

## Constitutions of Site and Visitor at the Swarbrick Wilderness Discovery Site

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**Abstract:** Located just off the North Walpole Road, the Swarbrick Wilderness Discovery Site can be seen as a node of several different historical trajectories which are—to different extents—documented in the artworks which frame, or decorate, the site. My account draws on my own biography and probes the investments I have in my various post-settler entanglements with the area. I critique, in particular, the idea of “wilderness” as one formative to post-settler narrations and myths at the same time that it places indigenous practices of belonging under erasure. For, most recently, Swarbrick stood metonymically for the campaign to preserve “old growth forests,” culminating at the end of the 1990s, and yet it is and has been also a site of logging, agriculture, Noongar belonging, that is, of pre-colonial and settler colonial spatial practices. In this article, I explore the different ways the Swarbrick Wilderness Discovery site positions itself and, critically, its visitor within frameworks provided by ecocritical and environmental discourse and post-settler theories.

**Keywords:** postcolonial ecocriticism, post-settler belonging, ficto-criticism, landscape architecture, wilderness

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Located just off the North Walpole Road in the southwest corner of the Australian continent, the Swarbrick Wilderness Discovery Site creates multiple meanings through the artworks and installations on site, as well as through its virtual presences.<sup>1</sup> I visited the site in autumn 2007 for the first time, returned in 2010, and I return to it once more here, in this contribution. Completed only in 2006, the site was very new

the time I first visited it. My friend Julie took me there, aware of my academically attuned interest in wilderness (resultant in Crane, *Myths of Wilderness*). Now a biologist assessing the impact of mining projects in the north of Western Australia, in the late 1990s and early 2000s she had been deeply involved in the campaigns to stop logging in the region. Activists faced fines and convictions for their behaviours back then; now the Western Australian government had put aside \$300,000 AUS for site construction and interpretative public artworks to “express personal connections to country and evolving community perception of this landscape” (AILA). Some three years later, I returned to the site with my mother, who grew up in the region on a farm and whose brother once worked in a sawmill, this time vested with an autobiographical interest. My companions, human and theoretical, shaped both visits, and my approach was and continues to be angled (cf. Ahmed 37). My own positionings<sup>2</sup> as friend/daughter and scholar, as well as tourist, led me to this attempt to trace how these positionings affected my engagement in the site and the contexts engaged by the site.

I am driven there, the first time, by Julie, in her second-or-third-hand off-road vehicle; I am driven there, from the south, only ten minutes off the round-Australia-Route and we are there; I am driven by my preoccupation with wilderness and readings of postcolonial and environmental philosophies. Julie asks me, “What is wilderness?” and, looking out of the open windows at the trees and paddocks flitting past as we drive on, I mutter three or four different answers, trying to reconcile our physical approach with those philosophical accounts with which I am grappling. She knows where we are going. The wind blows through the window as we drive along the bitumen roads; when we hit dirt, the fine particles mixing with the air rush in: smells of dirt and eucalyptus leaves, particles that land in lungs and eyes. Bodily senses confront sense-making.

I drive there, the second time, air-conditioning on, with my mother—driving her to visit the site with me. The approach this time is a trajectory from the north, away from family, whose residences are scattered through the state. Her childhood home, to the southeast, has been sold: the farm, at that small size, no longer financially feasible. We take a backroads route; the windows are closed to the dirt of the roads. The car

is scratched by trees encroaching on the roads outside, shock-absorbers on the axles cushion our journey over uneven, weathered tracks, and I have to break suddenly to avoid crashing into an emu. Closer by, we stop for directions—I don't remember exactly how to get there, and the approach from the opposite direction confuses me a little—and then turn onto the bitumen towards Swarbrick.

