of the ways in which visual art has dealt with questions of scale, form, geometry, optics and narrative prior. (p. 196)

Since the intended audience was children, we asked, 'Who would the child watching this film want to go on a journey with?' Quite simply, we imagined the camera's POV as a child of about 8 years old. This decision influenced the scriptwriting since it prompted us to write a group of children into the narrative, something that had not been in the stage production. We did this as a way of taking the camera (imagined as another child – the

[133] https://variety.com/2016/digital/news/sony-pictures-nokia-ozo-1201917664/

one watching the film) on a journey through the prehistoric waters of the Australia to meet creatures of the deep. My daughter, Fredi, had just given a speech on water and reminded us that we were probably drinking water that was once in a dinosaur's belly. With that in mind, I proposed to have the VR camera swim through the belly of a prehistoric fish, which then also became part of the story/script, but only after we had worked out the logistics of making a fish puppet that we could physically get a VR camera into.

With a VR camera that offers 360-degree filming, the viewer can look wherever they want on the screen. Understanding this, we choreographed the story/journey with puppeteers so that a viewer could be looking anywhere and still find some part of the story of prehistoric sea creatures available to them. This would have been impossible to write down in a standardized screenplay. We realized through this that we were choreographing an *experience* of the sea journey rather than a story, with *encounters* along the way. This aligns with Dooley's (2021b) reference to 'core experience' and 'key moments' when sequencing the narrative of a VR film (pp. 43–44). Equally, Ross and Munt's (2018) notion of the spatialized screenplay provides a greater depth of understanding of the more iterative process required to develop and find story in CVR.

Our collective range of experiences as practitioners allowed for different facets of the story to emerge in improvised and collaborative ways and provided a way to communicate about our development process and the production practices we would use. We used the original show and Erth's ability to make puppets and create a choreography of action with their puppeteers; we rehearsed with the children who would be in the film, adjusting their actions as we went; we were given technical limits by Start VR vis-a-vis the post-production process; and knowing that the final work would be shown during school holidays at ACMI, we also had the final experience in our minds. So, as we designed the film, we also designed the final viewer experience as makeshift submarine that a child can enter after they have dressed up in a submariner's outfit. They would sit in the 'submarine' and watch the film using Google Daydream goggles. In this sense we were creating our own screen poetics to suit the medium and practices of CVR, as well as aiming to elicit the specific feeling of wonder in our child viewers. This work was considered 'the first ever cinematic experience that combines VR and puppetry'.[134]

134 https://vrscout.com/news/acmi-prehistoric-vr-puppets/

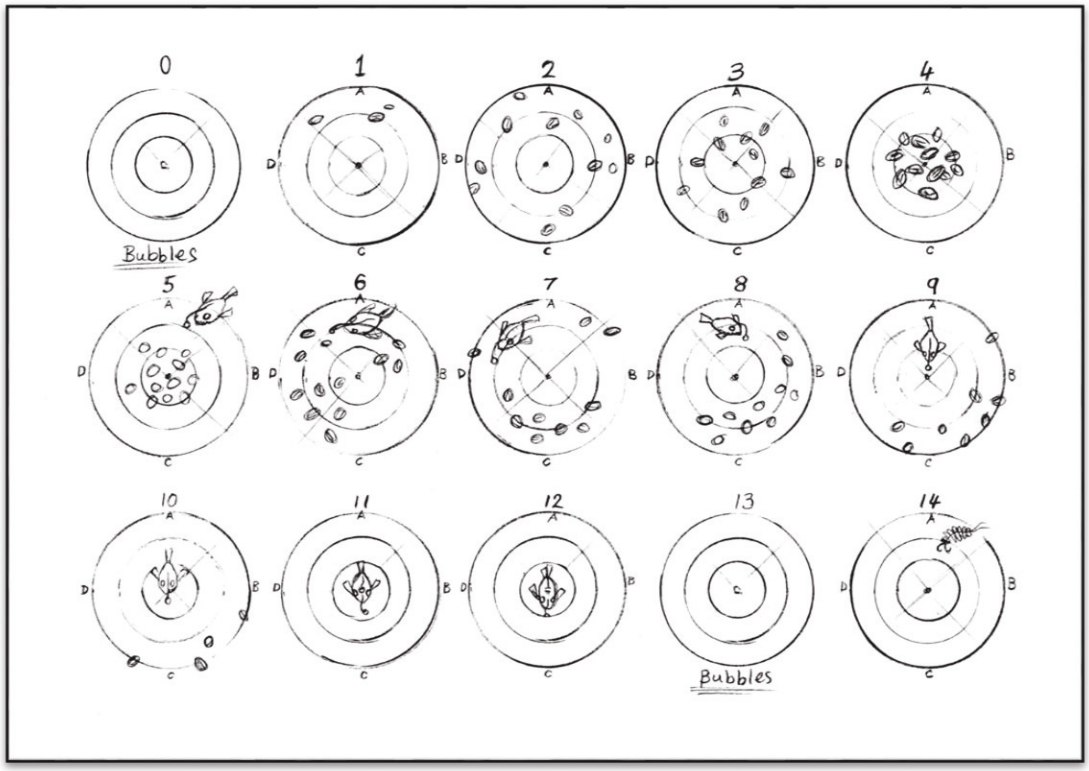


Figure 9 Choreography of puppet and child action for fish sequence for *Prehistoric VR* (2017)

Figure 35 Rehearsing children and puppets in *Prehistoric VR* (2017)

Figure 36 Watching back the sequence, *Prehistoric VR* (2017)

These two experiences helped me evolve my conception of the screen idea for my creative research on Brown Lake. Occurring during a period of my thesis when I felt stuck in modes of storytelling that didn't adequately respond to my research question, what emerged was that a different regime of vision was required, since the subject–viewer relationship needed to be one where the viewer was thinking *with* Brown Lake. The two filmic forms that would fit this remit were CVR and artist moving image works, because these would offer more of a story-encounter, a different means of finding story rather than presenting a conventional storytelling mode as a fait accompli. When developing these kinds of filmic forms, the 'scriptwriting' happens as much off the page as on it through storyboards, rehearsals, tests, and even during the realization process.

Since my creative practice research explores Brown Lake's relationship to the viewer, I realized the CVR and artist moving image forms could more potently 'presence' Brown Lake' in two ways: through an immersive experience with a headset, and by staging the artist moving image work across multiple platforms. Instead of 'mapping' a journey through Brown Lake, the scripting was transformed into making 'screen maps' of the lake through which the story could be encountered and found.

With the CVR as first screen map, testing and working at a micro scale with Brown Lake using the smallest VR camera possible and reconstructing it as a roughly built, hand-made environment so that the viewer could feel 'small' as they were immersed into it, created a messy 'geopoetics' by 'opening up' the world of the lake. I felt this could offer a non-human experience through CVR films rather than needing a human perspective to activate the audience experience. The CVR camera as 'point of view' was imagined as a water cycle moving vertically through the spaces and stratigraphies of the lake.

Figure 37 Final model for *Anthropocene VR*

Figure 38 Consumer VR camera for *Anthropocene VR*

Inventory of Materials

For the second screen map, the artist moving image work *Brown Lake/Boumiera* (2021), I applied very different techniques and used the principle of 'recycling the inventory of visual and aural materials' (Millard 2014, p. 184) to find the story, in part by recycling segments of the first screen map *Anthropocene VR* (2018). Being spatially different, and considering it would be 2D and need an installation, I started by making PowerPoint presentations to sequence my screen idea. At each stage, these were provisional attempts to capture momentarily the ephemeral changescape nature of Brown Lake.

The concept of the script as consisting of both text and image was useful (Munt 2016). This is a process that has been informally employed by independent filmmakers across many decades, for example Jean Luc Godard in *Film Socialisme* (2010) and in the preparatory work for filmmaker Apitchatpong Weerasethakul's *Memoria* (2022). Both used collages of image and text, along with notes, to create the journeys their screen stories would take. I found, however, that I preferred to work physically as well as use two-dimensional collages. For example, when I was testing the materials and their scale for *Anthropocene VR*, my Erth collaborator, Steve Howarth, would set up makeshift sets of cardboard for me to either walk through or move a camera through.

I wanted to construct both the CVR and artist moving image work in terms of directionality, connection, and movement (Povinelli 2016), taking the camera through a vertical and a circular journey, as well as horizontal one. Whether as a 360-degree view or a polycentric point of view, my aim was to capture the ever-changing assembly of arrangements in play at Brown Lake. The following clip demonstrates some of our testing at this early stage. Link: https://vimeo.com/246903877 (Links to an external site.) Password: Brown Lake. The ensuing still shots are taken from this clip.

Figure 10 Testing materials for Anthropocene Project

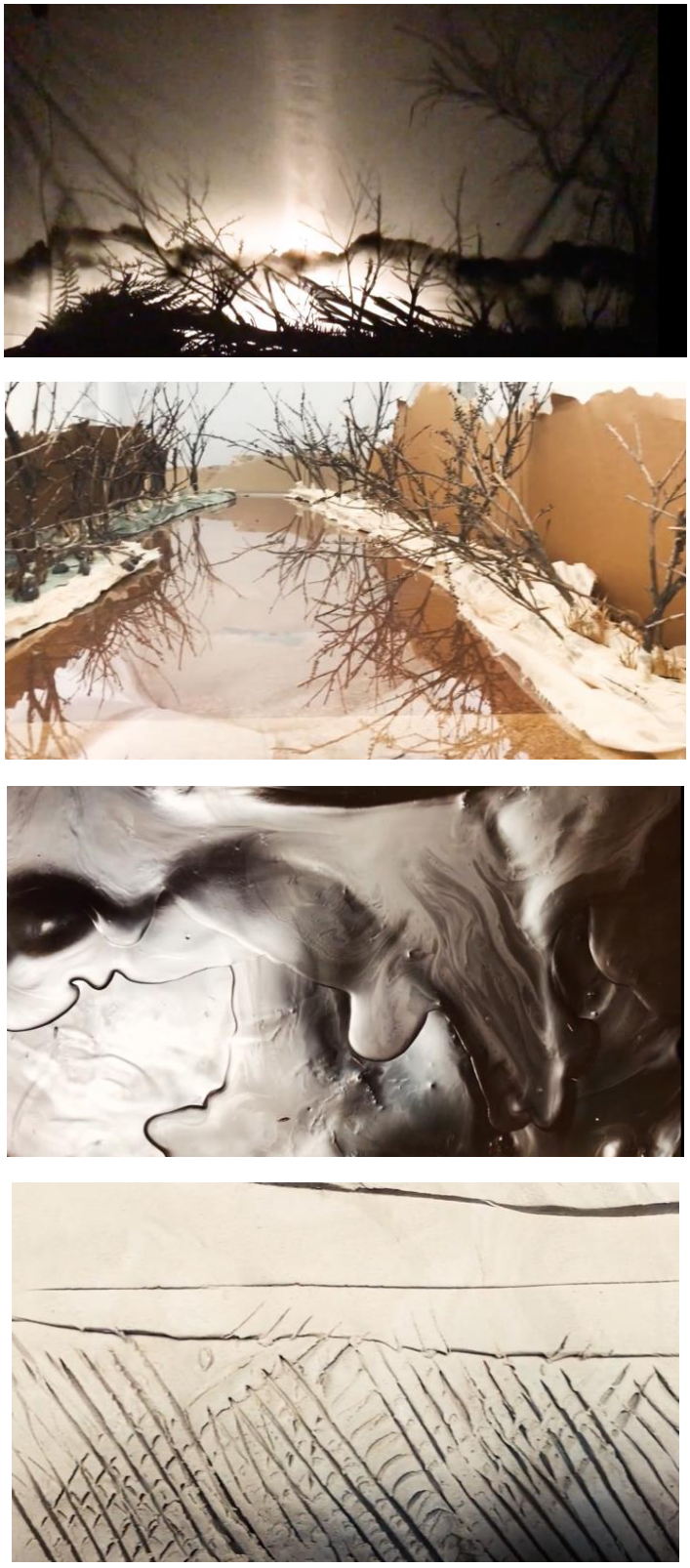


Figure 11 Shadow puppets, recycled materials, wax, clay

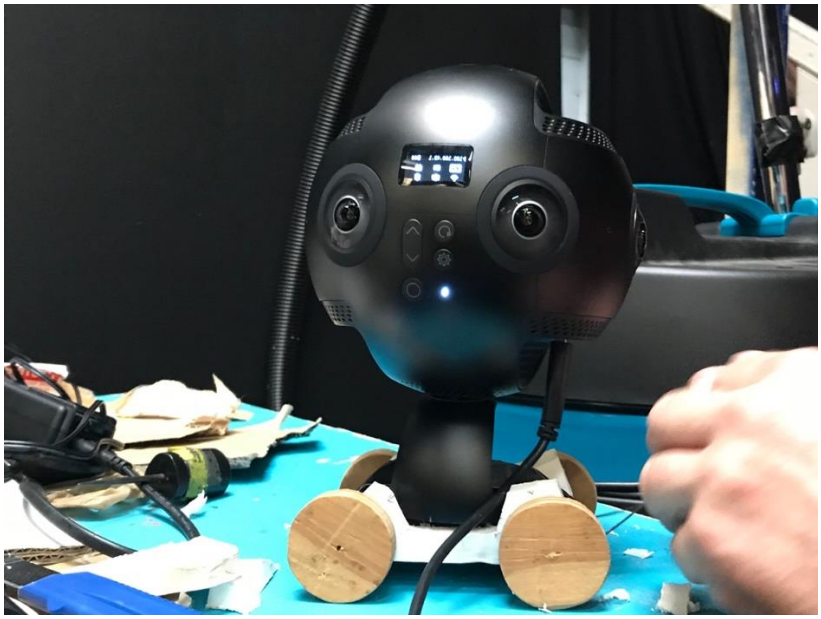


Figure 41 Testing a VR camera on wheels to 'script 'an experience from the POV of water

Figure 42 Testing a VR camera on wheels on a mock up Brown Lake model

Using fast, messy, often adhoc preparatory work and bricolage, I created a composite vision (Munt 2016) that led to an eventual polycentred composition (Braidotti 2019) from Brown Lake's perspective. Through the preparatory notes, sketches, images, and films, I wanted to evoke the feel of the lake geographically and geologically as cyclical rather than linear, while also suggesting the lake's point of view in terms of directionality, movement, and connections. Of further significance was the idea that the screen work 'does not interpret or represent what is already there but configures it' (Povinelli 2016, p. 84). This supports the notion of a composite vision, since the images are configured into a composition, whether through camera choreography in the case of the CVR, or through image and sound assembly in the artist moving image editing phase.

To consider the development process of Karrabing Collective films for a moment. Their films are written without scripts, having constructed what they refer to as a 'dirty manifesto'.[135] This dirty manifesto offers more philosophical parameters than practical ones. Similarly, in a philosophical sense, I was trying to work with images in a non-symbolic way, even though in the case of the CVR we built the Brown Lake environment in an arte povera style. I nonetheless wanted to achieve a kind of 'animate image' feeling that would give the viewer a sense of presence in the lake. The closest to this feeling I can describe is a Jan Svankmajer stop-motion film such as *Něco z Alenky*/Alice in Wonderland (1988) or one of the early Bjork music videos realized by Michel Gondry, such as *Human Behaviour* (1993), where even though they are full of artifice, there is an 'animate' quality contained in the images created, and the viewer is transposed to the location affectively.

When collating visual research and diagrams of Brown Lake's morphology, considering the different imagery, and using a mix of scientific and cultural and environmental historical recordings and notes, I assembled a plethora of development materials to assist with testing story forms, all the time assessing and intuiting what affect

135 Dirty manifesto to Karrabing analytics:

1. Things exist through an effort of mutual attention. This effort is not in the mind but in the activity of endurance.
2. Things are neither born nor die, though they can turn away from each other and change states.
3. In turning away from each other, entities withdraw care for each other. Thus, the earth is not dying. But the earth may be turning away from certain forms of existence. In this way of thinking the Desert is not that in which life does not exist. A Desert is where a series of entities have withdrawn care for the kinds of entities humans are and thus has made humans into another form of exis- tence: bone, mummy, ash, soil.
4. We must de-dramatize human life as we squarely take responsibility for what we are doing. This simultaneous de-dramatization and responsibilities may allow for opening new questions. Rather than Life and Nonlife, we will ask what formations we are keeping in existence or extinguishing? The concept does not interpret or represent what is already there but configures it. (Povinelli 2016, p.28)

the respective iterations of the screen idea might have on an audience. Some of the approaches used to script the CVR (Mateer 2017)[136] and the artist moving image work included writing with camera (camera stylo), assemblage as collage (arte povera), experimenting with filmic forms in CVR such as the 'spatialized screenplay' (Ross & Munt 2018), and relocating those forms across different platforms (cinema screenings, online platform, installation in white cube, museum screenings, festival screening). Whether as composite forms, configurations of images, collages, layering of practices, polycentric perspectives, or 360-degree viewing, these are all ways of thinking about screenwriting as writing with images.

