

Receding visions of pastoral idyll:

An ethnographic and photographic study
of marginal farming in the Maranoa.

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for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Certificate of Authorship

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.

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¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 8.

Preface

The names used in this project are pseudonyms. Personal details corresponding to property names, relatives, and ancestors have been changed to protect the confidentiality of the participants. The images from the fieldwork images have been de-identified. However the place names of towns and cities have remained the same.

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Abstract

Farming is a practice that is exemplified by a set of particular activities, which include purposeful engagements with things, background knowledge, know-how, emotions and goals. From the formation of a British colony in New South Wales, this practice has been framed by a particular conception of ideal engagement with the land. Political support for this ideal led to the generation of an economic environment within which family farming was first underwritten by successive Australian governments and later abandoned. Within the marginal farming landscapes of the Maranoa, in south west Queensland, progressive depletion of soils that are unsuited to intensive production, within a landscape subject to drought, has left the heirs to this ideal without any possibility of realising the 'good life' for which they have been striving. Both the land, and the families that work it, are exhausted.

This thesis presents an extended ethnographic and photographic documentary study of marginal farming families in south west Queensland. It draws on history, especially narratives and images made of farming landscapes in colonial Australia, to account for the disposition of these farmers for hard work, self-reliance, and frugal living, as well as their commitment to an ordering of the landscape in the service of production.

Interpretation of the fieldwork data has been informed by theoretical texts from phenomenology, philosophy of technology and practice theory. The desperate circumstances of small family farmers, who have been marginalised within the physical, economic and political landscapes that they inhabit, are communicated in this thesis through documentary photography and ethnographic exegesis.