I am driven to the site; I drive others to the site: the site interpellates me and my companions, both physical and imagined. In its negotiations of cultural politics of the region, the site addresses other drives, and I am driven to imagine them as I drive towards the site: the Noongar people, driven off their traditional lands by the first settlers ("pioneers"); these settlers, who cleared the land and its vegetation, driving off native species to be replaced by others (i.e., dairy cattle); the settlers then driven to logging to support themselves financially, driving the trees off to other places on the backs of trucks; then activists, driving "down" from Perth (mostly) to protest logging; these activists, in turn, driven off in the back of police paddy wagons; and, finally, the site in its current form, driving people (drivers themselves) to consider these multiple stories and conflicting trajectories.

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A "wilderness discovery site" necessarily constitutes a number of tensions. There are the tensions entailed by the concept of wilderness—between indigenous cultures and (post)settler cultures, between belonging and nation and nature, for example—and also the tensions implicit in discovery—the gesture of individual achievement in the name of larger forces (i.e., Empire), the gesture of erasure of other peoples' belonging. These are compounded when they are brought together in a particular site. Working through such tensions, and highlighting the contradictions that thus emerge, is part of the work with which a postcolonial-ecocritical approach must engage.

The Swarbrick site works to be an "attraction" to provide an "old growth" experience and "a powerful personal journey of interpretation" (AILA). It works in two modes—presentation and contemplation, or history and story—that form the constitutive tension of my interpretation of the site. Confronted with quotes, encountering trees and art-

works alike, what story do I tell, and how does that fit in with or work against the various histories the site seeks to address?

In order to counter the idea that the act of writing this contribution might be read as offering a singular, authoritative account of Swarbrick Wilderness Discovery Site, I emphasise (renderings of) my own personalised trajectories into and away from the site, which remain necessarily incomplete.<sup>3</sup> By writing of my visits to Swarbrick Wilderness Discovery Site, I recognise that I am engaging in the Romantic fallacy, articulated in William Wordsworth's canonical "Preface to Lyrical Ballads," of recollection in tranquillity that works to mask the recollection component. But, importantly, I want to probe this process of constitution of site and visitor, suggesting that the intransitive *probe into* might become a transitive *probe* with the instrument of writing, engendering a hermeneutics of object and subject that works to account for difference by occupying the position of the self.<sup>4</sup> I acknowledge that my post-settler whiteness brings privilege into the equation: rather than working to camouflage it, I want to foreground it. I hope not to do so as a gesture of reiterated power but rather, in a humbling acknowledgement, that this is the only story I *can* tell.

Because: one of the key quandaries that both postcolonial and ecocritical approaches face is "speaking for the other," that is, addressing the dynamics and problematics of taking up a position conceived of as "other," be this "other" encoded in terms of culture or nature. This, in turn, necessitates an elucidation of the (discursive) processes that lead to this encoding as "other." In this article, I suggest the dynamics of how this problem of "speaking as/for other" might be more productively imagined by stepping back to query the issues of "speaking." This "speaking" might be "with other," it might be "responding to other," and yet it is inevitably a "speaking as me," where this "me" entails the creation of my own position, exposed and entangled in interpolations of state and space, responding to contexts and conversations. For this, I use the term "positioning" to stress the dynamics of this process and its susceptibility to further considerations and interpolations. The gerund "-ing" marks the ongoing characteristic of this process, opening up my position at this particular site (and many others) to challenges of authenticity, historicity, and "stories-so-far" (the term is Doreen Massey's; see *For Space*).

And so here: I attempt to untangle the various threads, the various “stakes held” in the region as they are present(ed) at the site. To follow Catherine Spellman, “the relationship between landscape and architecture might be imagined over and over again, in such a way that each is defined less as a quantifiable object and more as an idea, a way of seeing, act of making, and way of engaging culture and society” (10). Following the impetus here, I find it possible to “read” the site almost, but not quite, as I might a written text: paying attention to aesthetics and to how the pieces fit together, to the way the site-as-text is put forward (by whom, responding to what forces, for whom), and to how I contextualise both the text and my responses to it. All of these aspects are as true for an interpretation of a written text as they are for an interpretation of a site. At the same time, and I wish to stress this, it is important to remember the “extratextuality” of the site: Swarbrick is not a *metaphorical* site—as discursive moments have been labelled following the “spatial turn”—but an actual site. It is a site located in the southwest of Western Australia; a tourist site, not far off the “round-Australia-route”; a site which was funded by the state government and which has won prizes; a site that is part of a network of sites, similarly conceived and located (like the site “Understory”), similarly located (the site “Tree-Top Walk,” for instance), and similarly conceived (perhaps the site “Uluru?”). It is a site of confluences of visual, olfactory, auditory and the tactile senses.