I would argue that this intimate and generative process would not be possible to undertake within in an industrial context. Nor would the final creative research artefacts fit neatly into a mainstream filmmaking paradigm, which is bound as much by capitalistic concern for profit as it is by creativity. My aim was to produce experimental works that could be readily accessed and experienced by the public.

136 'Cinematic Virtual Reality' (CVR) where media fidelity approaches that found in feature film. Unlike traditional VR, CVR limits the level of control users have within the environment to choosing viewpoints rather than interacting with the world itself (Mateer 2017)

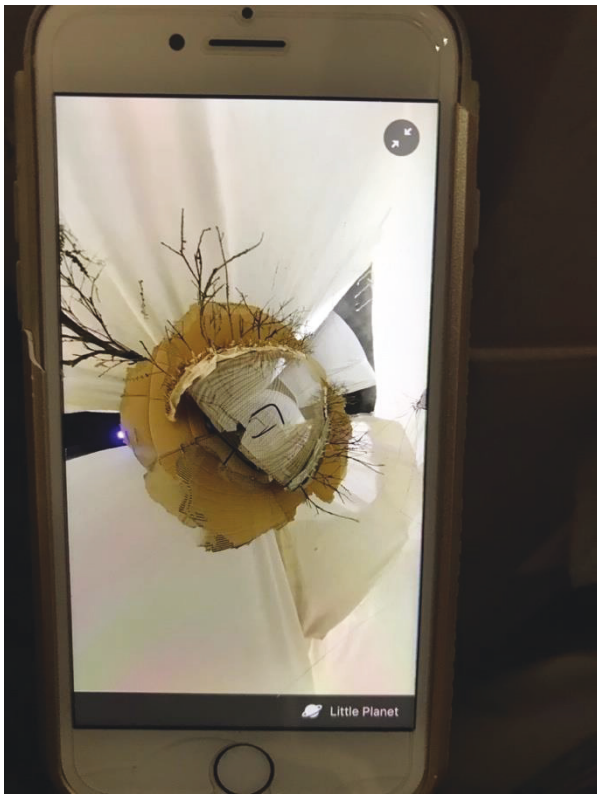
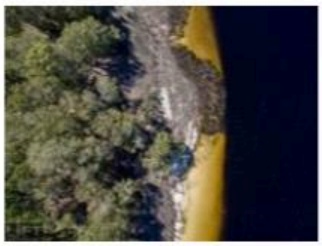
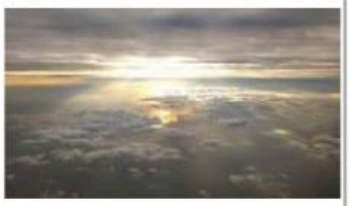


Figure 12 Virtual image and material model (2018)

Figure 13 Testing scale and texture (2018)

Anthropocene VR Screenplay – Sample Pages

Script	Vision	Sound	Technical/ Notes
IMAGE ONE **Above Lake** We are floating above Brown Lake. We are evaporated **Water** in the sky above Brown Lake. Brown Lake below is like a sleeping snake. A curled, brown shape in a bed of dark green fringed by pale sand and rust red water. Above us turquoise sky, Around us pale clouds pass like early morning traffic. A liminal space somewhere between a dot painting and a Michelangelo set of clouds. Slowly, very slowly **Water** descends down towards Brown Lake **IMAGE TWO** **TRANSITION to**	  	*V/O 1* *The water was right up and now it's just, a lot of it's disappeared, just gone.* Sound of wind - cooing against the microphone V/O 2 They used to always sing out our names and make us wait before we went down to Brown Lake because they had to talk to the spirits first. They used to tell the spirits who we were and that we belonged to this country and that we were all related and to please allow us to come down to the lake. And then they'd wait, they'd wait for an answer and then they'd tell us it was all right and that we could go down to the lake. *V/O 3* ***Oh all I know is it used to be the woman's, the old aboriginal women used to go there for their meetings and that and give birth or so I was told but I was too young back then to remember about that.* *V/O 4*	This would require the fulcrum crane and we would shoot overhead of the Brown Lake Model Try putting camera high above the model of Brown Lake – above could be a blue silk…camera to come down to rest close to the reeds.. *do we need to make a tiny goanna etc….and dragonflies or do we fly down with a dragonfly? *Make the shooting room dark. *Try to find the simplest but strongest iteration of the image.

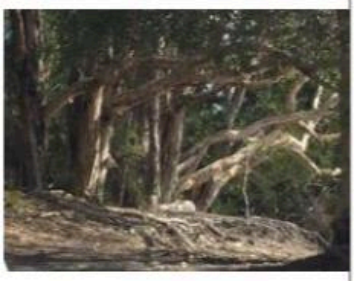
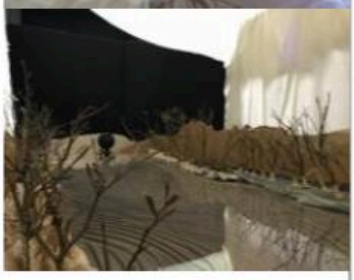
Lake Base of Model **Water** passes a golf course with white ant like players… A sand mine and dredge surround it as it lowers down we see a Golf ball like tower on the other side of the lake emitting a pale green light Then Camera as **Water** floats through **paperbark trees and bushes** A **goanna** clutches the peeling trunk **Water** comes to rest ….**Water** is close to **Brown Lake's mouth**. (On Brown Lake Model) in foreground. A **canoe** in the background **Tadpoles** swirling around in puddles, trying to stay alive as … **Kids brown hands** fashion man-made moat	  	***Yeah they had the ah what do they call that? They had the Bunyip. I think he was half kangaroo and half man. There was one like that. I don't know about the bunyip* *V/O 5* *We used to walk out now and again. Too far. You couldn't get into it because it had reeds all around it. It wasn't much good for swimming then. Not like now. The reeds were right around the lake, along the shoreline.* *.* *V/O 6***And there's ah the Moontagarlee, that's ah like the Rainbow Serpent, used to be in the Brown Lake because I remember when Jocko,* *V/O 7* *The Department of Natural Resources & Mines maintained a surface water level gauge at Brown Lake from 1968 to 1995. At this point in time, the gauge was broken and the Department ceased monitoring lake levels. All data for this gauge is contained in the NRM Groundwater Database, and was made available to me with bore data. Consolidated Rutile Ltd (CRL) began monitoring the lake levels in 1988 and continue to monitor the levels up to the present. In fact, a new*	*Would have 4 images – the sky, the clouds and brown lake (see Gaby's Storyboard *How to create that movement **TECHNICAL – how to do this in miniature (would have to create a golf course and a sand mine with dredge (not for this POC)**

Figure 14 Sample of Anthropocene VR screenplay

Layering

During the shooting of the CVR film, even though I had crafted a CVR script (see Figure 45) we also had a picture editor on set who would edit images together as we filmed them in order to give a sense of how the choreography was working. This enabled me to adapt and adjust the choreography accordingly. For example, we were puppeteering a dragonfly and when I looked through the VR goggles, I felt that it needed to be 'behind' the viewer, causing them to turn and look backwards, rather than in 'front' leading them (see Figure 46). We also tried putting a human face near the dragonfly but took it out as it didn't feel part of the non-human aesthetic we were evolving.

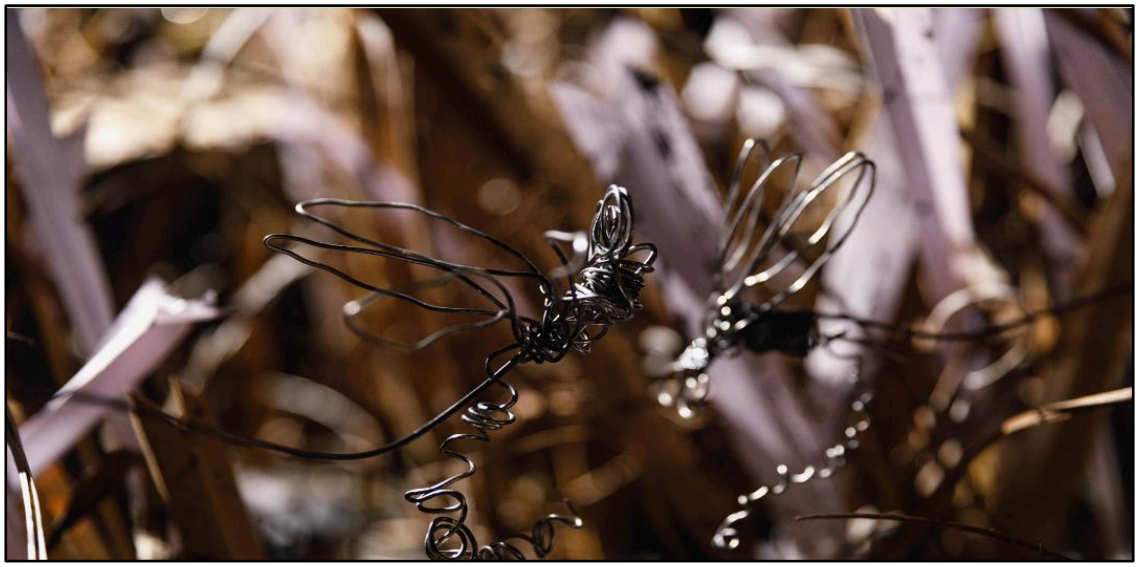


Figure 15 Puppeteering a dragonfly for *Anthropocene VR* (2018)

In contrast, the script preparation for the artist moving image was less spontaneous. I spent lots of time, across several years, walking around Brown Lake, finding tiny events such as ants going into tree trunks, frogs hopping, reeds swaying, and tadpoles swirling around. I would record these as stills and moving images, using my iPhone like Alexandre Astruc's camera stylo (Vincendeau & Graham 2009). I would then paste the images together on paper as sequences before reshooting those sequences very quickly over two days with a more professional camera. I then further re-sequenced the images during in final edit process. While I had written a script pitch document beforehand in the form of a PowerPoint that contained story, images, and ideas, I had no written script for the two-day shoot; instead I was relying on my previous 'field work' that attuned me to what the

different creatures would be doing what at certain times. I went with the cycle of the day rather than with a 'shooting schedule'. This meant rewriting a 'script' after the shoot. This was as a way of trying to get a sense of how the film might be after I had collated all the material. In this sense, the writing across both screen works was a layered process where writing, directing, and editing were sometimes all happening together.

With the artist moving image, I was under the pressure of a delivery deadline to Prototype[137], an online platform that was launching its second series with *Brown Lake/Boumiera* (2021), so had to make some 'teaser trailers' for the work before we had finished editing it. This was factored into the layering of the script. By using digital scripting modes for both screen works, the gap between conception and execution was narrowed. Through an accretion of materials and a series of tests and rehearsals, I was creating a cartography of place (Brown Lake) that is full of endless events, that is always changing and that has a multifaceted and interconnected subjectivity.

137 Prototype – An experimental video art and short film newsletter https://youaretheprototype.art A small screen culture utopia and digital pop-up by artists and filmmakers. Watch blazing works from bold voices across both art and film worlds.

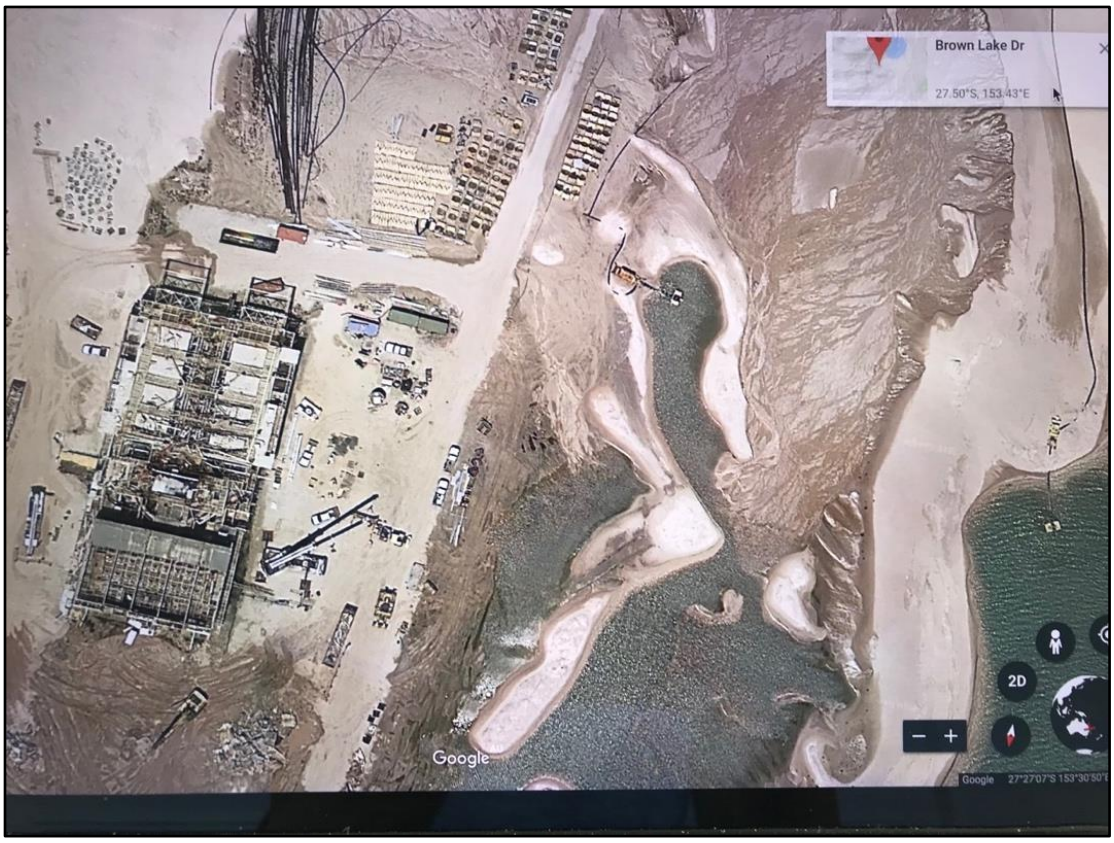


Figure 47 Google Earth image of sand mine near Brown Lake (2019)

Figure 16 iPhone close-up image of sand at Brown Lake (2020)

