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## Editorial introduction: geography and collective memories through art

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### ABSTRACT


'Art' and 'memory' are prominent areas of inquiry in geographical research. Artistic and memory work often overlap in our studies through practices and processes aimed at bringing people together in experimental, affective, and collective ways. In this introduction to the special issue, we write collectively as 12 authors to reflect on the histories, inspirations, and future trajectories of these intersecting concerns in geographical research. Our reflections stem from our collective participation and discussions of issues at the intersections of art, memory and geographical research, during an online workshop and our individual-and-collective reflections later through the process of writing this piece. We hope our discussions further interest on the possibilities for creative, collaborative, and decolonial interventions to memory in geography. And, incidentally, we hope that our editorial may be of interest for future research into the value and practices of collective geographic scholarship.

### KEYWORDS

Creative arts; memory; public art; creative methods; more-than-human; collective writing; collaboration

## Introduction

Art and memories are entangled in materialities, affects, politics, senses, places and experiences. Human geographers have a long history of engagement with 'the arts'. As Hawkins (2015) noted several years ago, art and creativity are now important and valued parts of geographical methods and inquiries. Australian geographers are increasingly keen on collaborating—and centring—artistic techniques and creative practice in their research (e.g. Gorman-Murray and Brickell 2017; Boyd and Barry 2020; Barry and Keane 2020; Gibbs et al. 2020). The increasing attention and use of creativity in social science research is often adjacent to, and 'complementary to, traditional forms

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of data collection and analysis' (Boyd and Barry 2020, 308). Art can be a materialised product, an immaterial expression, or a shared and connective modality of curated attunement. To be clear, when we say 'art', we approach the term with a lowercase-a, not the institutionalised capital 'A' of the 'Art world'. The turn to 'doing' geographical research through artistic engagement cumulates through the textual, visual and historical (e.g. Gorman-Murray and Brickell 2017), moves beyond representation (e.g. Boyd 2017; Boyd and Edwardes 2017), while attending to other senses (Doughty, Duffy, and Harada 2019), and interrogates multi-scalar and mobile phenomena (e.g. Barry and Keane 2020). Geographical uses of art and creative practices takes multiple forms and functions; and while this list here is not extensive, it is clear that artistic processes are firmly embedded in contemporary Australian geographical scholarship. It is from this perspective that we wish to talk about art and creativity as a set of practices, as an area of expertise, an opportunity for experimentation and collaboration and as part of our everyday lives manifest in our expressions, sensations, thoughts, and imaginations. We hope that we can collectively explore art in the context of geographical memory work as an opportunity for experimentation, collaboration, and a diverse set of non-textual and non-verbal, practices that broaden geographical inquiry.

Central to geographical engagement with art in research has been a relationship with memory's affective and more-than-representational capacities that link people and places (Jones 2011; Drozdowski, De Nardi, and Waterton 2016; Gorman-Murray and Brickell 2017). While memory has been interpreted and used in varied ways within geography, within the purview of this special issue memory can be understood as 'remembrances and recollections of the past that evoke emotions and experiences in/of/at places' in the present (Ratnam 2018, 4). Ultimately, memory 'has a *use* in a range of political, cultural and social contexts' (Drozdowski, De Nardi, and Waterton 2016, 448). Memories unfold in spaces of public collectives (Hayden 1995; Johnson 2002), in private settings (DeLyser 2015; Fortier 2000), and in intimate association with materialities and sensorialities (Ratnam 2018). Here, we have attempted to think of the potential of the geographies memory/memories through art to create an ecology of possibility – a sense of 'what could happen'. Dewsbury et al. (2002, 439) note that 'this is a world between potential and determination ... a world captured in the tension of its present tense of becoming, a not yet enacted moment where we meet and greet ourselves in the affect that inspires action'. We then aim to think of this coming together of memory through art, and their existing in places and spaces as a catalyst for geographical dialogue and possibility.

This introduction to the Special Issue arose out of a virtual workshop on 'geography and memories through art'<sup>1</sup>, where we focused on how artistic, more-than-representational and affective uses of memory in place are generating important contributions to truth-telling, climate justice, decoloniality and decolonisation, peacemaking and various forms of resistance. The creative process of memory-work which centres art, reminds us of the importance of experimentation, of uncovering what Whittaker (2019) refers to as 'telling silences', of the storying of life and of the processes of knowing.