And yet: such sites only exist insofar as they are imagined, visited, or otherwise engaged with. This is *not* to say that there is no reality beyond “the word” (in a post-structuralist sense). Rather, a site is always already part of a system—be it ecological, epistemological, ontological, and so on. We have different ways of comprising such a system—different angles we take in approaching it, different suspicions regarding the singularity implicit in “a system,” different connections we make between other specific systems. On site, these ways of knowing are also multiple, intellectual, and visceral, engaging all the senses (which I can only narrate here; see also Law).

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This part of Western Australia is many things. Take the eucalyptus, for instance (a collective noun and hence myriad materialities). The Karri

and Tingle, these tall trees, shift meaning depending on perspective; they can simultaneously evoke sight, site, smell, and strife. As elsewhere in the world, the Latin names bear witness to their European cataloguers—the Karri (*Eucalyptus diversicolor*) and Tingle (*Eucalyptus guilfoylei* [Yellow Tingle] or *Eucalyptus jacksonii* [Red Tingle])—whereas the common names are often languaged traces of Noongar culture, as is the case with Marri and Jarrah (whose anglicised names [i.e., Red or Blue Gum, Swan River Mahogany] have since reverted to their Noongar denominations). The Karri and Tingle tower over human forms. Some specimens have been transformed into lookouts for bushfires (sight) like the well-known Gloucester Tree in Pemberton. Others form site, like at the Walpole-Nornalup Tree-Top Walk. Sixty-metre-high trusses support a walkway accessible to feet and wheelchairs alike, snaking and shaking through the canopy of Tingles—and explicitly linked to Swarbrick by the Department of Environment and Conservation website. The smell of the trees here is ubiquitous and unmistakable, and the eucalyptol (of terpene and cymene) is ascribed with numerous properties, including nervous depressant. Another smell, the particular olfactory sensation of burnt eucalyptus, suggests bushfire and with it, practices of burning off reinstated by governmental agencies from pre-colonial times.

And the strife: of trees cleared, logged, planted, and protected. The Swarbrick site forms a node of these different historical trajectories, which are documented or referenced in the artworks that frame and/or decorate the site. However, before I can write of the artworks, I must stop a moment at the sign that reads “Swarbrick,” which has been a site of strife. Most recently, Swarbrick stood metonymically for the campaign to preserve “old growth forests,” culminating at the end of the 1990s. As Iain Copp explains, “Swarbrick, in the WWA [Walpole Wilderness Area] was the last stand for protesters who demonstrated against logging of old-growth forests during the 1990s. This campaign was pivotal in turning public opinion against logging and through it helped cause a change in government and the creation of the WWA” (6).<sup>5</sup> The site is more than just a celebration of this change in opinion. Obviously prior to the campaigning highlighted by Copp, and in which my friend Julie took part, logging took place in the area. In fact, up until