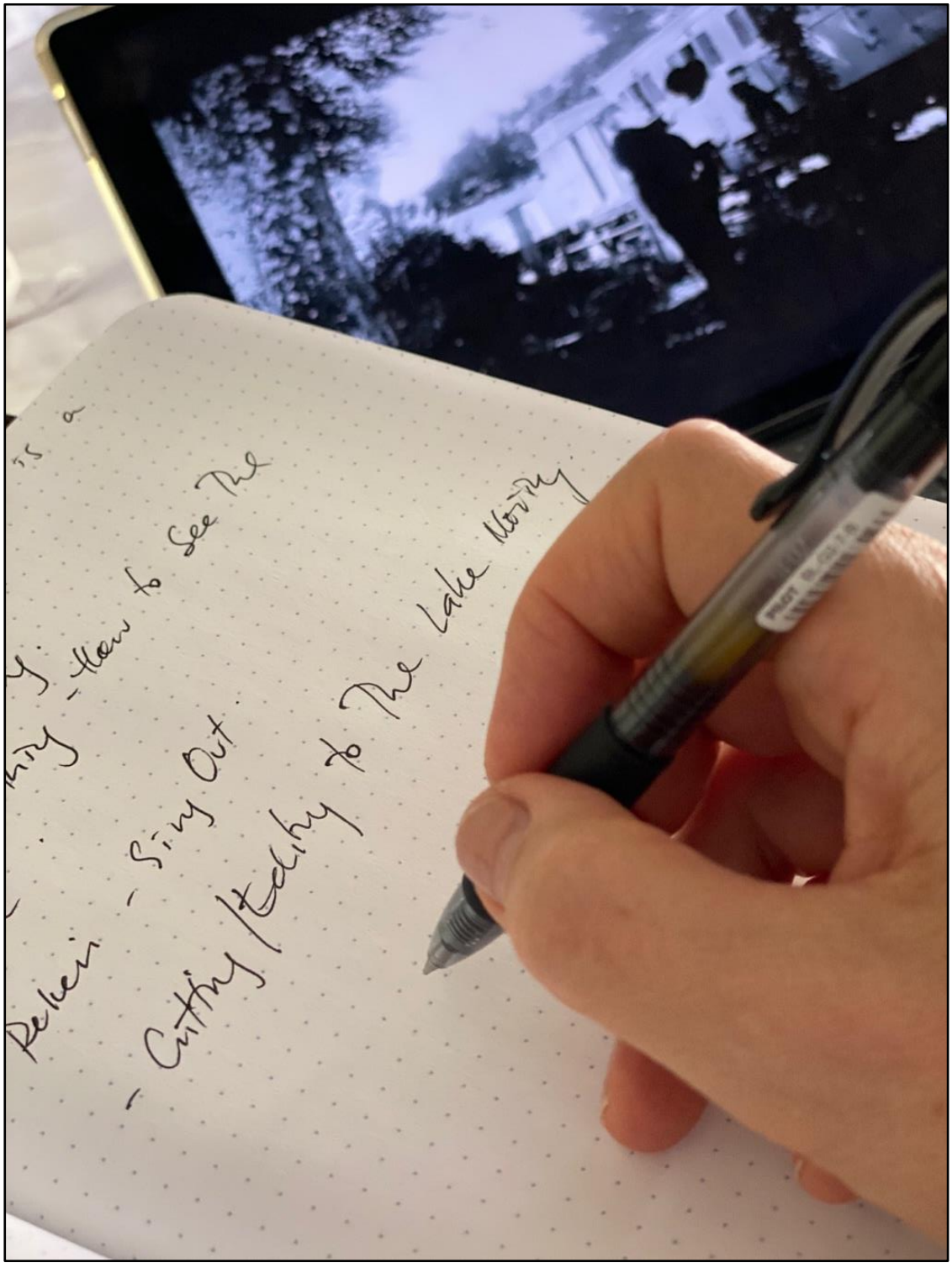


Figure 17 Hand notebook (2020)

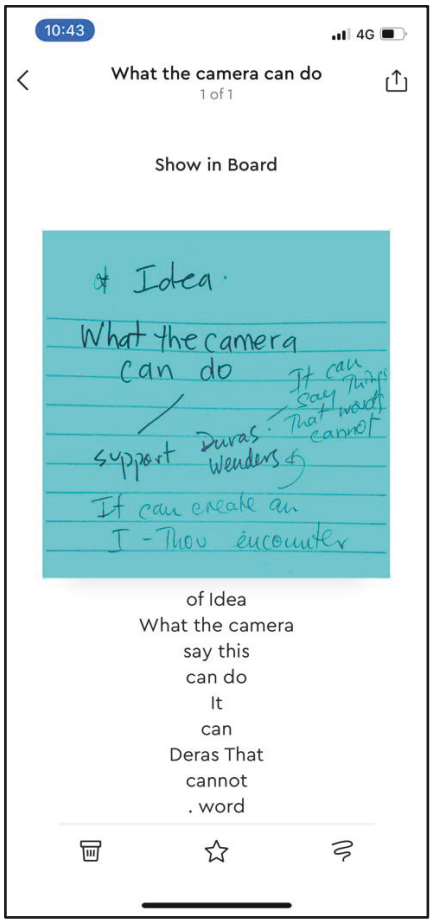


Figure 50 iPhone Notebook (2021)

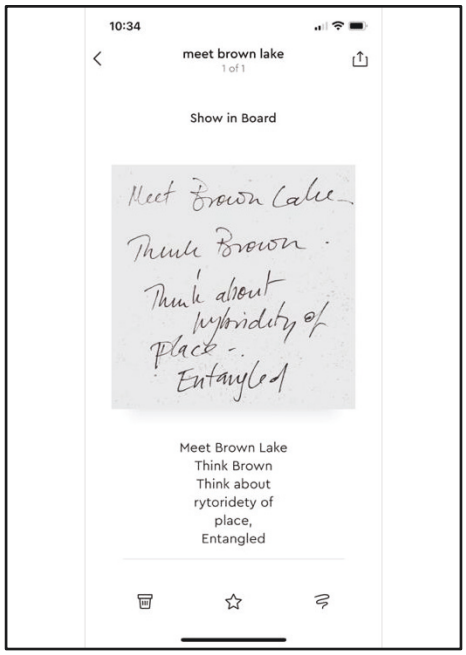


Figure 51 iPhone Notebook (2021)

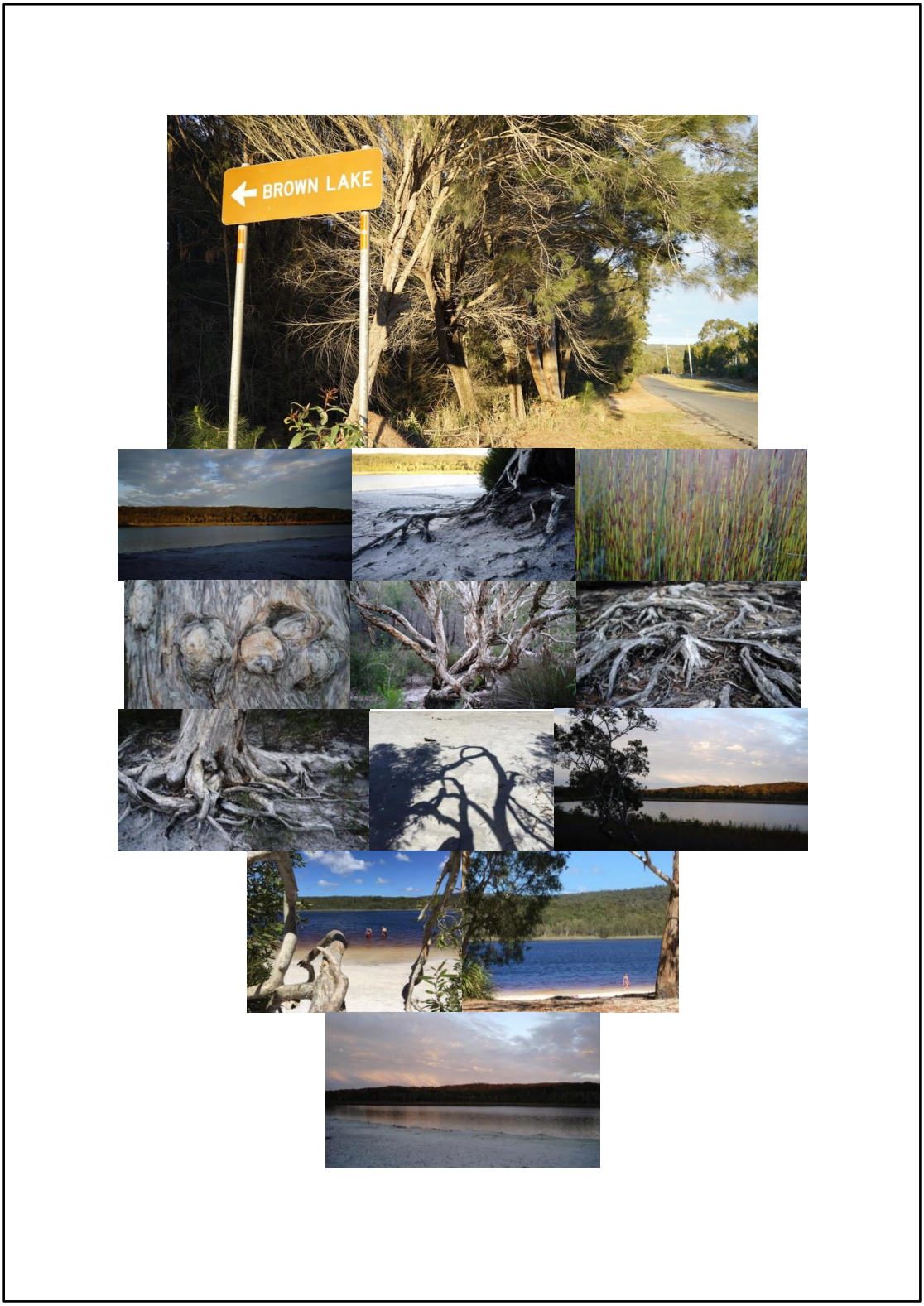


Figure 18 Photo collage of Brown Lake (2020)

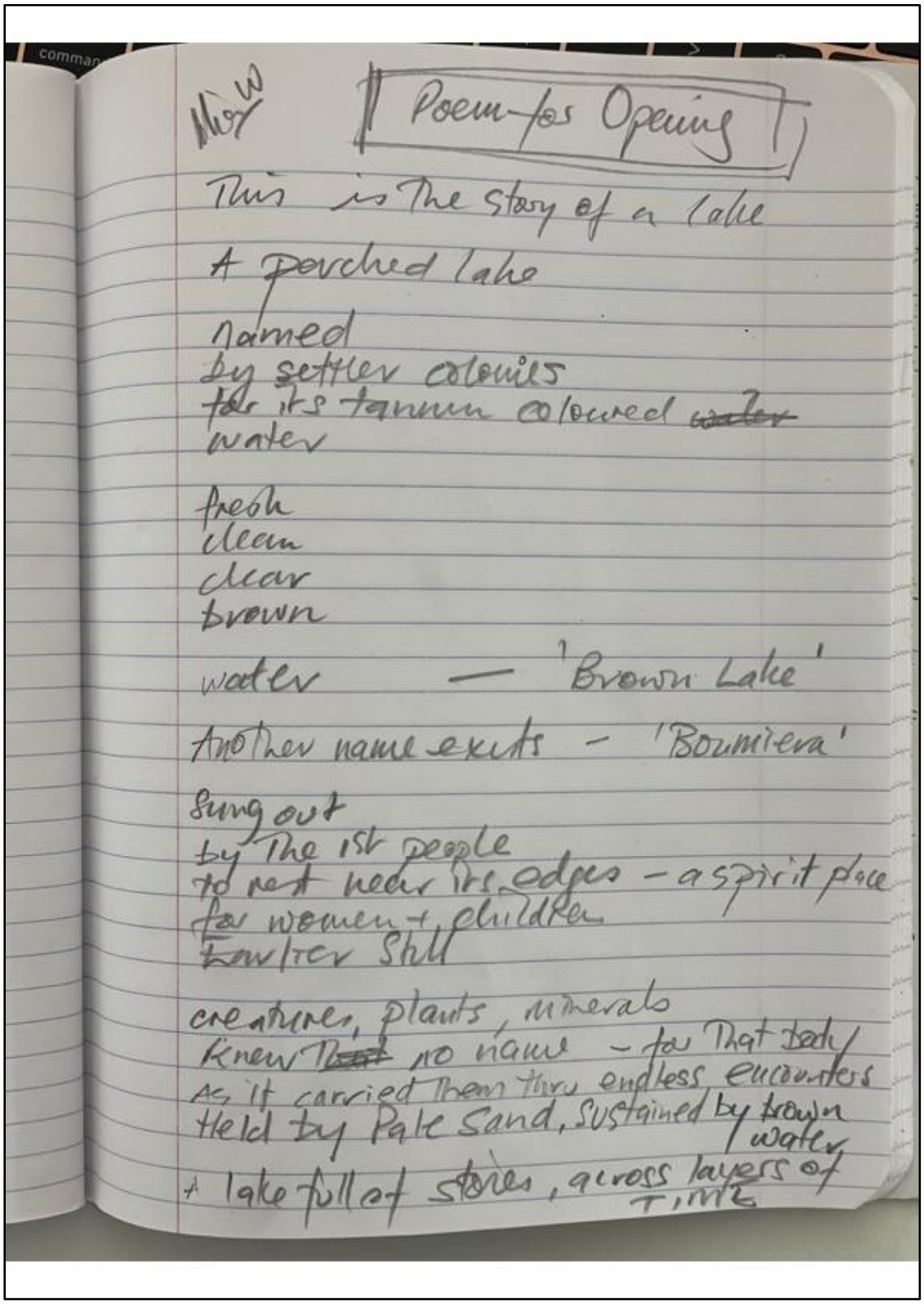


Figure 19 Poem for opening of film (2021)

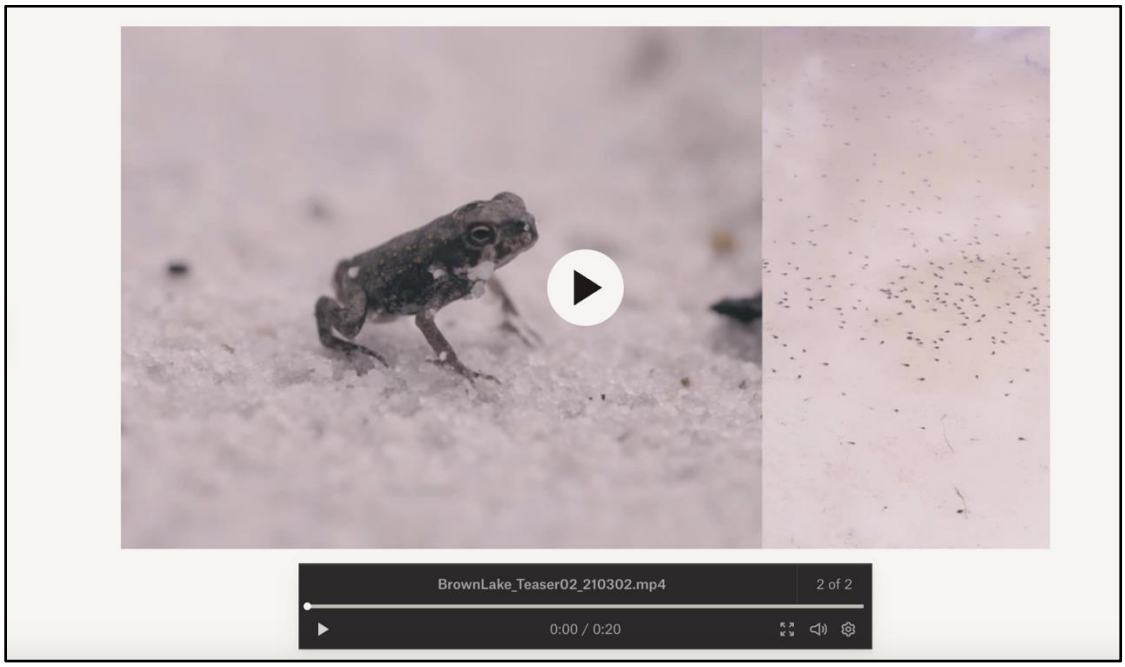


Figure 20 ACMI teaser trailer for *Brown Lake/Boumiera* – before edit lock (2021)

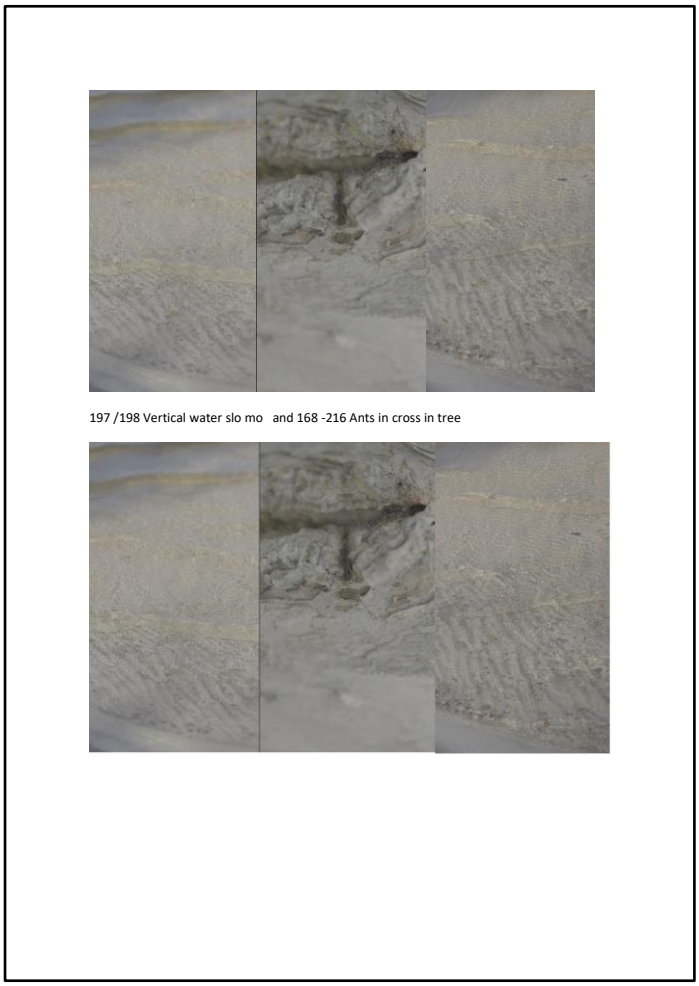


Figure 55 Sequencing with images from *Brown Lake/Boumiera* (2021)