## Questioning art and memory in geographical research

In February 2021, we, the authors of this introduction, participated in a virtual one-day workshop, which forms the basis for this Special Issue and our inquiry. Together, we

asked: *What does art do to the geographies of memory?* Such a broad question inevitably opened a series of related sub-questions, each that provoked debate and discussion, as we shared our emergent and process-oriented perspectives on the intersection of memory and art in geographical research. Cognizant of the privileging of knowledge, art, memories and ideas produced and imported from the Global North in Australian geography, we strive to centre the discussions in this Special Issue on artistic interventions from Southern and Indigenous ontologies. In doing so we asked the following questions:

- How do memories manifest through art? What do they do? How are they used? How are they advanced for social justice in contexts where there is ongoing violence?
- How does the colonality of power operate in memory-making?
- Can art challenge the objectification, institutionalisation, centralisation and instrumentalisation of memories?
- And finally, what are the ethical and political considerations of the collective making of memories through art?

The aim of the workshop was to use a collective process to tease out how our common interests in geographical issues of creativity, affect, methods, collaboration, and more-than-representational concerns are useful tools but also valuable starting points. We attempted to use these starting points to think with place, with each other, and modes of resistance and action. In the workshop, each one of us shared short creative interventions (textual and non-textual) on how we used art in our work/research, which formed the basis for subsequent dialogues that generated the themes presented in this editorial. Our contribution here aligns with others who have recently produced collaborative work that grapples with creative, experimental, and collective themes in geographical research methods and practice (e.g. Zhang et al. 2019; Boyd and Barry 2020; Lobo et al. 2020; Dufty-Jones and Gibson 2021). Conscious that participants were coming into the virtual space each bringing their disciplinary, methodological, and lived experiences related to geographical inquiry, the workshop was deliberately designed to create space in which we could focus on conceptualising what memory and art can do for geographical inquiry, rather than on methods. Although many of us work in geography, and would identify as being within the discipline of human geography, we had participants who are artists, practitioners, sociologists, writers, practice-led researchers, community builders, placemakers, and more. So while we had discussions, at times lively debates, and shared our technical, epistemological, and methodological experiences, the themes that emerged through the workshop reflect the conceptual and (multi)disciplinary avenues that necessarily congeal when thinking, doing, and thematically working across ‘art’ and ‘memory’ in geographical research.

Further, there are various relations that informed how we could participate and collaborate following the workshop: we are at various career levels and have vastly different expertise across academic, practical, creative, and socio-cultural experiences in the world. Cognizant of these factors, we made the decision to write this collectively, while allowing space for each of us to bring in our individual voices, reflections, and authorships that fed back into the collaborative inquiry into memory and art. In the process, we recognised the time limitations of many contributors as many of us navigated precarious employment and the pressures of the Covid-19 pandemic. Thus, as editors

(Authors 1-4), we made the decision to lead this collaborative piece, while also honouring the discussions had in the workshop and further correspondence with contributors – fostering an ethics of care for collegial work that is uneven, messy and interwoven. In doing so, we build on the work of Dufty-Jones and Gibson (2021, 3) exploring how we might reflect on and incorporate care into our ‘professional practice of scholarly writing’ that seeks to be transform ‘the institutional values, policies and practices that structure our writing’.

The organisation of this Special Issue was informed by interventions by scholars engaging with understandings of memory, heritage and geography who have argued for the need to de-centre Eurocentric uses of memory (see Smith 2006; Villalón 2017). This work has demonstrated that the use of memory has been extracted, instrumentalised and objectified to reproduce stereotypical and celebratory heritage, and to obscure histories that contribute to human-centric, nationalistic and colonial projects. Working from a recognition of ongoing coloniality and an epistemic gap, the Keynote Speakers of the workshop Ngugi artist Libby Harward and Afro-Colombian human rights defender Virgelina Chará demonstrated how Southern knowledge (see Sousa Santos 2010) can foster politically engaged discussions from a place of unlearning, disruption and decolonial praxis. Unbounded by the regime of Northern academies in which Connell (2007) argues that art and storytelling continue to be undermined, in Southern places, collective memory-work has contributed to advance knowledge, resistance and the enacting of an *otherwise*.

In the following sections of the paper, we take up these ideas presenting individual reflections on the workshop questions. We have organised the contributions around two trajectories of thought that emerged during the course of the workshop. The entries under the first theme, ‘Decolonial and public art interventions’, focus on the way in which creative practices may open up the space to share plural, complex and difficult memories in a collaborative way. Additionally, the contributions variously demonstrate how art and memory may trouble settler relationships with place, and reaffirm Indigenous and ancestral sovereignty. The second theme, titled ‘more-than-human memory’, is a collection of entries that thread together reflections on how art and memory speak to each other in the presence of the more-than-human. Many of these contributions engage with creative practice-led research in attempts to account for ways that place, embodiment and sensory attunements bring together both the past and present. Each of the entries weave, in their own ways, the various threads of being appealed and moved beyond the human and with more-than-human encounters.