recently, the road that leads to the Wilderness Discovery site had a road sign reading “Logging Road” (the sign was removed after the construction of the site, but the name can still be found on Google Maps, for instance). To prevent logging from taking place, campaigners or activists locked (themselves) on to logging machinery and built intricate devices to embed themselves in the roads, which led to direct conflict with loggers (or, more specifically, the companies for which they worked). These conflicts were mediated, most often, by the police (i.e., the state). The general area around Walpole, between Denmark and Manjimup, is marked also by agricultural use, sometimes visible from the road and more obviously in satellite images. Some of these farms stemmed, in turn, from the Group Settlement Scheme for assisted migration in the early twentieth century: my mother grew up on such a farm near the Kent River; her grandfather was one of these settlers. And for thousands of years before that, Noongar people were present in the area; their practices of land management affected the vegetation over such a long time that burning practices have recently been readopted by governmental agencies for regeneration purposes—many plant species have adapted to such fire-burning practices. Far from pristine and untouched, therefore, this is a deeply cultural, deeply touched, landscape. The history of human presence in the area is visible, even tangible.

After following the “Swarbrick” sign at the turn-off from the North Walpole Road, I come to a carpark. There are toilets for my and other visitors’ convenience. We are alone in 2007; in 2010, cars with numberplates from around the country line up in the shade. A large stainless steel construction painted to look like a door indicates the start of the site, with images of papers pinned to its surface, called the “Door of Perception.”<sup>6</sup> As an object, it does not function as a door. I walk past it, not through it. Almost but not quite a door, it provides a point of access into the site, and the image of papers demonstratively pinned on its surface recollects Martin Luther pinning his theses to the church door, foregrounding the attribution of meanings taking place behind it.

Next, I walk alongside the “Wall of Perception,” where my reflection accompanies me. The considerable size of the wall (3 metres tall, 39 metres long) means that I can walk for some distance accompanying

myself. The reflective surface of the “mirror-grade stainless steel” (AILA) emplaces me in this “pristine” environment. It reflects and invites reflection. As I stop to pause and read the quotes, engraved in leaves and key dates, engraved on book pages (also “leaves” as in “a leaf of paper”) on the surface of the steel, these words project onto my reflection, quite literally. The juxtaposition of leaves and books on the wall references the materiality of books, from which so many of the ideas of wilderness I brought with me came. My image, amongst the leaves reflected on this wall, together with the books, leaves, and words engraved on the surface reminds me how reliant my knowledge is on products of trees.

The surface functions as both mirror and as slate. It draws the attention of the viewer in two ways at once: both outwards and inwards. It calls, interpolates me into the site, and at the same time it calls me back to myself, forcing me to acknowledge my positionings.<sup>7</sup> A shift in focus of my eyes means I see words or myself—my camera is better at bifocalization than I am; such technologies can do work that my eyes cannot. Standing in front of the respective quotes, I can either focus on the phrases (with my image offering a blurry background) or on my image (slightly distorted by the etchings on the wall). This dual presence is enacted within the environment, the mirror doubling the trees and flora at the site, querying the relationship between site and image, between place and story.

The dates and quotes, written on the mirrored surface of the Wall of Perception, constitute a visual enactment of the ways in which history (as written texts, so History with a capital H) writes over the ways in which the visitor—me—can conceive of themselves (myself/-selves). The sources of the quotes are often given; however, some of those who are quoted are further contextualised (locality, ethnicity, official function) whilst others are not. The viewer is expected to know who Bob Hawke is (Prime Minister of Australia from 1983–1991), to know who William Blake is (the English poet who lived from 1757–1827), and to understand that the Noongar people are the indigenous custodians of the region. Others who are quoted, most notably local stakeholders, are ascribed denominations of contextualisation, for example Tom Whitaker, who is “President [of the] South Coast Environment Group.”



The unevenness in the references exposes intention and interpolation: the assumed addressees.

The wall also enacts a manifestation of human interaction with environments, with a history of inclusion and exclusion, serving as a boundary or barrier, alluding perhaps also to the frontier. Barriers, particularly in concrete forms such as the “Wall of Reflection” and in the form of fences, have a specific colonial history in the demarcation of property, and this is all the more so in so-called settler colonies such as Australia. The fixedness of the historical dates engraved on the wall and the clear trajectory from past to present troubles the explorative, associative quality of most of the rest of the site and suggests progress, replacement, and a lack of simultaneous stories. This kind of History is the kind that seems sanctioned, at the cost of others, or as Doreen Massey puts it, “it is not just buried histories at issue here, but histories still being made, now” (118).