Brown Lake - Plan for March 8th 2021

Sequences/Characters

1. Establishing Lake and Water and Reflections
2. Tadpoles & Frogs – Try having at one sequence at the head of film and a second at the tail of the film (Spilt current one into 2 sequences)
3. Reeds – Try the wide reeds shot much earlier in order to access the reeds section earlier and the dragonfly, spider and cicada, maybe add the cane toad (IMG 4635)
4. Dragonflies – connect into reeds more clearly and also possibly do two sequences (Like tadpoles)
5. Swimmers in Lake – work out when to place them – early or late and do only ONCE once
6. Trees – The triptych (after swimmer) did the dyptcyh (segues into a dragonfly?) and (Trees could segue into tree roots at beach for Humans on beach sequence)
7. The Ants – could try this as a segue after swimmers at the lake (also big ant in sand shot IMG 469) or possibly later on…after Cars and BBQ's but before the curlew
8. Humans on Beach – Look at edit and order. Super important to create the feeling of the lake watching them
9. Goanna – have another look at the Goanna in the tree
10. Cars & BBQ's – placement in sequence (and include red Brown Lake sign)
11. Curlew – Love this sequence – maybe connect the plastic bag shot to the head of it.
12. Sand …In order to link from the current opening – use the iphone shot at the water's edge (will locate) Have 3ater shots at the dge
13. Water (Linking device) Iphone 11 IMG 4628/29/30/31/32/4672/
14. Evening – reeds and trees and AUDIO of cicadas and frogs
15. Next morning – reflection on water – then Tadpoles and Frogs
16. Reeds and Dragonflies
17. Truck goes past trees ….go back into orange water….

Figure 56 Post-shoot 'scripting' of images (2021)

Figure 21 Still of dragonfly in *Anthropocene VR* (2018)

VR STORY BEATS- DRAFT ONLY *– Written after Create NSW Funding (2018)*

The story style is elliptical. The story of a place is not so much linear as cyclical. So, story beats could repeat back on themselves, but different events may occur in the repeated beat. This may be a way of approaching an experience of deep time. Some events are situated in the present, but some could have happened many, many years ago. Below are examples only – The idea being that the work is an observation of what happens at the lake over slow time...it's an assemblage of stories and its effect is cumulative.

STRATIGRAPHY OF A BROWN PERCHED LAKE – We start down in the depths of lake – the stratigraphy of a perched lake has three layers – anoxic, cold, and warm....at the very bottom is a bed of Tea Tree leaves – imperceptibly is the shape of a giant water serpent, that sways gently amongst the leaves. WATER (the VR camera) will float through these layers...at the bottom it is dark brown, slowly appearing an old aboriginal man and his wife. They are wearing contemporary snorkels and wet suits. They swim around, searching for flints, finding what they want, not noticing the giant snake, they collect the flints and swim away to the surface. The water moves up – past roots of reeds and trees as they dance underwater. The water around the camera starts to ripple intensely, like a vibration with shadows and sounds above it as a jet ski passes and oil bubbles descend. As the bubbles reach the snake below, it jerks away and the oil rests on the leaves. Further up the water becomes translucent brown. Small white feet kick around, little brown hands grasp for each other, tinier legs, and feet in bright PVC floaties. Muffled sounds of children giggling and then a scream and a sudden departure. Closer to the surface a group of middle- aged men's pot bellies in a circle – seven of them...muffled sounds – just audible - their dislocated voices speak about Brown Lake and the plans to dig a hole in it and supply the town with water. It might sound like a news broadcast.

THE SAND – The water (VR camera) is low on the sand - we experience the drama of the bee and the tadpole. A coach arrives in the deep background...a delegation of Japanese wedding party arrives, and the bridal couple come onto the sand just near where the sand castle lakes of tadpoles are wriggling. In the foreground a bee arrives near the tadpoles. A child's foot, steps on the circling bee, and the child screams. The bee starts to expire, its legs flailing furiously as the child cries. A mother arrives and laments for the bee who will now die. The child screams as the other children suggest that they go look for honey...they depart, and the tadpoles escape from their sand castle. A Japanese photographer takes the last photograph of the wedding party. The sunset is reflected in the lake's still water. The roots of the trees in the sand shudder slightly as the vibrations from the mine resonate across the land. A gecko comes down from a nearby tree and walks to edge of the water

THE AIR – We are in the clouds – Above us sky, below us Brown Lake. A cloud slowly passes beneath us. The sound of wind. We see the whole shape of Brown Lake – an imperfect oval. A car snakes its way through a small artery connected to the lake. Its engine audible, just. Another sound as we float higher -the adjacent sand mine is pumping water and sand through its dredger. Its grey mass inhales and exhales the land. Close by is a brilliant green patch. It's the golf club. Tiny white creatures make their way across the green. Their dialogue is just audible. A cloud blocks the view and when the lake is revealed again it has less water, another cloud pass then less water, the golf club becomes greener, the sand mine greyer and so on. Thunder clouds pass below and above. Sound of thunder.

THE ACQUIFER – Inside the Acquifer underneath Brown Lake – hundreds of wormholes. Water sloshes through the holes. A violent shudder, rock shuddering, and shuddering more. Wormholes

Figure 58 Story beats document for *Anthropocene VR* (2018)

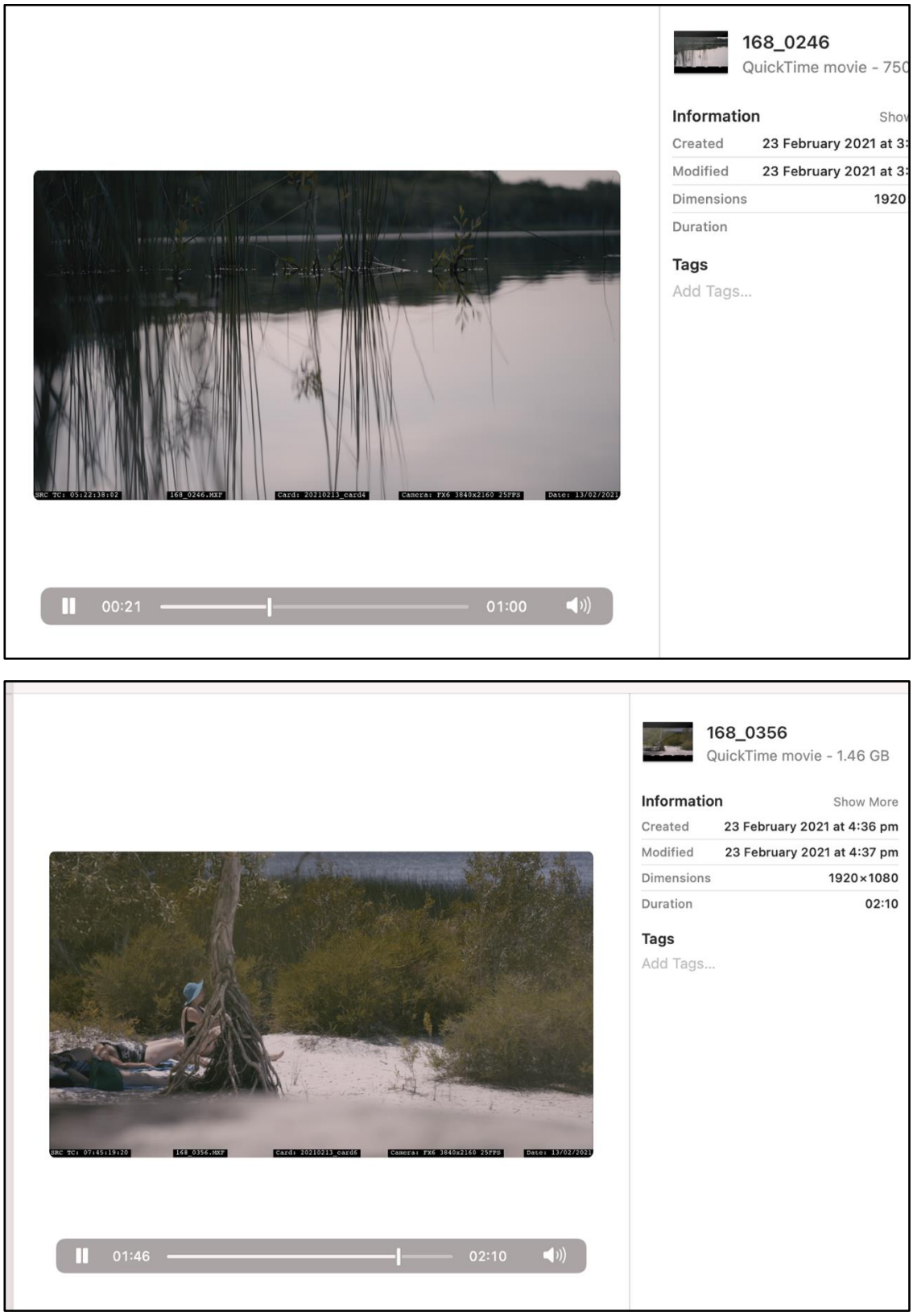


Figure 22 Frames I didn't use in *Brown Lake/Boumiera* (2021)

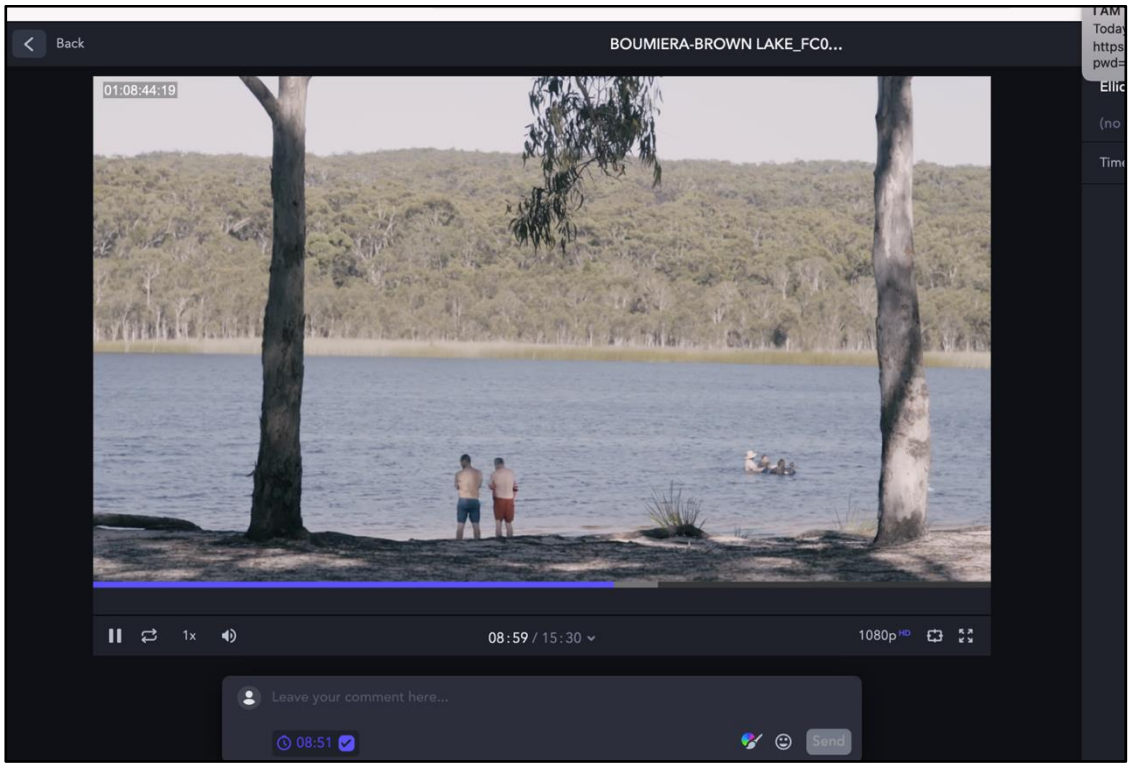


Figure 23 Frames I didn't use in *Brown Lake/Boumiera* (2021)

Floating into Visibility – Spatializing an artist moving image work

After the experience of making the lo-fi CVR, I watched *Char Soo* (Valmanesh 2015), a four-panel moving image work, at Carriageworks in Sydney. The audience sits in the middle of a room and watches the events of a day unfold in a market in Iran. Four cameras point out in four directions. The effect is that the viewer feels they are in the middle of an experience, but with no VR headset on. *Char Soo* explores and contemplates the notion of movement and the passing of time. 'Underlying this observation is Hossein Valmanesh's personal and emotional connection to his birthplace, Iran.'[138]

After watching this work, I decided to try the next iteration of my screen idea as a spatialized artist moving image work, which would be a different way of affecting spectators. That process was held up by life events, and then by the COVID-19 pandemic, so that second creative research artefact eventually had to pivot online and become part of the Prototype collection of artists' moving image works. As an online screen work, it actually became a 'changescape' in itself, since I wanted to conceive of it as having a life beyond the internet and I imagined it being distributed, screened and

[138] https://www.artlink.com.au/articles/4426/hossein-valamanesh-char-soo/

installed in different ways. What transfixed me about making this now shifting form was that in another act of layering, and as a narrowing of the gap between production and distribution, the screen work became multi-platform. It had to be designed to be watched on an iPhone, screened in a cinema, and shown in a white-cube gallery space.