## **Theme 1: decolonial and public art interventions**

### ***Embroidered truth-telling – Laura Rodriguez Castro***

State sanctioned denialist politics and violence have characterised Colombia’s most recent post-peace Accord period. Since day one of the Accord (24/11/2016) more than 900 social leaders have been massacred (Indepaz 2020). When I visited in 2019-2020, I felt despair and hopelessness about the future of peace in my country, as the news media continued to report ongoing violence. These feelings sat alongside the sovereignty of the memory-work and territorial resistance that women social leaders were doing all

around the country. Indeed, this was not the first time that their resistances, *caminar*, *sentipensar* was showing me an *otherwise*. It was at this moment of reckoning about the multiple meanings of the post-Accord period, that I met Virgelina Chará at the Memory Centre for Peace and Reconciliation (MCPR) in Bogotá. As I entered the Salon of Trades, she was sewing alongside other members of the Embroideries of Memory. We had a chat, as she sewed a cover for a plush doll I was buying made of fabric scraps. As she sewed agilely, she told me about the international reach of their collective organising.

Co-led by Virgelina, the Embroideries of Memory are collectively constructing plural truth-telling embodied in a fabric banner (Figure 1) that continues to expand with memories of place, conflict and peace. The collective includes women who were forcibly displaced by the armed conflict and has been leading important globally renowned symbolic reparation and territorial peace pedagogies (Bernal Huertas 2020). They are generating truth-telling through memory processes of embroidery that address material and symbolic reparations. Collective embroidery has enabled the construction of memories,



**Figure 1.** On 9 April, 2021 the embroidered fabric of the 'Embroideries of Memory' clothed the Truth Commission in commemoration of the National Day of Memory and Solidarity with the Victims. Source: Image courtesy of Embroideries of Memory.

resistance and hope in times of ongoing violence, denialist politics and silencing. As violence continues and the current right-wing government denies the right to peace and truth, the 540+ metres of embroidered fabric stands out loudly as a testament of truth-telling and memory work through art.

### **Returning memories – Dorell Ben**

Tattoos and tattoo art evoke memories for Indigenous Oceanians through a process of reconnection. Since the concomitance of Christianity and colonialism, cultural practices such as tattoo art, were eradicated and replaced with western ideologies. What once dictated the sociopolitical overtures of cultures, became perceived by westerners as indelible marks. Western clothing covered Indigenous bodies from the neck to the ankles and colonial identities were imposed. Cultural tattoo practices shifted to mediums other than skin, and its histories were recorded through westerners' ethnological and anthropological accounts.

In this shift, the tattoo moved into *vā*: a space which Wendt (1999) calls an interconnecting space – an interstitial framework that contains the many cultural concepts, suspended in space and time. Cultural tattoo masters are charged with a sacred duty to reach into *vā* and reconnect tattoos to their communities. These reconnections play a vital role in generating story and body sovereignties. Tattoo cultures today are now reaching into *vā*, sieving through the many western accounts of recorded tattoo histories, motifs and patterns. While such records were often dictated with western perceptions, and some racist undertones labelling these marks as 'savage' or 'native', these provide useful insights into a cultural practice that has been dormant for some centuries. For instance, there are drawings, sketches, descriptions of patterns of Rotuman tattoos but much of this history is unknown to many Rotumans as a whole. By locating tattoo motifs within *vā*, Oceanian artists are able to use tattoo art as a way of decolonising their bodies and reconnecting Indigenous Oceanians to their histories and memories. This also instigates the movement for several Oceanic tattoo renaissances (cf. *TepTok* & *The Veiqia Project*). Tattoo art is a cyclic instigator and inspiration, retrieving the concepts from *vā* and reconnecting today's Oceanic people to their memories by invoking vital sovereignties.

### **Placemaking across geographies: art and translation – Pallavi Narayan**

Making art which reflects my experience of living in certain geographical terrains informs my writing practice when I consider translation. It enables me to get inside the skin of a place, engage in a sense of community-based placemaking and evoke empathy across geographical borders. Engaging with the work of Chilean poet Jonathan Urqueta Briones, the act of translating from Spanish brings me back to the landscapes of Valle del Elqui, where we met in August 2019. Painting parts of the town and surrounding region embed those memories deeper into my cognisance. My fledgling familiarity with Vicuña, hometown of Nobel laureate Gabriela Mistral—was contextualized with a visit to the Gabriela Mistral Museum—where Chile's literary and cultural history was brought to my attention in an unassuming and poignant manner. I was compelled to

paint a picture of Vicuña's church and colourful homes and caught Jonathan's interest while doing so.