I follow a gap in the Wall of Perception onto the path. The bitumen path seems rather prescriptive; this specific material is used to set the “proper” path apart from possible alternatives. I walk along it as it traces an irregular circuit from the wall through the vegetation—dominated by the tall trees—past five artworks. Two pieces—the “Golden Torus” and “Ghost Feather”—are suspended from the trees above the path. The other three—“Message Sticks,” “Colonial Totem,” and “5000 Seeds”—are placed at a short distance just off the path. At a total length of 500 metres, this path is no trek, no “wilderness adventure” (remember, the toilets on site), and the bitumen path facilitates access for those who may require mobility assistance.<sup>8</sup>

Concise interpretive guides are provided on short signposts throughout the site, giving names and artists for the artworks, as well as a short impetus for consideration. The signpost in front of “Golden Torus,” for instance, declares this “is the ancient geometric metaphor of unity. It symbolises the interconnectedness of all living things.” Information regarding the artists or the brief to which they were responding is available online (to a certain extent), however not on-site. A de-historicised, de-personalised, nearly de-contextualised framework is thus provided for the artworks and constitutes a stark contrast to the work done by the quotes and dates provided on the wall. The artworks suggest the

simultaneity of different claims to the region that counters the historicity of order that dominates other accounts that rely on dates, like those on the wall. At the same time, though, I felt this politics of information to be rather frustrating, particularly later at home when I realised that some of my assumptions about the artworks were incorrect, which had consequences for my initial responses. Two of the artworks, “Ghost Feathers” and “Golden Torus,” to which I will turn first, were for me quite straightforward symbols in a European/philosophical tradition. “Message Sticks,” however, was closely entangled with my response to “Colonial Totem,” as well as to “5000 Seeds” (possibly also because they were all made from similar materials). My presumption was that the artworks were all made by white (European, even Anglo-Australian) artists. The team Loreнна Grant and Alan Clarke made four of the pieces. However, an artist of Noongar heritage, Peter Farmer (who is also known as Cherriger [Blue Wren] or Peter John Farmer II), made the piece “Message Sticks.” This was frustrating in that it revealed my biases as straight out of a whiteness studies textbook, and yet, given the care taken on-site to specify “local resident” Shawn Councillor’s Noongar heritage but not Farmer’s, my bias is one for which I might perhaps be forgiven. Perhaps not, but to whom can I appeal?

The “Ghost Feather” hangs in its environment; it is suspended, a state that echoes in its materiality, as well as in its subtitle: “A eulogy for the lost” (Grant). Evoking both loss and the fauna through its subtitle, it references that which cannot be seen: extinct species. Its white colour reinforces its ghostly state and reminds me of other ghosts, the Noongar presence and the white European settlers alike. It is a feather but more the size of a human. Suspended in the trees, its location relies on the continual presence of the trees, which were once at danger of being logged and whose companions of the same species constituted habitats for those birds we can no longer see or hear. Its materiality—constructed of kevlar, steel, and resins—is overtly artificial, and it seems to fulfil a role as a plastic simulacra for the loss which cannot be undone. And yet, unlike the bird species it works to reference, the materials from which it is made means that it will survive longer than a human lifetime. The “Ghost Feather” is static, suspended in both senses of the word, and

yet the heaviness of the materials conflicts with the notion that this feather might once have drifted from the canopy to the undergrowth. This object, however, is suspended, in time as well as in space, a referent of the impossible. Its position, moreover, means I must lift my head upward to view it. It is just beyond my reach; there is no way I might touch it, giving it a further, almost ephemeral, quality of loss.