During the editing process, I would always watch it back on a smartphone and then a large screen, and the sound designer also created different sound designs and mixes for the different spaces. In this way the distribution and exhibition of the two 'screen maps' had extended the screen idea of 'Brown Lake as a changescape' beyond the development and realization processes. These creative research artefacts are endlessly relocated (Andrea et al. 2020) outside the cinema *dispositif* (Martin 2014) as gallery and museum installations, landscapes in pockets and purses via iphones, and open-access items held in the 'cloud' that can be downloaded or viewed on computer screens. As filmmaker Wim Wenders says, 'When we move with technology and nature rather than being alienated from them and by them, memories, experiences and technologies become sources of inventing that can sharpen vision, give us presence and inspire us *(*Wenders & Zournazi 2013, p.163*)*

Figure 24 Installation of work at Moreton Bay Regional Gallery (2021)

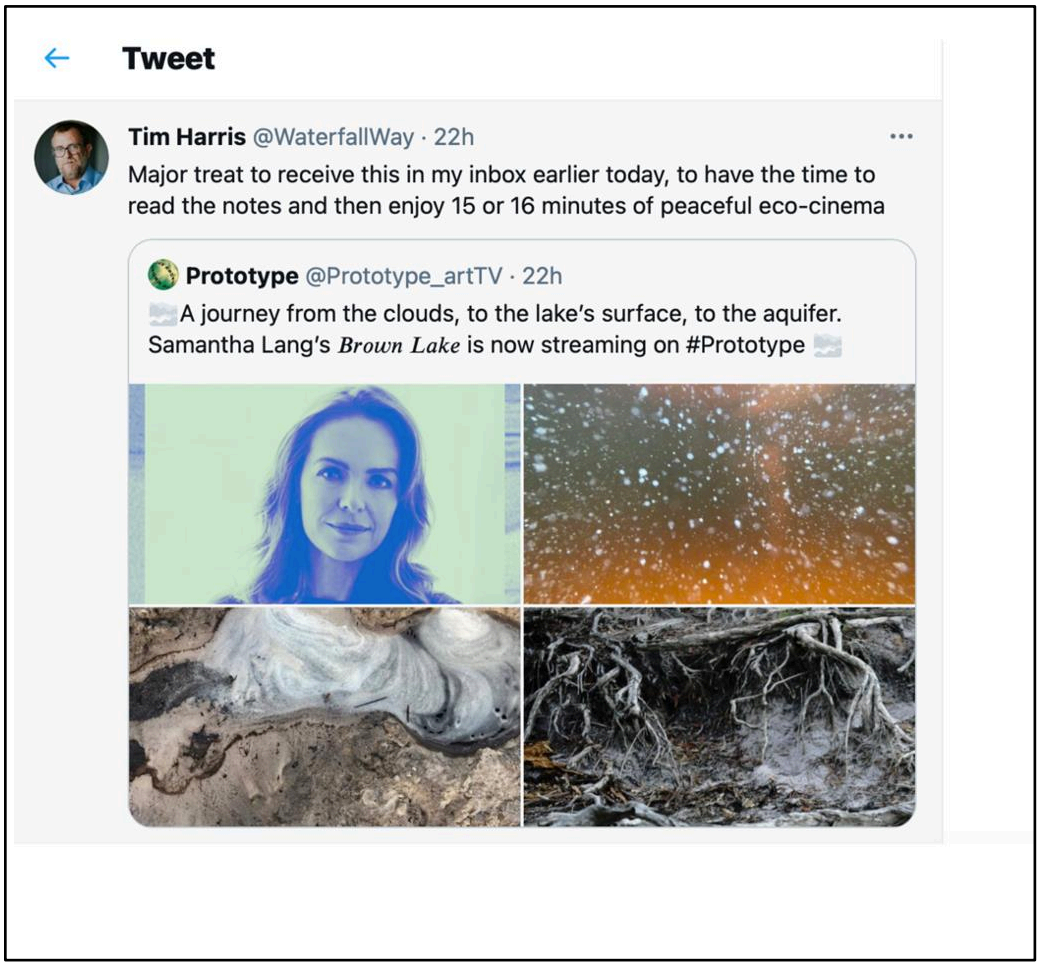


Figure 25 Tweet about *Brown Lake/Boumiera* (2021)

Figure 26 ACMI screening of *Brown Lake/Boumiera* (2021)

Brown Lake as Changescape

The non-traditional screen practice set out in this chapter has proposed the assembly 'screen maps' that navigate a transforming world in order to see it differently. The concept of 'changescapes' has provided a means of understanding where to start with that endeavour. Cultural theorist Colebrook (2017c) suggests that art must exceed and surpass its own world, and in doing so become a sign of another world. Art has this added dimension of relationality. It indicates a world that is not fully present, a fragment. I think of the film *Leviathan* (Zvi͡agint͡sev & Mel′kumov 2016); its Russian seaside landscape is imprinted on my memory more clearly than the human actors within it. *Leviathan* suggests signs of another world where the earth elements that were once more powerful than the humans who resided amongst them seem to rise to power again. The landscapes carry layers of events and memory. The film's excess of meaning *is* a sign of another world. It is an image that is both animate and world-making (Ivakhiv 2018).

Through screen practice, this creative research has sought to open up new worlds by presenting Brown Lake as a changescape. The excess of meaning arrives via the idea that Brown Lake has its own agential subjectivity and surpasses the human world, offering signs of a non-human world. Film theorist and environmental philosopher Ivakhiv (2011, 2013) suggests that a more direct way to read the moving image and its relationship to humans is as 'taking them on cognitive and affective journeys that, at their most compelling, change both the viewers and their worlds' (Ivakhiv 2013, p.1). This is a kind of feedback loop of reciprocity.

In this regard, one limit was determined for this thesis: 'eco-films' like Burtynsky's *Watermark* (2013) and *Anthropocene* (2018)), whose visually arresting documentaries inspire fear and awe, feel at arms' length from the places they represent and, I would argue, do not offer an excess of meaning. These highly professional lens-based works are slick and showy. I understand the attraction. Like a famous actor's charisma might, Brown Lake's also haunted me, and the performative, expressive filmmaker in me wanted to elevate the lake to celebrity status via a dystopic vision. I resisted the temptation. This was not an exercise in mainstream image-making; rather, I have drawn on lo-fi practices, a 'manifesto of sustainable screenwriting' (Millard 2014, p. 184), pluralistic scripting approaches (Maras 2009), and expanded modes of screenwriting practice (Munt 2016) to connect the audience to Brown Lake.

Of interest to me, for example, was how a tiny camera in an iPhone might reveal the layers of meaning imposed on Brown Lake by time. How might it mediate her relationship to worlds gone by in a way that gestures to 'planetary memory' (Colebrook 2017)? How might a rough cartography of events, slowly assembled by tests of endless photographs, uncover those stratigraphic qualities that suggest a dialogue with other times and other species? I think of the late Deborah Bird Rose and the way she explained reciprocal capture and the shimmer that is borne of that reciprocity across time and beings (Rose 2017), and I wonder if I could elicit this feeling in a lo-fi, no budget film in an immersive way. A small shimmer that might appear out of an understanding of mutuality. Shimmer as a kind of spirit moving through images revealing a world.

My methods, much like my domestic mornings at home, began by embracing the messy contradictions in front of me in an attempt to stay with whatever trouble might arise (Haraway 2016) and to remain practical, fluid, hand-made. To acknowledge my earth-boundness (Latour 2018), I often walked around Brown Lake, yet I still reached for big imaginaries (Millard 2014). I looked at her via Google Earth. I considered how to locate an alternative perspective from which to project her 'voice' in an expanded notion of cinema. I attempted to create screen maps as research artefacts to acknowledge her geophony and polyphony, and perhaps most critically to affect a human's conception of a world beyond the human.

As an interdisciplinary thought experiment, this creative practice research has imagined a multitude of forms, and made material attempts at finding a non-human perspective while remaining cognizant of the limits of human understanding. Such limits of human perception were tested decades ago with Michael Snow's three-hour-long experimental film *La region centrale* (1972), where it became clear that a camera could record perspectives beyond the human. In *La region centrale* there is no attempt to conquer or to anthropomorphize nature. Humans and nature are separate, and Snow's specially devised camera supports that separation. 'The landscape does not become an extension of the artist*'*(Cornwell 1974, p.4), Watching it fifty years after it was made, I was struck by the feeling that Humans are no longer in control; instead, they are at the scintillating mercy of the machine and its non-human gaze. 'Each Snow work forces its perceivers from a passive to an active role as they read and study the object unfolding through time and space on the screen' (Cornwell 1975, p.4). I wonder if that is the active pull of big-spectacle movies. Dissociating and dizzying, yet as viewers we often feel mesmerized, if not anaesthetized by them.

Image-making is complex. There are many ways of writing with images, assembling them, and distributing them. Each step of the process changes the meaning. How one might displace, include, implicate, connect, and acknowledge entanglement of the human in the screen story of Brown Lake was a driver of this creative process. I am reminded of the French film *The Stranger by the Lake* (Guiraudie 2013)[139] entangling its characters into the landscape. The human characters leave the lake at night, but the camera remains there, doesn't leave, so that by the end of the film story we feel as if it is the lake who might be the true witness to the crimes and misdemeanors that unfold in that locale. In Michael Snow's film cosmology, it would be the camera as protagonist, but I feel the lake's gaze in Guiraudie's film, not the camera's. Nonetheless, it makes me pause and think about Sam Smith's diligent work *Capture* (Smith 2021), a moving image work in which a Blackmagic camera records its own demise as it is dis-assembled. Nearby, we see all its parts on display. A true geology of film.

My search for form lies with the affective, the perceptual and the terrestrial. Cinema may technically have always been a non-human gaze – and perhaps, despite its intentions, a nostalgic work such as Tacita Dean's *Film* (2011) makes this all too clear – but now that it has been relocated (Andrea et al. 2020; Casetti 2015), there are opportunities to reimagine our relationship to it, just as there are opportunities to reimagine our relationship with the Earth. I still believe that a human audience can re-align and be with Brown Lake in a photofilmic form that give her the means to communicate.

To return to my conceptual framework – nature has an active voice. A place can have its own mind, that can be expressed by an image of thought. A place can possess a polycentric subjectivity that is nomadic, that moves through time and space. Using geopoetics, cinema has the potential to house a terrestrial politic. With this framework-as-toolbox, the practice of scripting my own private inventory of materials – as a relocated mini-cinema of Brown Lake – took shape over time. The process of assembling iPhone films, photos, notes, drawings, diegetic soundscapes from voice memos, arte povera puppets, consumer VR camera data, Google Earth–animated satellite footage, as well as writing a human-centred film treatment (that I eventually rejected) has created a kind of a superposition/stratigraphy in my screen maps. This geology of encounters with the changescape that Brown Lake is, reveals the many stages of the research 'becoming' an

139 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stranger_by_the_Lake

animate – image world (Ivakhiv 2018). This was the doxa of my screenwriting poetics. The work existed as a screen idea, not in an object form (MacDonald 2013).

The directions I should take became clearer as I muddled through the disparate collections of images. Eventually I settled on CVR, a 360-degree, vertically oriented journey as a water cycle, and an artist moving image work that uses perspective, parallelism, and pragmatism (Braidotti & Hlavajova 2018). By centering Brown Lake as protagonist for the screen, I have proposed that the role of writer/director can become that of a 'changescaper' (Gibson 2005). Across both works, in my role of changescaper I tried to harness the complexity of Brown Lake by aesthetic means and creative attention.

Understood as *screen maps*, my two creative research artefacts are experiential encounters and immersive means that navigate Brown Lake's active, polyphonic, agentic subjectivity. Both are experiments in writing new image-worlds into existence. These image-worlds mediate imaginary dialogues between a non-human entity and its encounters. These digital image-as-thought experiments explore ways that, if 'cinema is like the Anthropocene' (Fay 2018, p.4). screen practice might reorient itself away from the 'Anthropos', towards the 'Geos' As Wim Wenders has suggested, 'Cinema can rescue the existence of things – it can teach us how to be' (Wenders 1991, p.1)

Figure 27 Paperbarks at Brown Lake (2021)

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

What happens to us
Is irrelevant to the world's geology
But what happens to the world's geology
Is not irrelevant to us.
We must reconcile ourselves to the stones,
Not the stones to us.

McDiarmid (1992)
Selected Poems, Technology, Terra, Ethics

In selecting which images to enact, we become the aesthetic, ethical, and (eco)logical enactors of the worlds we create, alongside the others we create them with.

Ivakhiv (2018, p. 156)

Figure 28 Still life from *Brown Lake/Boumiera*

Findings and Contributions

At the core of this research project lies the problem of how on earth do we tell stories in the Anthropocene? How can we reorient anthropocentric perspectives to realign human and non-human relationships; how can we find the self that has lost itself? While mainstream cinematic responses, often in the form of fiction feature films, might gesture to narratives about inevitable dystopian futures, the end of the world and of the human species, in this thesis I have argued that cinema, in both its conventional and its relocated forms, houses the possibility of re-making image worlds and opening up new imaginaries of human and non-human relationships. Since there can be little doubt that we are living through planetary change that might encompass mass extinction and ecological devastation, by exploring Brown Lake as a fractal of the unsettled concept of the Anthropocene, I have responded to broader questions about the kinds of image-making and screen forms that will suggest different futures on Earth? These concerns have traversed this exegesis and are embodied in my two creative practice research artefacts. Focusing on the entangled landscape of Brown Lake/Boumiera on Minjerribah/North Stradbroke Island, in Queensland, Australia, I asked,

> What creative strategies might an ecofeminist and posthuman conceptual framework offer for opening up new imaginaries, new subjectivities of a place as complex and entangled as Brown Lake – through non-traditional screen practices – in relation to the challenges/provocations presented by the unsettled concept of the Anthropocene?

I also asked, 'What forms of screen practice offer a way of expressing Brown Lake as subject?' and 'How do such forms realign human and non-human relationships?' As a starting point in this thesis, I introduced the Anthropocene as a 'connector' term (Latour 2018) in a cultural debate that brings together the disciplines of science, philosophy, and art to trouble over the challenges presented to sustainability, democracy, and history (Chakrabarty 2009) brought about by certain types of human behaviour and their impact on Earth's geology in the face of planetary change (Steffen, Crutzen & McNeill 2007).

Responding to Latour's (2018) suggestion that the affects and percepts of art (and cinema) might be the means to house a 'terrestrial politic' (p. 90) and evolve a yet unknown language in an act of diplomacy between humans and nonhumans, in this thesis I lay some ground for evolving that language. Situating Brown Lake at the centre, as subject *and* story, I have privileged creativity as a research method and drawn on

experimental scripting practices to execute a 'screen idea' (Macdonald 2013), influence screen realization, and relocate photofilmic forms to address the research questions and thus contribute new knowledge through an approach I call *posthuman screen poetics*.

Recognizing the necessity of 'creativity with critique' (Braidotti 2019), this research method was mediated by scholarly research on cinema, place, and the Anthropocene, with the specific purpose of writing 'nature in an active voice' (Plumwood 2009). In this exegesis I extend on the stratigraphies of understanding at Brown Lake. With the aid of creative practice research artefacts that mediated the subjectivity of Brown Lake, I have contributed stories of care and noticing by using active and creative attention (Rose 2002; Weil 1973), affirmative ethics (Braidotti 2019), and messy aesthetics (Millard 2014) to reconnect humans to Nature, Country, Earth and Planet. Both my writing and my creative practices have provided me with the means to reorient human and non-human perspectives and bring them into dialogue with each other.

I began Chapter One with the screenplay image of three women respectively avoiding, fearing, or welcoming the end of world at the place called Brown Lake. I asked: What perspectives are we missing in this narrative? Do those missing perspectives also nurture similar dread about the end of the world? If so, what are the means by which we might imagine different possibilities and preferred futures together?

I then constructed a 'conceptual tool-box' as a foundation for the methodology (as screen practice) to follow. For this, I drew on ecofeminist texts, a critical posthuman framework, and post-colonial theory. Geopoetics then tied these concepts together in a practical way. I first considered the work of Australian eco-philosopher Val Plumwood (2009), specifically her call to put 'nature in an active voice' as a means of disabling the 'master story', finding new stories of care and connection to Country, and creating a dialogical relationship with nature. Plumwood provided a clear direction for the script development to take. Scripting an 'active voice' for Brown Lake was one of the creative challenges of this thesis, a process documented in Chapter Four.

I used the work of continental philosopher Rosi Braidotti (2017) on the posthuman subject to build on Plumwood's directive to frame the posthuman subject as something that is interconnected, relational, and part of an assemblage of multiple, changing, human and non-human subjectivities. Braidotti's (2019) affirmative ethics, understood as a relational force and capacity between interconnected entities, contributed to my framing/juxtaposing strategy. Brown Lake would be 'composed' in a horizontal arrangement on screen with other entities, each with its own heterogenous perspective

and force, and be represented in a parallel relationship, rather than a hierarchical one. Braidotti's (2017) phrase, "We are in *this* together but we are not one and the same' (p. 26), became a mantra for the film editing of my artist moving image work *Brown Lake/Boumiera*, as did her call for creative artefacts to made for open access instead of as commodities.

Anthropologist and filmmaker Elisabeth Povinelli's collaboration as member of the grass roots, trans-local filmmaking collective Karrabing also provided inspiration. Her strategy to write a marginalized Indigenous community and its stories of Country into existence through filmmaking practices as an act of endurance also provided examples of lively and messy modes of making screen works. This is a mode of filmmaking that presences the people and places often invisible in more mainstream films. Her analysis of the figures and tactics of the Anthropocene, to elucidate late-liberal settler society and signal what an 'otherwise' of geontopower might look like, also provided further support for my attributing subjectivity to Brown Lake on screen. While not human, Brown Lake is presented in this thesis as an agentic entity in dialogue with human activity and whose existence can be modified by its relations with the human.

Thinking of Brown Lake's subjectivity as an otherwise of the Anthropocene whose agency might survive and endure as a result of being written into existence through filmmaking stimulated my creative practice research methodology. Experimentation with form through quick and messy practices such as scripting, accretion, adhocism, writing with an iPhone, and layering during script development, was extended to formal experimentation during the realization and distribution processes. My immersive work *Anthropocene VR* was part of that experimentation; the CVR camera became the point of view of the lake's water as it moves through time and space, encountering those who reside within and visit it. My artist moving image *Brown Lake/Boumiera* also experimented with distribution formats across black box, white cube, and online environments.