In translating his work, I use art as a medium to encounter Jonathan's poetry which is deeply impacted by the land and spiritual elements. As I translate the volcanic, metallic tones of the north, near the Atacama Desert, into watercolours, the words flow more easily. They facilitate my translation of the brightness of the moonlight and stars over the valley, among other themes—as Elqui is known for its astronomy. As Jonathan progresses through Santiago and his hometown of Marchigüe, the landscapes vary and his writing acquires the hues of farmlands and lush vineyards, the cadences of the ancestral words from the Mapuche and Diaguita vocabularies. His poems approximate the deep internal polarisation in the long, narrow country of Chile in their expression of the human-nature interdependence. Jonathan's quiet determination to catalogue the changing landscape invokes in my art a delicacy of utterance and in my translation a fineness of articulation.

### *Misty Water-Coloured memories – Michele Lobo*

I see this block printed fabric from the Tiwi Islands on my bedroom wall every morning—a gift from a young man at Tiwi Arts, Bathurst Island. It takes me to the warm and welcoming atmosphere in the large shed where artists demonstrate the block printing process to curious visitors. John asks if I would like a piece of printed fabric, a gift that is part of the Indigenous Tiwi Island tour. I choose one with ornate circles and discover that it's an authentic Tiwi design - the Pamijini design - of a ceremonial armband worn at funerals.

I tell John it is a funeral armband not a flower, he laughs. Rather than cutting the usual small white piece of cloth, he selects almost two metres of fabric. I worry that perhaps the piece of fabric is too large and not really the norm for gifts on the tour, but my anxiety evaporates with John's laugh. He dips the wooden blocks in orange and maroon dyes and carefully transforms the white fabric into a beautiful piece of art. I thank John for this wonderful souvenir that seems to capture the vitality of the Tiwi islands. I see Mary, who 'lives rough' in Darwin performing a smoking ceremony. She describes island life as 'boring' but says she's glad to earn money for waving some leaves because the young Aboriginal woman leading the tour had died the day before.

Why do my eyes light up each morning when I look at the print when Tiwi Islanders struggle in the midst of police brutality, incarceration, death but also the slow violence of sea level rise and biodiversity loss? I can feel the tropical breeze, see the shady groves where long grassers 'live rough' as well as the Pukamani poles as the sun sets at Mindil beach, Darwin. Does the Pamijini pattern echo turbulent toxic worlds and Black death or woven affective ecologies of saltwater Country? (Figure 2)

### *Public art: Interventions of memory, activation of meaning – Becky Nevin Berger*

Our everyday lives are carried out in built environments which obscure the inherent diversity of these geographies. The majority of Australia's urban environment was built after the Second World War. However, the homogeneity of urban Australia's





**Figure 2.** Misty Water-Coloured memories.<sup>2</sup> Source: Michele Lobo.

concrete paths and gutters—its roads, and right-angled structures—make it appear as permanent as it is immediate. This landscape is inscribed by colonisation and Western economics, which displaced Indigenous cultures that preceded the Australian nation-state. Public art has the potential to reveal the terms of this paradigm while inviting critique that unsettles its naturalisation. When art intersects in the environments of the everyday the opportunity arises to unsettle our familiarity and to arouse vivid consciousness.

*Edge of the Trees* by Fiona Foley and Janet Laurence provides an example of public art that prompts reconsideration of the terrain where works exist while extending awareness to their continuity with places beyond. *Edge of the Trees* activates the memory of the Museum of Sydney, where the colony's first piece of permanent architecture, the First Government House, was built (MacDonald 1999). Timber originally felled in the area at the time of European colonisation is combined with other site-specific materials creating a ghostly forest amongst skyscrapers. *Edge of the Trees* imagines the memory of first contact and marks the spot from which the built structures of the colonisers multiplied.

Our bodies respond to the materials and composition of public art installations just as they respond to the materials and meanings embedded in landscapes. Even when we do not perceive the full histories of places, their memories remain meaningful through the relationships they adhere to Country, and through our affective responses to their material forms. Public art can enable critical entry points to the vast and dynamic material assemblages of human geographies.

### ***Decoloniality and the value of the 'Doing' – Barbara Pini***

Art can make us anxious as geographers. We may not consider ourselves to be 'creative'. This was my experience in approaching the workshop, which had attracted me because of its interventionist stance on Southern epistemologies.