The “Golden Torus” is the other artwork suspended above the path. It is a large doughnut shaped ring covered in gold paint (the geometrical term torus refers to “a surface or solid formed by rotating a closed curve, especially a circle, about a line which lies in the same plane but does not intersect it . . . like a ring doughnut” [“torus”]). It recalls a halo, of the kind that angels are often depicted wearing in Christian traditions, such as Christmas tree angels or in icon paintings. As such, it evokes a particular Western tradition of thought. The fact that it is suspended above again draws my attention upward, encircling the sky and canopy of trees above my head, all the while alluding to discourses of the sublime, intrinsic to discourses of wilderness. It is some 4–5 metres above the ground and just over 1.5 metres in diameter. The golden ring is made of kevlar and resin, like the Ghost Feather, but is also composed of steel and gold leaf. As such, it glows much like the icons from churches but in the sunlight of the outdoors. The gold, too, recalls histories of gold rushes to the east in Kalgoorlie; the material, the gold, is both here and elsewhere, like my thoughts.

“5000 Seeds,” according to the sign, is a “veil in which to interpret the forest, manifesting an alternate window to the forest.” It is set right next to the bitumen path and is made of a rusted steel plate, mounted on two posts, and into which many minute holes have been drilled. It does have the effect of a veil, although my association of this artwork with the veil is not “an alternate window” as suggested by the sign but rather a sheltered, even purified, line of sight. In my reading, the view it provides of the site is restricted or limited. Other visitors to the site have called the effect “pixelated” (Renkio). Its rustiness (like that of “Message Sticks”; see below) works to suggest long-term exposure to the environment, a germaneness, a situatedness. The minute dots punctured into its surface recollected, for me on-site, the dots of dot paintings made popular by

Aboriginal artists of desert origin. I resisted the flattening of cultures I felt this artwork enacting in what I hastily assumed was an appropriation by Anglo-Australian artists in my initial projection of ethnicity, as this corner of Australia is thousands of kilometres away from the desert regions of dot painting renown. Whilst in front of this piece, the kitschy ease of identifying the meanings at works in the “Golden Torus” and my contemplation of the contradiction of a plastic symbol of extinction embodied in “Ghost Feather” gave way to discontent, casting my interpretation of the other pieces in a different, somewhat dismissive, light.

“Colonial Totem” is an artwork comprised of two materials. One of the materials is the wooden pole, upon which the rest is mounted, viscerally and visibly drawing on the environment, the wood of the trees. The other material is metal rendered into an 8-foot crosscut saw and a log carrier. The juxtaposition of tools and product, of saw/carrier and wooden pole, of a tool of corrosion and the product it generates, enacts a tension of its own. The tools, the interpretive aid suggests, “represent human endeavour and courage in the colonising of Western Australia” (and the use of imperial measures in the descriptions [8 feet, not, say, 2.5 metres] speaks to its historical contextualisation). The message continues: “The Colonial Totem is an historical window of attached meanings.” This artwork, to me, does not provide a “window” in the way that “5000 Seeds” might be seen as a veil/window, as the wording linking the two artworks together would suggest. Rather the totem references a historical moment that may have entailed “human endeavour and courage” for some but meant “human sacrifice and carnage” for others. A totem, perhaps, but with more than one angle to the story.

The entanglements of meanings provided by these four artworks—by Lorena Grant (a sculptor who has public art pieces throughout Western Australia, including at the “Understory” site, located “down-the-road” at Northcliffe) and Alan Clarke<sup>9</sup> (a landscaper and sculptor, who has had works displayed in Mundaring close to Perth, for instance)—became knotty when juxtaposed with the fifth artwork, “Message Sticks.” For these two artists are (apparently, see note 9) of European or “whitefella” ancestry. Peter Farmer, the artist behind “Message Sticks,” is of Noongar ancestry (and was recognised as Visual Artist of the Year at the Perth

National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee Awards in 2008). He is known as a painter as well as sculptor. No reference to any of this is made at the site.