Finally, conceiving of a poetics of place, I imagined a geopoetic of Brown Lake as a way of eschewing a well-trodden dialectic of place as site of ecological devastation. This allowed me to compose a new language of place. The weaving together of geopoetics and the screen idea created space to consider Brown Lake as a 'changescape'. Here, the notion of a changescape as a series of endless events, as proposed by Gibson (2005), became important, if not essential, for recognizing my screen idea: Brown Lake is a place whose identity is in constant flux and change, rather than a place whose existence is

coming to end. Using the idea of the filmmaker as 'changescaper' (p. 201) who could harness the subjectivity of Brown Lake through creative attention and aesthetic composition provided focus for structuring the lake as a narrative. In response to the challenges presented to storytelling in a (post) cinema epoch, I conceived of my creative research artefacts as 'screen maps' of the changing nature of Brown Lake. These artefacts represent some of the unexplored possibilities of the post cinema era, an era that invites a polyphony of different but engaged responses.

In Chapter Two, a genealogy of screen works that respond to similar questions about place and its connection to those who go unseen or unrepresented by the 'master story' of advanced capitalism, made clear that extending on cinematic conventions, developing and realising screen works in a non-traditional manner, and using photofilmic forms that are relocated outside of the cinema *dispositif,* produces screen encounters and experiences that can activate and reanimate a greater reciprocity of care and attention between place, beings and non-beings. Whether using filmmaking as an activity to build or protect a community's identity like the Karrabing Collective and the Rojave Film Commune, or questioning the politics of representation by making multimodal works containing the non-human gaze of scientific recording apparatus in *Frames of Reference* (Yushin 2020), or immersing an audience in a place using cinematic virtual reality, such as *Awavena* (Wallworth 2018), the possibilities of cinema are emerging in forms that have the potential to re-imagine the future in terms of a representational justice for all.

The review of screen works in Chapter Two revealed not so much a gap, but an opportunity to extend the call for renewing visions of place through screen practice. The hyperlocal, experimental, immersive, filming into existence of non-human and human relationships through what I term *posthuman screen poetics* – a language that eschews the didactic and overtly political – emerges as a small act of resistance among a multiplicity of heterogenous forms and strategies. This thesis contributes the unique voice of Brown Lake to this poetics, although I also argue that many voices are needed to create a collective voice powerful enough to advocate for nature and all those marginalized by cultures of resource extraction, colonialism, and war. Evolving, accessible, proliferating digital technologies and platforms make it increasingly likely that screen forms can be tailored to different places and different audiences.

Brown Lake as a changescape iterated in the form of two screen maps, both portable and changeable, responds to a gap in knowledge around how to make manifest the subjectivity and changing nature of a place that is understood through diverse, and

sometimes divergent, knowledge systems, but not as an entity. The screen maps act as navigational tools for the subjectivity of a lake itself.

In Chapter Three, I explored the stratigraphies of understanding that entangle Brown Lake, offering insights into the dialogical nature of the lake's relationship to time, geology, hydrology, animals, plants, weather, cultures of extraction, tourism, government, and indigenous cosmologies of place. Brown Lake, as palimpsest of historical, geological, and cultural narratives, is a place that offers complicated and compelling storytelling challenges. Untangling the mysterious conditions of the changing water levels at the lake across decades, together with a layered understanding of Brown Lake herself, revealed a strangely suspenseful drama in which a body of water became the protagonist.

Scholarly investigations also informed the production of my creative practice research artefacts, the two 'screen maps' of Brown Lake as changescape. In this way, the work of this thesis moved between reading Brown Lake in an affective, embodied, perceptual mode (the screen maps) and in a conceptual, theoretical one (through scholarly reading and writing).

In Chapter Four, I addressed my own creative practice and outlined how my creative practice artefacts were developed for the screen. I also explained the reasoning, development, and realization processes of both my CVR work, *Anthropocene VR,* and my artist moving image work, *Brown Lake/Boumiera.*

Across the years of filming Brown Lake, I felt certain that eventually all her water would disappear. Despite my best intentions I worried that the mystery of Brown Lake would become a 'murder mystery' and that as a filmmaker/researcher I would be caught, against my will, in the cycle of dystopian storytelling that I was trying to avoid.
At the end of 2019, the last sand mine on her island was closed. During 2020 and 2021 the Queensland borders closed to stop the spread of the COVID-19 virus. During that time, Brown Lake had its first all-female burn off, which was overseen by Quandamooka female elders, but I was not able to be there. When I returned to the area in 2021, expecting to find water levels further depleted, what I found instead was a lake full of water, something I had not yet experienced. As I filmed this now abundant Brown Lake, I realized that she really is an agential force, that she will come and go as she pleases, according to the changing relations with her body that human activity imposes. The artist moving image work *Brown Lake/Boumiera*, in part, contributes a reflection of this ever changing, cyclical nature, as does the perhaps more prescient CVR work, *Anthropocene VR.*

Expanded Trajectories

Girish Shambu (2020) writes in his conclusion to *The New Cinephilia*:

> Life organised around films' is one widely accepted definition of traditional cinephilia. But at this moment, when the world is in turmoil and the planet on the edge of catastrophe, such a conception of cine-love seems irresponsible, even narcissistic. What we need now is a cinephilia that is fully in contact with its present global moment – that accompanies it, that moves and travels with it. No matter how ardent and passionate our love for this medium, the world is bigger and vastly more important than cinema. (p. 84)

My screen maps have been shown in various places around Australia to different types of audiences: general public, artists, filmmakers, and students. To my great surprise, a former film student of mine who now lectures in media arts at a university, is currently using my works as teaching tools. An artist who saw the work in Queensland, and who grew up on Minjerribah, Stradbroke Island, thanked me for making a work so representative of a place she loved. As well, a resident on Minjerribah, who has fought for the protection of the island's ecology across decades, distributed the film widely amongst cohorts. At a Q&A session at ACMI in Melbourne, a women who had worked in finance all her life told me that the film had made clear the issues of climate change and she now felt she could act. Such responses to my works show me there is room to evolve my screen idea into other forms, perhaps a more mainstream cinema narrative that could reach a wider audience; I shall explore this in the near future.

More importantly though, the geophilia that I experienced for Brown Lake during this study has led to me appreciate the value of having a conceptual toolbox when researching new modes of filmmaking practice. It can bring the aesthetics of cinema together with a new ethics for our era to house a 'terrestrial politic' for the planet. This understanding has influenced the other film and television projects that I am currently working on, and the question 'What story are we telling and from whose point of view?' is now as important as 'How do we tell the story?'

During the writing of this thesis, I was employed to set up a creative slate of screen projects for an international film and television company. As one of the company's manifesto of nine bullet points, I was able to include: *This company's values are*

concerned with addressing what it means to be human in a more than human world. The first television project to be made through this company will feature wolves as the main characters in a drama about re-wilding an ecologically bereft environment.

Two key insights have become apparent through the work of this thesis: (1) nature really does have an active voice that is beyond any human framing or taming of that voice. It is a main character in every story we tell, whether or not we choose to recognize it; and (2) cinema really can adapt itself to forms and locations that imagine preferred futures and remake image-worlds. Cinema itself is non-human, yet it too can have an active voice that, like nature, filmmakers must always be in dialogue with. 'Posthuman screen poetics' constitutes a creative method for initiating conversations between cinema, place, and the Anthropocene.

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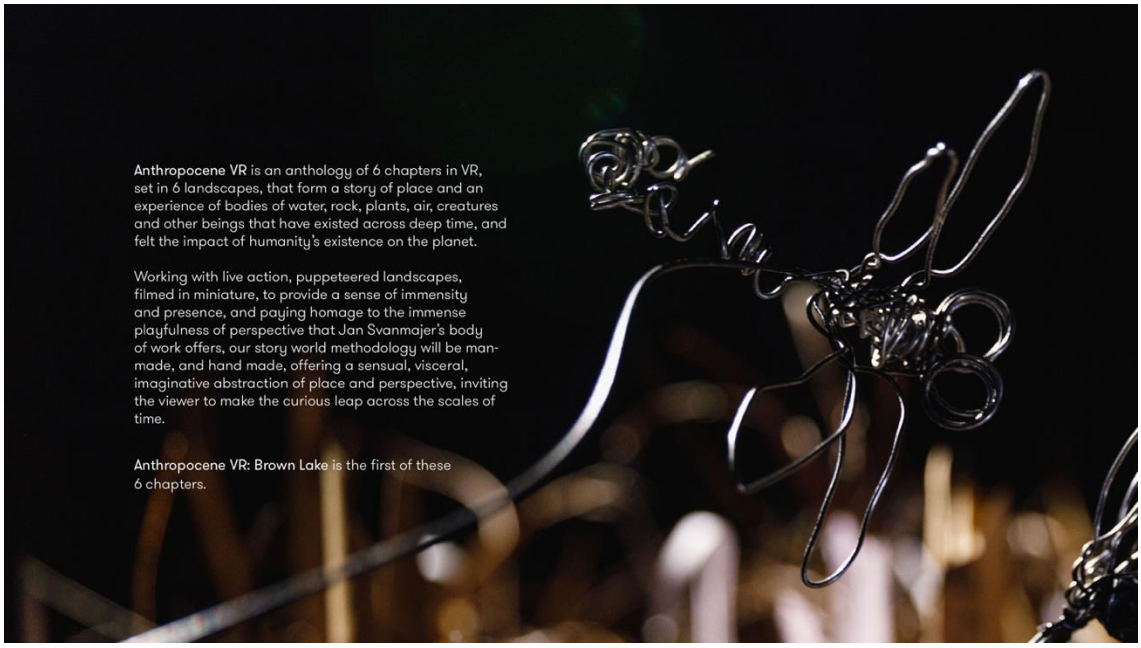
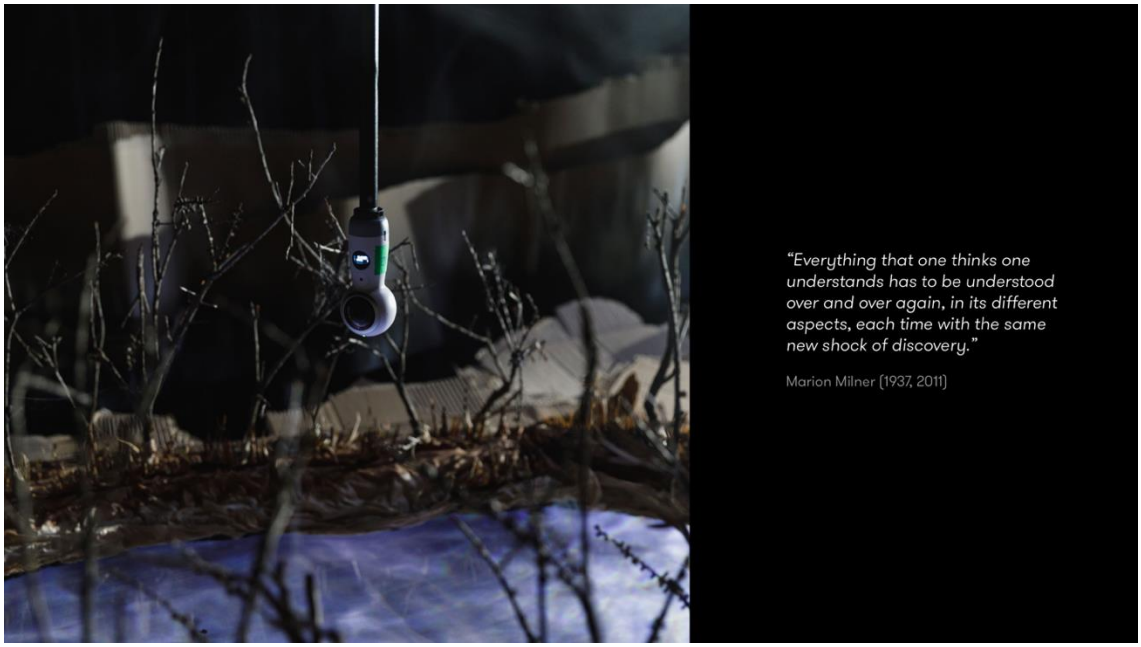
Yushin, S. 2019, *Water Sleep II Akaike River Under Xizang Road* Flaneur Magazine, Taipei, single channel video, color, sound.
Yushin, S. 2020, *Frame of Reference* ZKM | Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe,Taipei Fine Arts Museum, , Taipei, Two-channel video installation, Full HD, Color, Sound, ,
Zviagintsev, A. & Mel′kumov, S. 2016, *Leviathan*, Kanopy Streaming, San Francisco, California, USA.

CREATIVE COMPONENTS

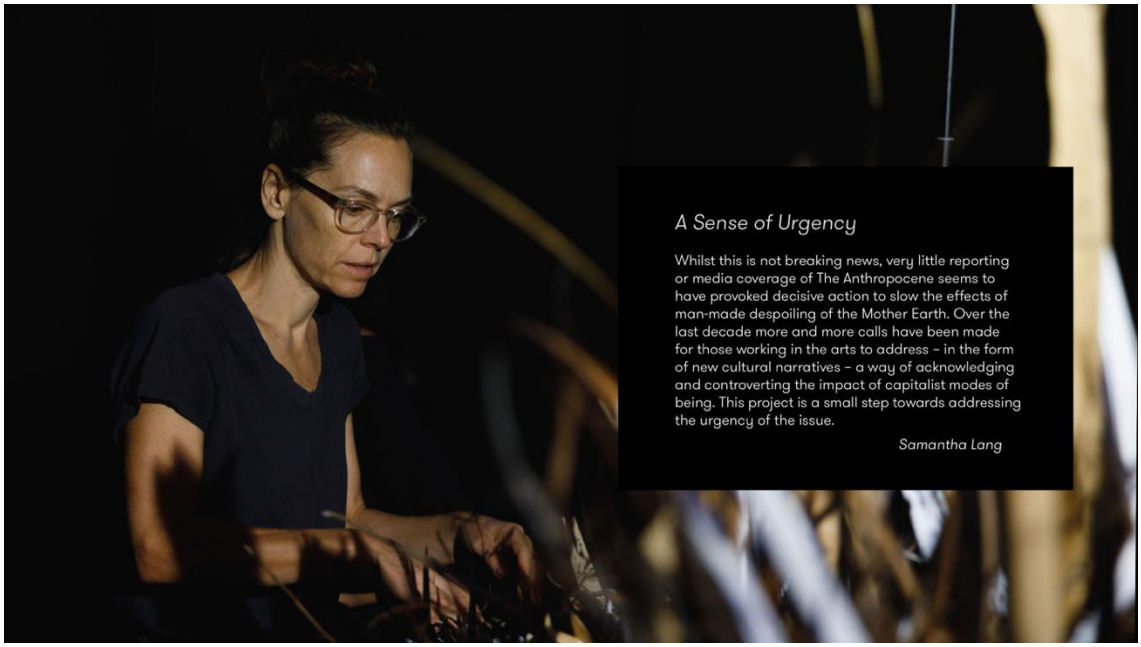
Brown Lake/Boumiera VR Proof of Concept Pitch





"Everything that one thinks one understands has to be understood over and over again, in its different aspects, each time with the same new shock of discovery."

Marion Milner (1937, 2011)

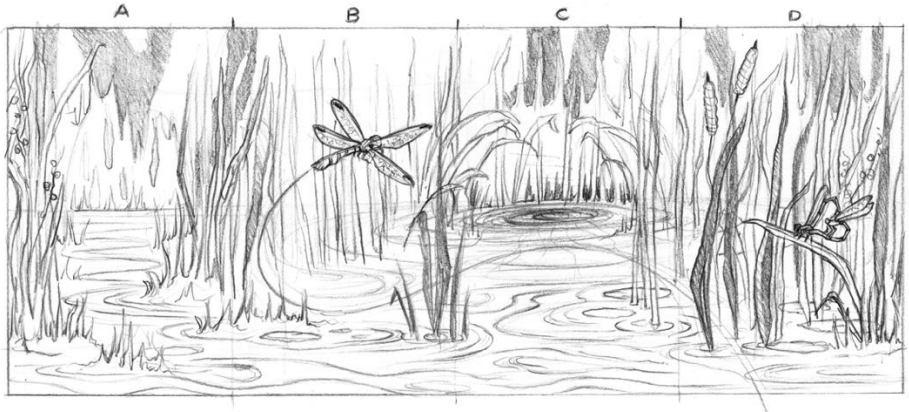


A Sense of Urgency

Whilst this is not breaking news, very little reporting or media coverage of The Anthropocene seems to have provoked decisive action to slow the effects of man-made despoiling of the Mother Earth. Over the last decade more and more calls have been made for those working in the arts to address – in the form of new cultural narratives – a way of acknowledging and controverting the impact of capitalist modes of being. This project is a small step towards addressing the urgency of the issue.

