

**Atopia: Digital Fictions of Place**

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## Certificate of Authorship/Originality

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Ying-Jui Huang

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## Abstract

The central focus of this project is on how images of place mediate experiences of tourism and landscape. The invention of photography in the nineteenth century coincided with a boom in tourist activities, and since that time, photographs became an essential component of tourism. Tourists travelling to scenic areas for leisure and recreation use photography to capture and memorialise their experiences. Once they return home, these photographic images come to mediate their experiences of the landscapes they visited.

In contrast to the early explorations of touristic landscape imagery of the nineteenth century, photographic imagery in the contemporary world cannot be disembedded from the ubiquitous mass media networks that distribute vast quantities of images and information. Images of foreign landscapes are now ubiquitous, and the touristic photograph, which originally mediated between travellers and the landscapes they visited, has infiltrated and become a crucial part of human life. As a result the boundaries between geographical places and virtual places become more uncertain day by day. Furthermore, the relationships between users and images are blurring and shifting. A digital image can be transformed and recomposed, and becomes itself an autonomous image that represents a new fictional landscape.

The creative work and written analysis of this doctoral submission focuses on the concept of *atopia*. Willke refers to atopia as describing an ‘anywhere/nowhere’ state based on deterritorialisation, concentration and spatial inversion of social possibilities. The notion of atopia can refer to geographic spaces, but also can denote a fictitious place that is outside the actual world, an autonomous space that has the quality of being an in-between place, or an interface. In particular, an atopia can be an invented

place, caught between the local and the foreign. Lippard coins the term 'tourist-at-home' to signify the collapsing of the distinctions between the visitor and the visited, the touristic and the domestic. This work takes up the challenge of Lippard's contention that there is the possibility for a critical artistic practice at the interstice of the local and the foreign. It does this through appropriating modes of image creation at the intersection of landscape and tourism photography and digital media practice.

The idea of the possibility of being both a visitor and a local at the same time is explored. By both studying and living in Australia but having grown up in Taiwan, I have myself had the cultural experience of being both 'alien' and 'at home' in the sense that crosses both the domain of travelling but also of dwelling. This investigation is pursued through a consideration of the significance and associations of fictional images of place, in that they have the quality of interfaces, standing between the actual world and the virtual spaces of imagination.

The project explores how seemingly mundane places can be transformed into extraordinary landscapes through reconceptualisation, digital manipulation and re-presentation. The creative component consists of a series of twelve digital images that are created by combining original photographs of local landscapes that I took in the manner of a tourist exploring my surroundings. The images are presented in the form of a photograph album. This form of presentation invokes traditions of travel and recording of tourist experiences from before the digital era. The form of the album, a hand-crafted book using the coptic binding technique, allows for the images to be displayed in the domestic environment, in the manner of a personal exhibition.