Five metres high, “Message Sticks” is constructed of metal, which has rusted in a manner similar to “5000 Seeds.” It, too, has a geometric design, cut into three panels which are attached to two metal poles. Two panels “face” the viewer; one is mounted on the “back,” and there is some overlap between the panels. The design has been cut into the metal sheets and is comprised of gently undulating S-shaped strips connected by thinner strips. Because of the overlapping, my physical perspective has an effect on my understanding of the artwork, as the extent of the overlap will change with respect to my height and distance from the artwork. Farmer notes: “My sculpture is in the middle of two message sticks having the look of karri trees. The most significant symbol is the Norne—the black snake which is visually thick and seemingly foreboding. I hope it evokes thoughts that Swarbrick is still a wilderness area and that wild things roam” (DEC, “Discover. . . Swarbrick”). Given this background knowledge, the geometric shapes do recollect the patterns made by a snake in the ground. The name, with its “Message,” harks back to the “Totem”; the basic structure (metal sheets mounted on two poles) and its materiality links it with that of “5000 Seeds.” Initially, I was aggravated at the presumptuousness of the two rusty artworks that appeared to appropriate indigenous designs. But one of the artworks *is* an indigenous design. Rather than only redeeming this singular artwork, it led me to reconsider the particular messiness of the correlations between indigenous art and post-settler art—in particular, how assumptions about traditional forms, materials, and motives tend to be prescriptive and restrictive, and also how the policing or management of borders is motivated by particular, not necessarily clearly articulated, interests. My assumptions regarding appropriation needed re-thinking, as did my dismissal of the simplicity of the artworks.

The identity politics of post-settler belonging and the use of particular artistic traditions—and indeed the exclusion of “traditional” artists from participating in or utilising modern developments or techniques (see Byrne)—entails interpretive frameworks that are open to the (negotia-

tion of) narratives of self and belonging. Closing off my interpretation in disgust at presumed appropriation proves, at close examination, to be as damaging to my capacity to engage with the artworks as reducing the artworks to interpretations offered by the brief signs on-site or the texts provided online, the heritage of their respective artists, or to the reduction of mimesis without taking the materials or experimental forms into account. What I make of the artworks is of course a sum of these factors, a sum of the positionings at the site and later: aesthetics entangled in contexts.

The multiple meanings that the site generates with its visitors, who are called into the site in particular by the Wall of Perception, as outlined above, are environmental. The artworks that comprise the Swarbrick Wilderness Discovery Site are not displayed indoors—for example, in an urban art gallery—but are on-site, in the forest of the southwest. Here, then, the title of the site undergoes a change in emphasis: it is the discovery site for Swarbrick wilderness rather than a wilderness discovery site located at Swarbrick (which is how I had initially read it). Presence at the site is simultaneously exposure to the elements and being at a site that entails all senses. The quotes and somewhat construed visual references to the various traditions of being at this site—which may not be predicated on the wilderness that figures so prominently in the title of the site—are augmented by the sense and senses of actually being present at the site. The sound of gravel crunching under car tyres and boots, trees rustling with the wind, maybe a bird call; the smell of eucalyptus trees, and, depending on the season and wind direction, burnt wood at a distance, the musty dirt, maybe the faint salty smell of the sea; the alternation between sunlight and shade on the skin, wind dancing on the skin, maybe the coarseness of bark at fingertips—the senses evoke an immediacy of place, cautioning the visitor to remember the way the world (/site) constitutes us at the same time as we try to constitute, or narrate, it.