Samantha Lang

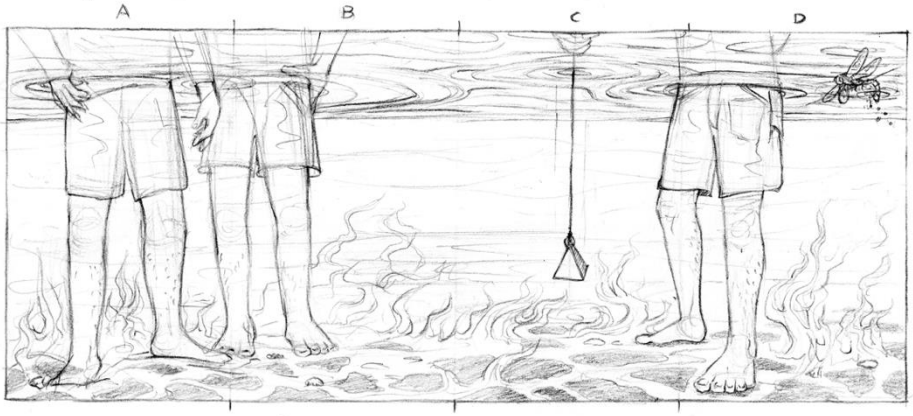
Initial Storyboards



– Flowing through the reeds, following the dragonfly.

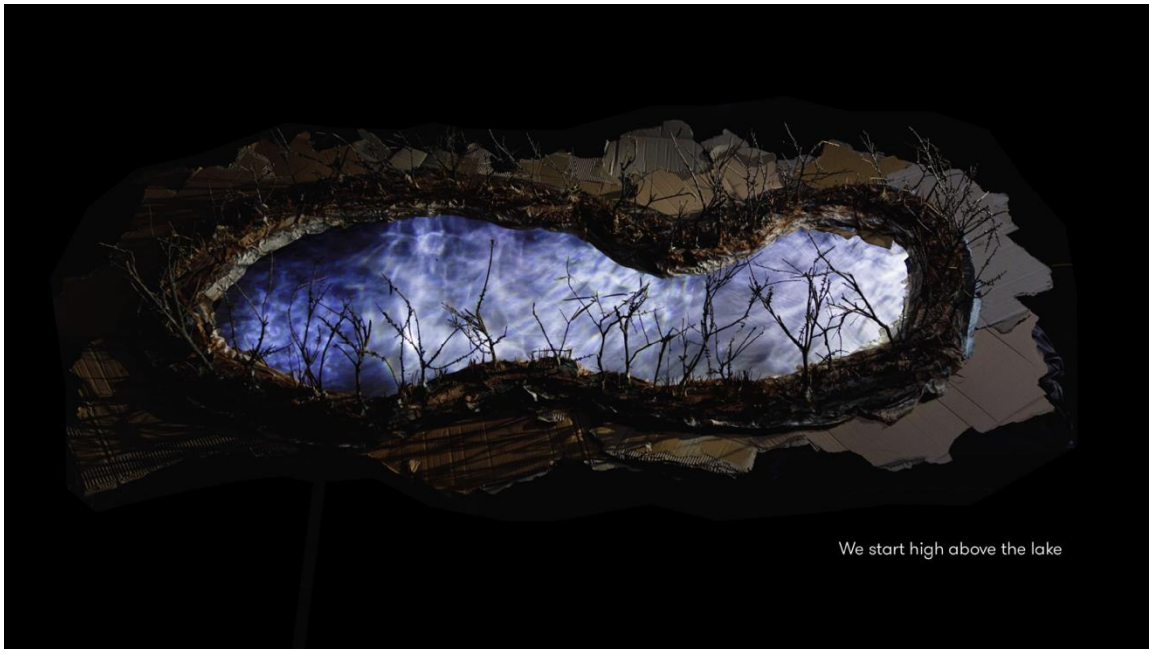
Artist: Gab Paananen

Initial Storyboards

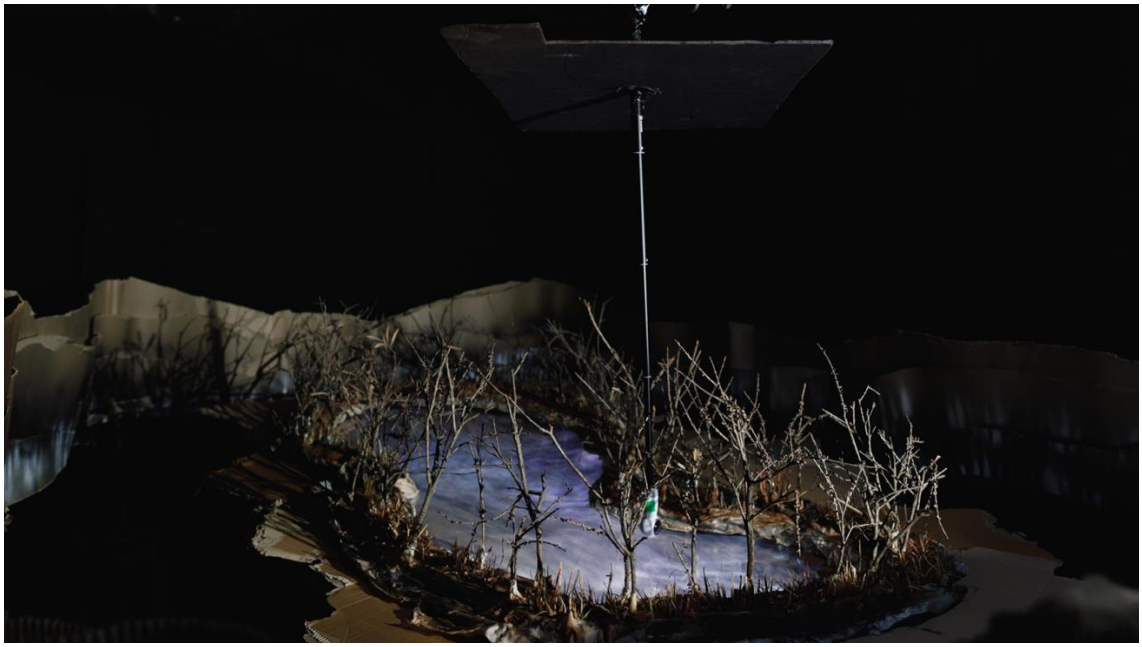


– Mens legs, waist deep, dropping the measuring stick down.

Artist: Gab Paananen


We start high above the lake


We slowly descend, as we travel
along the water




Closer and closer to the edge
of the lake

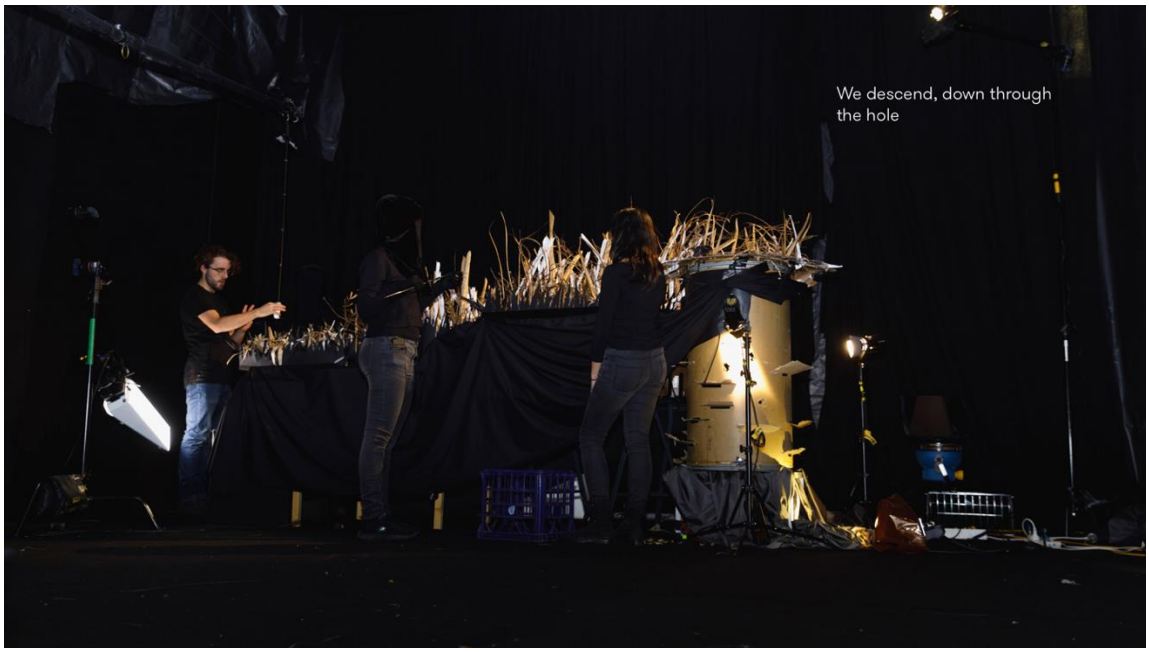

We transition into the reed bed
lining the lake


Our scale now small, we move
through the reeds


Dragonflies appear behind us,
and begin to mate


We continue to move through
the reeds


Towards a sinkhole in the
ground


We descend, down through
the hole


And into the water


Dragonflies lay their eggs in
the shallow water


We descend deeper and men
step into the water around us


Deeper again, and a pair of
divers appear


Transitioning us into the coffee
rock substrate


We move through the
coffee rock

"Places are best understood as endless events rather than locations or settings"

Gibson, p.22

Prototype Work – ACMI Moving Image Q & A

ACMI SCREENING – 27th April 2021

Lauren Carroll Harris and Samantha Lang

LH You've made many scripted feature dramas, you've made art documentaries, you've worked in all these different parts of filmmaking and you're a visual artist. What is it about this form of the experimental short that has drawn you in? What do you see of value in this artform, why did you want to make this?

SL The experimental short - offers the opportunity to use cinematic language of image/sound/movement to create a sense-memory experience in a way that is different from long form narrative -even in indie cinema - which has been usurped in part by narrative functionality...

Short experimental films can still operate on a level of poetry - where ellipse creates meaning rather than narrative/plot. I love this art form because it eschews precise meaning and as a maker you are wanting to engage the viewer in a thinking/feeling/sensing exercise

LH Usually with a feature film, you build out from a set of characters and a story — but with this type of art, you're thinking more in terms of the place and the concept. How did making this approach, this project differ from your previous filmmaking?

SL It was, quite literally, an experiment - where I didn't quite know where I was going or what I was doing - particularly because I had set the task of trying to align the viewer with the POV of the lake and I wasn't sure how to create that language without anthropomorphising or sentimentalizing - but I wanted to try nonetheless

LH When we first talked about this project, you thought you'd be making a work about why Brown Lake is losing its water. And then the story changed. Tell us about your connection to Brown Lake on Stradbroke Island and what happened along the way that changed the work.

SL So much has changed along the way and yet so much of what I wanted to include in the film remains... At the outset i was imagining the work in a more 'plot like' way and also - in a more didactic way - I wanted to express many of the feelings I had about the lake and the various human interactions with it - mining, water pumping, tourism all within the context of the lake having a special place in Quandamooka lore and women. My introduction to the lake had been through an Geonpul man and elder and his wife who from the outset explained the significance of the lake to its First Nation inhabitants. But it was also a place I took my children from when they were babies - so it had a political and personal connotations for me.

As you mention I started with the idea of Brown Lake being in a mystery about losing water - and in truth I still intend to write a longer film narrative in ta hat

vein - but a few things shifted - I realised that I was repelled by dystopian narratives - as I began to see them as deeply conservative - since they assume we are in a world that is normative and now we will lose that world and its the worst thing that can happen...I didnt agree - and the more I read and watched work from Haraway, Tsing, Povinelli and felt hollowed out by films like Watermark and Anthropocene - the more I felt that speculative, posthuman, eco feminine ways of reading climate change were far more appealing as an approach.

At the same time - when I returned to Brown Lake in 2021 after Covid and various border lockdowns and after the mining ceased at the end of 2019 - the lake's water levels had become abundant for the first time in years - so I felt it would no longer be completely right to make a story about it losing water. And whilst I wasn't certain what I would communicate - it did speak to an ending I'd been chasing but unable to articulate - which was about a return to 'care for country' so not a nostalgic return but a new perspective on caring for country -which is one of the reasons why I included the Oodgeroo poem - Dawn Wail for the Dead - (Things have been lost but we still have a responsibility for the future generations

LH So you made a decision early on that this wouldn't be like a nature documentary. Instead of just depicting and capturing the lake as a static landscape, you would try to actually make the ecosystem live on screen. I love that you did that because so much environmental art is mired in apocalyptic thinking or nostalgia or eulogies for what's been lost.

SL Yes - when Elliott and I were editing - I was trying to find a way to communicate the life of the lake and the lives of the creatures that lived within the ecosystem of the lake - seeing the lake as a body and a host to many different entities. That way I could both decentre the human perspectives and contextualise humans as playing a supporting role. And actually what I realised is that - not unlike David Attenborough's claim in his most recent documentary - the lake would be ok and so would many of the creatures there - it was the humans who would likely become extinct - ultimately - like the DMV zone between North and South Korea

LH Do you think all art now is actually anthropocene art by default?

SL I've thought a lot about this and think that whilst its not all Anthropocene art - any artist who places humans in a context that decentres them/disrupts the narrative of them being protagonist- is probably making Anthropocene art

APPENDICES

A1 Can cinema exist without a story?

A2 Bring your garden to life with a water feature

A3 Can a landscape be a protagonist?

A4 A new kind of screen map

A5 Peaceful eco-cinema

A6 Her Beauty Her Terror

Appendix 1

Can cinema exist without the story? Bold new visions break the mold

Jake Wilson April 23, 2021 — 4.00pm

https://www.smh.com.au/culture/movies/can-cinema-exist-without-the-story-bold-new-visions-break-the-mold-20210419-p57kjo.html

Often it's assumed that the central question surrounding Australian cinema is about what sorts of stories our filmmakers should be telling. But curator, scholar and critic Lauren Carroll Harris wonders if we should be looking past the need to tell stories at all.

As a freelance arts journalist, Harris found herself increasingly drawn to those ways of working with the moving image that have less to do with narrative: experimental film, video art, and new forms specific to the internet.

The problem, as she saw it, wasn't any lack of talented artists in these fields, but a lack of opportunities for them to have works funded and made available to a wide public. "I think there is an overarching timidity in the media and arts landscape," she says.

It was this perception that led to the 2019 launch of Prototype, conceived as an e-newsletter giving subscribers access to specially commissioned experimental films and video artworks, rolled out week by week.

By design, this was a low-budget, non-commercial initiative, with carefully selected participants but no restrictions imposed on style or subject matter. "Prototype is an invitation to consider what you really want to get out of art and film in the first place," Harris says. "What's a new cinematic language? What can cinema look and feel like?"

Indeed, she's in two minds about whether "cinema" is the best word for what an online platform might have to offer. "A lot of interesting cultural innovation – finding new ideas, new visual and formal ways of communicating those ideas – is happening outside of commercial filmmaking or even independent filmmaking."

Not that filmmakers associated with these fields have been excluded. The latest round of Prototype starts on April 27 with *Brown Lake*, shot on Stradbroke Island by Samantha Lang, best-known for narrative features such as her 1997 debut *The Well*, based on the novel by Elizabeth Jolley.

Samantha Lang, *Brown Lake/Boumiera*, 2021, video still. (Courtesy the artist)

More recently, Lang has been working with virtual reality – and VR cameras were used to shoot part of *Brown Lake*, which she describes as a film from the point of view of the lake itself. "If we were water, in the water cycle of Brown Lake, what is the journey that we would take?"