As often has been the case, I found comfort and insight in the words of colleagues. Particularly useful was Hawkins (2015, 263) reflections that creative geographies require multiple skills and that a lack of skills in one area does not impede involvement in another. She writes of her own concern at not being 'good at drawing' and her recognition that, despite this, there was 'value in the doing' and the reflection of purpose and process.

My contribution was a series of photographs of buildings in my hometown of Proserpine, Queensland that I remembered as being central to community, but have now been left derelict – such as the town hall and department store. Initially I imagined what I was producing was as a story of rural globalisation, but other stories emerged from the 'doing'. The act of taking and arranging the photographs and giving them titles facilitated reflection about the racialised and classed hierarchies of my hometown. I thought of events I had attended in the town hall, who was there and what we were there to do. I remembered the department store layout and products, its staff and managers and trips to its different areas to mark special occasions. I thought of the public art that had hung in these places – the photograph of the Queen, the mural of the sugar mill and cane paddocks. This reflection sharpened as I reviewed the creative piece with workshop participants, particularly Libby Harward's keynote, which included a discussion of her *Already Occupied* installation. I recalled that these were largely middle-class and almost always white places and, moreover, like all buildings in Australia, on unceded land.

In the above reflections participants engage with a diversity of creative practices including embroidery, creative writing, photography, public art installations, print making, tattooing and poetry to address the key questions we posed in organising the workshop and the accompanying Special Issue. They demonstrate the possibilities of creative work to give expression to different histories, subjectivities and experiences

which challenge normative definitions and understandings of many of our key geographic notions such as ‘home’, ‘city’, ‘community’ and ‘nation’. They reveal that creative works can give the coloniality of power material form rendering its violence present and visible in contemporary life. These beginning lines of thought are enumerated in detail by contributors to this Special Issue, not least through the paper by one of the workshop keynotes, Ngugi artist Libby Harward. Her arts practice of ‘listening, calling out to, knowing and understanding Country’ spans from giving non-native Australian plants a voice to speak in their own language to appropriating the aural markers of urban life such as the sound of jack hammers and cement mixers, and in doing so, asserting Indigenous sovereignty and care for Country.

## Theme 2: more-than-human memory

### *Exploring place-based connections through photography – Candice Boyd*

There is now a strong appreciation in human geography that the world is a ‘more-than-human’ project – relational, contingent, and processual – in which all sorts of non-human actants are involved in place-making. It no longer makes sense to neglect the role of non-human agency in the making of memory. As Trigg (2012, 4) argues, the body responds to the environment to create memory as a ‘lived spatiality’ of ‘being-in-the-world’. These on-going bodily connections give rise to mental understandings that are not easily reconciled with the memory of place, and so our place-based identities are constantly being undone and re-made. This, according to Trigg (2012), accounts for the strange and uncanny feelings that ‘new’ bodies have when encountering ‘old’ places.

The implications of the ‘more-than-human’ for a geography of memory is as methodological as it is conceptual. As Dowling, Lloyd, and Suchet-Pearson (2017, 827) suggest, a more-than-human geography is less about ‘giving voice’ to non-human actants, and more about finding ways to de-centre the human in both the *doing* and *thinking* of geography. In a recent project called *Engaging Youth in Regional Australia*, I worked with young people from three towns to better understand the reasons behind youth outmigration in these areas. Ten young people agreed to take part in a creative project that would further explore their emotional connections to their hometowns and produce a collection of photographs for an upcoming exhibition. Each was sent a disposable camera with black and white film and asked to take photographs of things in their hometown that were meaningful for them.

Two things happened. First, the act of walking and photographing places helped participants to think geographically and relationally in ways that they hadn’t in their interviews. Second, the analogue medium of film had the surprising tendency to elicit place-based memories for the participants (Figure 3).

### *Palimpsests of landscapes: on thinking of memory through layers of recreation – Diti Bhattacharya*

Post-phenomenological examinations have often questioned how memory plays in our ability to presence, or re-presence, our relationship with specific landscapes (Pearce 2021, 3). Thinking through the multiple topographical features of landscapes and its



**Figure 3.** 'Asta', 2020. Source: Photo courtesy of Jasmine Hair for the 'Engaging Youth in Regional Australia' project.

myriad imprints on memory, I reflect on the how creating/doing art catalyses finding one place in another.

On a recent hiking trip, my partner and I began walking along the coloured sands bordering the Great Sandy National Park in Noothena or Gnuthuru (also known as Noosa). The colour in the sands of the Cooloola recreation area, formed through iron-rich mineral deposits, imparted layers of gradience that transported us to places that we had visited before. The landscape of coloured sands created moments of oscillations: between the red soil in Bolpur, India, black sand beaches of Kovalam, Kerala, and the Cooloola recreation area. Reflecting on these moments, these multi-sensorial trajectories of memory 'can deliver the human subject a profound, if fleeting ownership of topographical place via a reflex of embodied familiarity while simultaneously interfering with our capacity to feel ourselves back into locations we once knew well' (Pearce 2021, 3). These moments of topographical intimacy were not limited to the immediate walking experience -- they are often carried forward and carried around through artworks. I took photographs of the landscape and of patches of colour and rock formations that, somehow, seemed familiar in a place that I was visiting for the first time. Later, I would go on to reproduce my memory of the coloured sands through a playing-around session with acrylic paints. These moments of engaging the memory through art is about the tangible feeling of being in one place corporeally but in multiple places sensorially and emotionally. Engagement with landscape and memory through art makes 'visible the experiences of being - in and moving through the world' (Hawkins 2011, 474) in all its complexities.

### *Memories of movement – Kaya Barry*

If I try to think of what I remember most vividly, I conjure feelings of motion, rather than an image or point in time. Examples include: the car rocking on the windy bush road where I lived as a child; the nervousness of being pushed back into the seat during a flight taking off; feeling being bustled and buoyed around in rolling waves. The motion and movement and the sensing of one's body in relation to the environment has preoccupied my creative and geographical research. I want to emphasise the importance of multi-sensory encounters that bring our memorising bodies into dialogue with the world (Figure 4).

Art draws the artist and audience/experiencer into dialogue through an artefact, moment, or event: for example, a small textual prompt in a gallery urges us to feel the power of the weather as it bolsters us around landscapes and narratives (e.g. Roni Horn's artworks); or an adult-sized slippery slide allows one to re-encounter the dizzying, joyful playgrounds of childhood (e.g. Carsten Höller's installations). Creative explorations evoke memories that are always-already in relation to the nonhuman world (e.g. weather, architecture, materials, sunlight). Art practice opens out what may have been an individually felt moment, and brings forth these memories for others to feel-with.

As others have noted in this introduction, many geographers value more-than-human encounters as a rich area for studying spatial, material, and transspecies relations. Alam, McGregor, and Houston (2020, 1124) remind us that taking a more-than-human account seriously means that agency 'is not limited to intentionality (and thereby most restricted to humans), and is instead conceived more broadly through the sets of relations that co-constitute the world'. In this vein, memory, too, must be considered as a mobile relation with-in the world, felt deeply individually, but one which can be evoked, shared, and felt collectively as it moves.

### *Re-storying geographic memory – Chantelle Bayes*

There is a long history of using writing as part of geographical enquiry but much of this has been mimetic, non-fiction, scientific or reflective. In 1983, Donald Meinig (1983) called for geographers to become creators and not just borrowers of literature, arguing that writing need not just be used to present evidence of geographic study but could also produce geographic imaginaries and contribute to place-making. Geographers now use creative writing techniques that might be 'equal to the conceptual challenges posed by recent imaginaries of place' (Hawkins 2015, 252).



**Figure 4.** Panorama of a flight taking off over Brisbane Airport, Quandamooka Country, 2018. Source: Kaya Barry.

Creative writing can also contest anthropocentric narratives, allow people to explore the self-representation of memories, rebuild cultural memories of place, and to acknowledge the multiplicitous, relational, and more-than-human nature of geographic memory. As Hawkins (2015, 252) argues, writing that goes beyond mimesis and experiments with language, structure, or representations can be used to explore ‘conflicting histories’, ‘uncertain futures’ and can destabilise ideas of bounded, singular and stable geographies. Fragmented and entangled stories like in Tara June Winch’s (2019) *The Yield* can contest official histories of place by filling in gaps and presenting multiple conflicting memories as Winch does when she braids together narratives from colonial records, Indigenous knowledges and familial memories. In addition, speculative futures might be explored to present what Derrida calls ‘the past as to come’ that would allow geographers (or geographer-writer collaborations) to respond to environmental changes while also exploring how these changes reflect the histories embedded in geographies so that cultural memories of place might be reclaimed and retold (in Zong 2020, 102). Geographers might look to novels such as Merlinda Bobis’ (2016) *Locust Girl* and Claire Coleman’s (2017) *Terra Nullius* that collapse possible futures and reclaimed pasts through notions of climate change, environmental justice and more-than-human worlds. Producing creative writing that engages with memory and more-than-human relationality allows new geographic research as well as constructing imaginaries of place that account for contested histories, uncertain futures and more-than-human agencies.