From Lang's perspective, there's some continuity between this approach and the use of landscape in her feature films (including *The Well*, set on an isolated New South Wales farm). Here, though, it's the place itself that moves to the foreground. "I would say there's a journey rather than a narrative, an experience rather than a story."

The Indigenous cultural significance of the lake is not irrelevant to this project, nor the ecological impact of mining. But human concerns are deliberately not at the film's centre. "I'm interested in very, very small events," Lang says. "The way the light moves around the lake is an event, or the way one small thing in the water creates these ripples."

By coincidence, Robert McDougall's *Rare Earth*, also part of the upcoming Prototype line-up, also involves a lake, though of a vastly different sort. A musician and video artist with a leaning towards the cinematic, McDougall explains

that *Rare Earth* had its genesis in material he shot in 2015, during a residency in Beijing.

Robert McDougall, *Rare Earth*, 2021, video still (Courtesy the artist)

Inspired by a BBC news story, he took a trip to the city of Baotou in Inner Mongolia, the world's largest source of the rare earth minerals that are essential components in smartphones. At the mine just outside the city, he slipped past security and found himself confronted with the enormous tailings dam used to store the toxic by-products of the operation.

"This thing is, like, 10 kilometres across so you can't even see the other side," he says. "It's one of the craziest things I've ever seen. It was really deeply ominous."

"Deeply ominous": the 10-kilometre dam at the heart of Robert McDougall's *Rare Earth* (Courtesy the artist)

For him, this was confirmation that the planet has entered a new era, sometimes known as the Anthropocene. “Human beings have become a force of nature and we’re destroying the earth.“

As McDougall acknowledges, there are inescapable ironies here. “The camera I’m using and even the smartphone that I’m talking to you on right now contain rare earth minerals. And the only reason that we’re able to do what we’re doing now is because of rare earth mineral extraction.

“All of the language that’s used around the internet and fast technology suggests that it has no physical consequence. But in fact the physical consequence is this enormous lake of poison, and every time we use this technology and we buy these products, we’re contributing to the total destruction of this landscape.”

The entire Prototype enterprise is, of course, dependent on digital technology. Still, a different perspective is offered by Audrey Lam, part of the Artist Film Workshop, a Melbourne group that focuses on shooting on Super-8 or 16mm film rather than digitally.

Lam’s contribution to Prototype, provisionally titled *Is Anybody Coming To Dinner?*, is a portrait of a young Japanese boy, Yoki, living in Melbourne with his family.

Audrey Lam, *Is Anyone Coming for Dinner?* 2021, video still (Courtesy of the artist)

Lam’s work is not easily labelled with terms such as “experimental” or “documentary” – and the filmmakers she cites as inspirations and reference points are likewise singular figures, such as Scotland’s Margaret Tait or the French

anthropologist-filmmaker Jean Rouch. “They’re really playful, and observant, and they like things being a bit elastic.” (In the same spirit, she mentions modernist poets such as Elizabeth Bishop and Frank O’Hara.)

Lam describes her film as in one sense simply “glimpses of a life,” though there’s a hint of something poignant in her working title. “Hopefully, when the film comes together, it’s the sense of spending time with this kid, and his family, and the fact that they don’t have any family in Melbourne or in Australia, and Yoki just loves to hang out with other people.”

Having said that, “the film isn’t about what he’s missing out on but just how he lives.” And even this is not the whole story. “It’s not just about spending time with him. The camera’s part of the game. The camera and the sound recorder, which are two separate things.”

Lam says her use of film in the traditional sense doesn’t imply a belief that the digital medium is inferior. “The choice just works for me.”

On the other hand, she has no qualms about viewing her film as a film, regardless of how it might be distributed – and her sense of cinema as an artform with a history throws the whole notion of innovation into doubt. “Everything has been done before,” but that’s not a bad thing, she says. On the other hand, she concedes, cinema is a comparatively young art – so perhaps after all there are still possibilities left to explore.

Prototype launches at ACMI on April 27 with a special screening of *Brown Lake*. youaretheprototype.art

Appendix 2

Bring your garden to life with a water feature

Megan Backhouse May 7, 2021 — 8.40am

https://www.smh.com.au/lifestyle/health-and-wellness/bring-your-garden-to-life-with-a-water-feature-20210430-p57nra.html

Water has been a feature of garden design since the early centuries of the first millennium BCE, when Persians dug thousands of subterranean tunnels to transport water from the mountains of Iran to the plains of Tehran. In doing so, they uncovered a way to irrigate their crops, shape the growth of urban settlements *and* draw attention to the pure aesthetic joy of water.

Ancient cultures knew that even a sheet of water could mimic a reflecting pool and create a sense of dynamism in a garden. Later, gardeners incorporated fountains, jets, mains water and electric pumps but, as we are coming to realise, some of the most sustainable innovations of the past have the best lessons for the future.

Feeding the Ibis at Corsica by William Stephen Coleman (Getty Images)

Joost Bakker's "future food system" house and garden temporarily installed on the banks of the Yarra next to Federation Square demonstrates how a water feature

might even double as an environmentally sustainable food farm. In this closed-loop, solar-powered aquaponics setup – in recycled food-grade IBC containers – Bakker is farming fish and edible greens. The barramundi, trout, yabbies and mussels, living over two levels of the house, produce nutrients that feed the likes of chicory, dandelions and radicchio. Bakker has described it as like "living in an ecosystem" and anyone passing will hear what sounds like a creek flowing through this workhorse of a townhouse.

Joost Bakker at the pop-up Greenhouse at Federation Square (Wayne Taylor)_

But water features don't have to be this ambitious. They can be as simple as making the most of rainfall when it happens. Instead of ending up in drains, the run-off can be directed into rills, ponds and other spots in the garden. Inadvertently I got first-hand knowledge of this when, after a recent series of drainage mishaps, I disconnected a downpipe at home and redirected the pipe and the rainwater it carried onto a nearby bed. I dug a short – and rudimentary – channel from the end of the new pipe into a pond that now overflows onto the garden.

Watching the water rise in the rain has given me the most unexpected pleasure. Frogs have moved in. More birds, too. The knobby club-rush growing in and around the pond has turned a vivid lime green. Even the most unprepossessing setups can introduce an air of life and movement.

On a much bigger scale, regenerative farmers have started reinstating wetlands drained by previous generations and finding that, as soon as the natural hydrology is reintroduced, birds, frogs, insects and reptiles follow. The natural cycle of

wetting and drying helps with nutrient cycling and maintaining plant diversity, which in turn attracts more wildlife.

Turning farm dams into “habitat” as well as functional water-harnessing devices is another way to make the most of the water you have. By adding a diversity of plants, shallow-edge gradients, rocks, logs and leaf litter, you can create a landscape that is better for wildlife and more beautiful as well.

Gardeners have always known that birds, frogs and insects gravitate towards water and it is telling that the star of Samantha Lang’s *Brown Lake* - part of this year’s Prototype season of video art and short films - is a fresh, clean, clear, brown-water lake.

Lang’s film, which juxtaposes the delicacy of dragonflies and sedges with the whine of four-wheel drives and trail bikes around a North Stradbroke Island tourism hotspot, reminds us that water is beautiful. It ripples and laps. It reflects the trees and the sky. It draws the light.

Vegetation ringing Brown Lake (Courtesy Samantha Lang and Prototype)

While Lang dwells on the endless encounters between “creatures, plants and minerals” in an age-old natural water body, man-made water features in the garden are something to be savoured too. Nothing enhances the sensory potential of a space like a water feature that looks – and sounds – right for its setting. The best watery additions in the garden are both ornamental and ecological.

In time you might even create something that looks – and functions – like a small version of North Stradbroke Island’s Brown Lake.

***Brown Lake/Boumiera* can be viewed free online at youaretheprototype.art/gallery-2021.**

Appendix 3

Can a landscape be a protagonist?

LAUREN CARROLL HARRIS PROTOTYPE ESSAY (2021)

DIVING INTO
Radical nature, stories of water and minerals, portable ecologies, landscape as protagonist, portrait of a place, anthropocene dreams.

CURATOR'S NOTES
Can a landscape be a protagonist? When ecology is acknowledged as a living entity, can a film of a place be considered a portrait? These are the questions illuminating internationally acclaimed filmmaker Samantha Lang's newly commissioned work Brown Lake. Shot on location at North Stradbroke Island in early 2021, this is a work of visual storytelling that teases then withdraws the conventions of environmental documentary.

Lang had spent decades visiting the lake, a special and significant place for Quandamooka peoples' law, country and culture. Here, two great bodies of water, the Brown Lake and the Pacific Ocean, almost come together in a sub-tropical mix of tea tree oil and sand. Here, tourism and mining are the colonising industries. Mineral sands have been mined for decades to extract zircon, of value in engines, spacecraft and electronics; rutile, a brilliant white pigment; ilmenite, for paints, plastics, metals and cosmetics; and silica for glass production. Here, mining leases cover more than half the island, with dredge mining the main method of extraction. Here, sixty percent of the local mainland's water supply is drawn up.

When Lang returned in early 2021, she expected to see depletion and exhaustion. The lake's water levels have been dropping for years, and is it any wonder? Her intention was to make a story of an ecosystem, with a great body of water at its centre, that was threatened, mined and nearing abandonment. Lang has worked across commercial and independent cinema for many years. Across these cinematic realms, filmmakers have often depicted the environment as a source of terror and fear in this country, but rarely – with the exception of Indigenous artists and their collaborators – in balance with human society.

Instead of ecological unravelling at Brown Lake, Lang found a story of regeneration. Mining had ceased on Stradbroke Island in 2019, and with tourism on pause for much of 2020 on account of the pandemic, the lake had begun to replenish itself. It hadn't taken long. Water levels were up. Life seethed. Reeds regrew. Bugs proliferated.

Lakes are solar heated and lunar powered. They always remember to come out and in. They hold climate legacies: their sediments record information – natural archives of epochs past. Dust, charcoal from bushfires, dead insects, pollution, pollen, pulverised minerals and other detritus fall onto the surface and settle to the bottom. Where does a body of water – seeping into sand, fed by clouds in weather systems – begin and end?

Remember: almost all things are water. It's distributed in the air, it sits on Saturn's moon, in subglacial lakes on Mars, in morning mist, in droplets of ocean spray. And held in human and animal bodies "Water is something you cannot hold," wrote the poet Anne Carson. It's always on the move, a quality not recognised by the classic Western painting of a rectangular frame with a static horizon line and still body of water.

Energised by a sense of natural elements as living forces and active entities, "Brown Lake" is one of a wave of Earth-centred art works that aim to stop addressing nature and start merging with it. After all, extraction is more than an industrial activity. It's a way of thinking, deeply embedded in our culture.

The idea of non-human perspectives in film and art may sound strange, until you consider its long history. Just as a sentient ocean on a remote planet formed the impetus of the sci-fi classic Solaris by Russian filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky. Just as the wind-blown leaves of the Douglas Firs in David Lynch and Mark Frost's TV series Twin Peaks seemed to watch Laura Palmer and know her secrets. Just as the ancient geological forms in Peter Weir's Picnic at Hanging Rock were an active player in that film's plot line. All these works escape the human condition, live imaginatively and see through other perspectives. Those perspectives *are* the story.

Just as, now, Samantha Lang films the surface of Brown Lake the way she might film an actor's face, but not before a hazardous montage of overhead satellite images show the way the land has been divided, mapped and monitored for conquest and ownership. Soon, the island's noisy, invasive tourists are filmed like scuttling aliens, watched by indifferent lizards who are at home in the lake's surrounds. Industrial capitalism is captured as something foreign. Through Lang's askew, low-angle framing, we see a radical reimagining of the landscape – too often represented by artists as an inanimate object – as something that breathes and moves and lives. We see art and film in symbiosis with ecosystems of this watery planet.

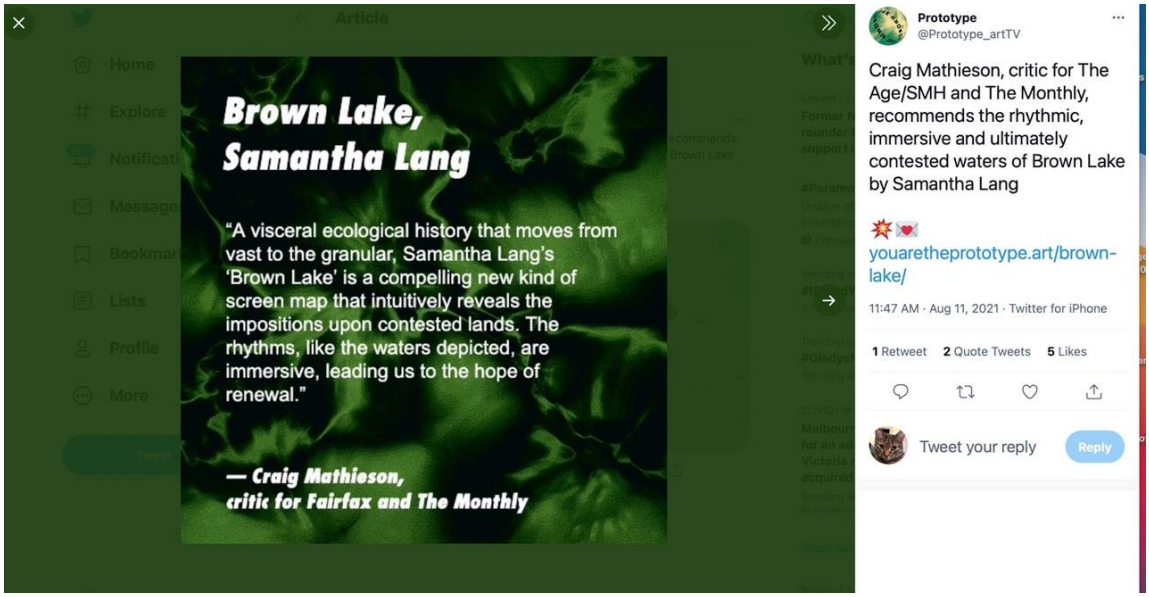
So much environmental art has spoken of dismal predictions. The vogue for landscape art throughout much of the 20th century has been a nostalgia for a lost wilderness, in which melancholy gives way to a reckoning with a damaged planet and the economies of extraction and industrialisation that terrorise it. But such dire visions might just reinforce the catastrophic Western notion of nature standing apart from culture. Have we fallen so far out of sympathy with this planet that we can't imagine anything beyond degradation?

The work ends with a poem by Oodgeroo Noonuccal, whose view was that through observing nature we understand our place in it and our responsibility to it. A poet from Stradbroke Island, Oodgeroo is one of the most significant poetic and political voices from the 1960s onwards, bringing to light Indigenous ways of knowing country. Here, 'Dawn Wail for the Dead' is performed by Ooodgeroo's great granddaughter Kaleenah Edwards. In this work, the poem contrasts the Indigenous interaction over millennia, which privileged the lake as a place for women, against the destruction reeked by those who stole this place. Through Oodgeroo's wail, we get a different kind of human glimpse of the lake, and a reminder of what may be white-washed if we do not stop to listen or only view places through Western limited sensibilities.
Stradbroke Island is sandy country, tea tree country, occupied country. But it's not spent. It is a hope, a vision, a place finding equilibrium.

Acknowledgement of Country: We pay respects to the Quandamooka People, the Traditional Custodians of the land and waters where this project was shot.

Appendix 4

A new kind of screen map



Appendix *5*

Peaceful eco-cinema

Appendix 6

Her Beauty Her Terror – Exhibition

From the curator - Exhibition titled Her Beauty and her Terror for the Caboolture Regional Art Gallery, opening in June 26 2021. Drawn from the poem by Dorothea Mackellar, Her beauty and Her Terror aims to encourage different ways of thinking and engaging with the landscape. The character of the Australian landscape, the changes it is undergoing and the people who live on/occupy the land experiences of it will be focused upon. For this exhibition, contemporary artists journey through the Australian landscape, in all its extremities, subtleties and forms to consider our connection to it.

I believe your work, Brown Lake, particularly its references to the character of the landscape of Minjerribah and the changes it is has undergone through the impacts of mining and tourism would work well in this exhibition.