### **Recycling place-based experiences – Nina Ginsberg**

Discussions of coloniality of power resonate strongly with my research which looks at how bicycles impact schoolgirl travel in Lunsar, Sierra Leone. In working through myriad complexities, two U.S. bicycle-art projects that ‘recycle’ current views of place-based meaning-making stand out.

The *5 Cyclists Project* showcases the incredible untold story of five African-American women, Marylou Jackson, Velva Jackson, Ethyl Miller, Leolya Nelson and Constance White, who in 1928, biked 250 miles cross-country. At the time, cycling was overwhelmingly white and elite, a dynamic that still remains today (Mackintosh and Norcliffe 2007). The centrepiece *5 Cyclists* photograph (Scurlock 1928), challenges essentialising assumptions as to when, how and why certain bodies cannot move through landscapes. It questions mainstream notions of who a cyclist is, where they can go, how far they travel, what spaces they can access, and how mobility shapes environments encountered. This project reminds us that certain voices and lived experiences are systematically overlooked, and the need to shed light on the complex issues and legitimacy of racialised, gendered, and classed experiences.

Another cycling-based arts project reimaging geographies of heritage is *Talking with Ghosts about Freedom*. This multifaceted project includes a 2,000-mile series of bike trips that retrace the Underground Railway escape route used by slaves. Bike rider-artists Kelsey Robinson and Di-Ay Battad (n.d.) use their rides to contest one-sided versions of history and utilise narratives, memories, performance, soundscapes, and artefacts from African, Indigenous and people of colour to interrupt and re-story white-settler practices of place-based erasure. The project is a creative synthesis and a critical

exploration of what informs understandings of land, collective nostalgia, mobility, situatedness and identity.

Projects such as these are important decolonial research-action, as they actively resist and restore dominant grand narratives about methodology, cycling, geography and collective memory-making.

### **Developing a more-than-human arts practice – Amelia Hine**

Artistic practice presents an entry point for re-considering individual knowledges, or what amounts to memory, of different geographies. This statement is the driving force underlying my own emerging creative practice in which I use digital collage animation to form complex, multilayered more-than-human landscapes that reflect particular geographic conditions. This has included the short films *Metamorphosis*, which imagines a speculative subtropical urban future in which insects have taken on a significant role in city design, encouraging a reflection on the human-centredness of existing design practice, and *A Millennium of Seepage* that explores methods for visualising subterranean worlds and their nonhuman inhabitants (Figure 5).

The videos ask viewers to think about and with the materiality of familiar landscapes. They play with the idea that highlighting nonhuman bodies has the potential to encourage the recognition of everyday spaces as co-produced more-than-human assemblages.

While not directly interacting with the earth as a medium, this burgeoning arts practice is nevertheless in line with eco art conversations that posit that ‘because environmental problems are rooted in cultural practices and ideologies, it is artists, immersed



**Figure 5.** Installation view of *A Millennium of Seepage* in *Whoever's in the Soil*, shown at STABLE Artspace Brisbane, 2021. Source: Image courtesy STABLE.

in world and cultural practices, who are ideally situated to locate and develop effective responses' (Carruthers 2006, 4) (or perhaps affective responses in my case). The pursuit of imagery that prompts viewers to engage with nonhuman worlds in relation to our contemporary environmental condition in ways that do not inspire immobility borne of guilt or a sense of distance from the problem is an important path of enquiry. Art that engages with geographic imaginaries is, I believe, well placed to address this call by eliciting a sited sense of a thickened present ripe with possibilities for nonhuman collaborations and, as a consequence, encouraging attentiveness to other ways of living in the world.

The more-than-human ontologies communicated in the set of reflections collated above respond to the workshop and Special Issue aim to examine the entanglement of art, memory, colonial power, ethics and politics. They show that the more-than-human required by and produced through creative approaches facilitate the de-centring of the human subject, and the orthodoxies of an anthropocentric epistemology in memory-based research. In conversation with theme 1 on decolonial interventions, the latter is bound up with colonial ways of knowing, including an ethics and politics which ignores or marginalises the centrality of nature, plants and animals. In this Special Issue contributors expand upon these concerns affording epistemic attention to sounds and signs, plants and gardens, taps and water, landscapes and buildings and factories and machines.

### Conclusion: writing and reflecting together

This paper has detailed our individual and collective reflections on the workshop questions. Two key themes emerged from our personal contributions and subsequent collaborative discussions. The first of these was how memory becomes material through public art and arts practices. This materiality is manifest in tattooed skins (Dorell), coloured and embroidered fabrics (Lobo and Rodriguez Castro), poems (Narayan), photographs (Pini), and artistic installations (Nevin Berger). As memories are materialised and brought into conversation with decolonial praxis and Indigenous and ancestral ways of knowing, they reveal colonial violence and histories of place in so called Australia (e.g. racialised and classed in Proserpine and Tiwi Islands), as well as invoke re-connection (e.g. Indigenous Oceanic *vā*), sovereignty, healing from armed violence (e.g. of the Colombian armed conflict) and re-claiming national and world histories (*Edge of Trees*). The process of creating and the engagement with creative works as part of memory making is deeply affective, often eliciting conflicted emotional states such as joy and anger. Collectively the contributions highlight a heterogenous but shared colonial history in Australia, Colombia, Oceania and Chile where there has been an attempt to contain, silence, disconnect and violently take ancestral memories of place.

The second theme which contributors' work spoke to was the variety of ways that memory work is practised, presented, captured, and visualised. In a similar vein to the first theme, materiality and how presences and voices manifest was tangible in these reflections, including the visualising and illustrating of narratives that are non-verbal through photographic medium (Boyd), or the tracing of women's histories that were untold in Afro-American archives, photographs, and artefacts (Ginsberg). Similarly, the use of photographs to think about the textures of place, linking the vibrant



saturations of the landscape to unknown, learning's of postcolonial places (Bhattacharya), and the feeling of and with the world through overlooked, fleeting, or inaccessible memories of the nonhuman realm (Barry and Hine). These are inherently more-than-human ways of being in, feeling with, and listening to the world (Dowling, Lloyd, and Suchet-Pearson 2017) that challenge representational accounts of creative expression and practice (Jones 2011).

As we responded to the workshop across the two themes summarised above and brought this paper to fruition, we did not know it at the time, but we were working with similar energy to other geographers who were grappling with collective modes of assembling, doing, thinking, and writing research (e.g. Dufty-Jones and Gibson 2021; Eye et al. 2020). This is indicative of a growing tradition of Australian geographical work that aims to do research collectively, and to embrace collaboration, experimental, and often messy and uncertain tasks as vital for research (e.g. Zhang et al. 2019; Lobo et al. 2020). While this shift to more collaborative writing is not exclusive to Australian geographical research, we do want to emphasise the growth of these kinds of workshops and experiments that are increasingly valued and (financially) supported by scholarly funding bodies and societies.

Further, we are conscious that the 'neoliberalized governmentalities' that prioritise scholarly 'metrics, competition and individuals are hopelessly inadequate but distressingly enduring' (Dufty-Jones and Gibson 2021, 14), and these come to bear in the capacities for each of us, at various career and life stages, to participate in such collaborations. The time-period in which the workshop took place—in that all-too-familiar impose of the pandemic offered little alternative to an online participation mode—layers further exaggerations of the multiple positions that we inhabit and therefore bring to our participation in this collective writing task. While we want to emphasise the task that we set out to do as facilitating a collegial and generative approach to writing this collective introduction, we must acknowledge the privileges or vulnerabilities that we did not share or inhabit equally. Most of us are early career researchers, practitioners and scholars in precarious positions that limit our capacity to engage in these approaches.

The simultaneity of thinking, reflecting and writing, both collectively and individually throughout the various stages of the workshop over 2021, ensured that we embrace the potential of working not just with existing knowledge, but with the anticipated thrill of knowing and not-knowing. This required a sense of slowness, care and attunement towards various paces of creating and thinking. In working as a collective, we move but we also pause, stop to think through our own ideas and the ideas of others. We attempt to blur the conventional geographical bounds of place and time and to centre the differences and commonalities in our creative process.

The papers that constitute this Special Issue represent an extension of our creative and collective process as artists, practitioners and geographers. Ngugi artist Libby Harward's piece narrates relational processes of listening, calling out, knowing and understanding Country through art. The more-than-human knowing through creative practices is also addressed through Chantelle Bayes' article on creative writing for remaking the geographic memory of gardens and Becky Nevin Berger's artistic practice-led contribution on water flows. Discussing collective creative processes in research Candice Boyd and Andrew Gorman-Murray's piece reflects on photographic practices

with young people and Janis Hanley's article unveils the potential of drawing and mapping for generating understandings of spatial memories in heritage.

## Notes

1. The workshop was organised by Diti Bhattacharya, Laura Rodriguez Castro, Kaya Barry and Barbara Pini, facilitated by generous support from the Geographical Society of New South Wales and the Griffith Centre for Social and Cultural Research, Griffith University. Nineteen people attended.
2. This title is a reference to Bergman, A. Bergman, B. and Marvin, H. 1974. *The Way We Were* lyrics © Arlovol Music, Colgems-emi Music Inc.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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