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The Wilderness Discovery Site at Swarbrick was commissioned in 2001 by the Western Australian government (see AILA). Whereas the Tree-Top Walk, a nearby attraction considered part of the same conglomer-

ate of Wilderness Discovery Sites, is situated in the Walpole-Nornalup National Park established in 1955, the Swarbrick site is part of the Mt. Franklin South National Park and was only gazetted in 2004 following the election results in 2001, which led to the halt on logging in old-growth forests. The political is entrenched in the site.<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George B. Handley write in their introduction to *Postcolonial Ecologies*: “Since it is the nature, so to speak, of colonial powers to suppress the history of their own violence, the land and even the ocean become all the more crucial as recuperative sites of postcolonial historiography” (8). If the establishment of the Swarbrick Wilderness Discovery Site is an act commissioned by a government, then there are some points here that need to be considered more closely. A government that lays bare the history of its own violence is one that, to a certain extent at least, can be considered a postcolonial government (although it may, in some of its other practices, still be considered a colonial government). Concomitantly, citizens of this government whose personal and familial (hi)stories are closely reflected and refracted through governmental policy, and who engage in those practises of the government that work to lay bare such (hi)stories, might instead of considering themselves settlers, engage with the terminology of post-settler, troubling the clear trajectories the “post-” might entail. Landscape architecture and land art, when commissioned by a (postcolonial) government, entails both a “recuperative site” as well as a politicised site, working both within and outside of state-sanctioned narratives. There is a way to insert the personal into the political here, a path that I can take that might acknowledge and resist such narratives. The particular discourses that such work might generate cannot be contained by the site itself, especially considering that many of the practices this site references—in particular, logging—continue (the ongoing logging of Karri forests elsewhere, even nearby, and the environmental damage to which logging gives rise like the destruction of habitats for many species as well as erosion). This is to say nothing of the continuation of land rights debates throughout Australia: not just an issue of ownership, but also an issue of custodianship (see Bayet) and entangled in the repercussions of legal decisions (like the “Mabo” decision and the “Wik” decision before it, landmark

decisions in land rights legal procedures in Australia's recent[ish] past). Land imaginaries, land politics, land ownership, land protection: these are issues demanding postcolonial ecocritical attention as well as issues demanding careful elucidation of speaking positions.

As mentioned earlier, I have visited the site twice. My interaction with the site, the angle I took in approaching the site, was irrevocably linked to not only the way in which I conducted myself with respect to the site but also the way in which I conducted myself in relation to my companions. On my first trip to the Swarbrick Wilderness Discovery Site, I was in a sense predisposed to encounter such a highly constructive and indeed construed site. I was sceptical of the capacity of a highly constructed tourist site to evoke wilderness, shared this scepticism with my friend, and found the artworks contrived. My companion pointed out the ambivalence toward the site expressed by members of her activist circle: many had faced legal repercussions only a few years prior, being imprisoned or fined for protecting the site upon which the artworks were now on display at the expense of the state government.

My second visit was an intentional revisiting of the site with my mother. At this stage I had already submitted my dissertation, although my conversations with wilderness and my dissertation were still ongoing as part of the process of thinking it through to publication. I was also thinking through an imagined conversation with academics at an upcoming conference and partaking in an actual conversation with my mother. My mother's family's historical presence as settlers in the region (my grandfather was a farmer and my uncle was both farmer and logger) was part of this conversation. Like many of her generation, my mother is active in genealogical research, and many of my conversations with her take place through my understanding of her as a genealogist. This genealogical interpolation, which is to be understood as an imagined interpolation as much as anything else, gave rise in turn to considerations of historical interpolations. I remember, at primary school, we celebrated the first Monday in June as the establishment of the colony in Western Australia, a date that commemorated Helen Dance's cutting down of a tree as the symbolic act of the establishment of this colony.<sup>11</sup> I pause to consider the very rich symbolism at work here for postcolonial ecocriticism: not only



does such a gesture of establishment place indigenous cultures under erasure, it celebrates the destruction of the environment as a constitutive act of state. This act of colonising far exceeds the standard acts of “planting” a flag in foreign soils, so often commemorated in visual representations and articulated in national narratives. The act of cutting down the tree does not rely on metonymy to function. The tree cut down, the clearing of grounds, is celebrated. And then, after the land has endured 150 years of more logging, I visit a site that celebrates not cutting down trees.

\* \* \*

Undoubtedly, what first brought me to the Swarbrick Wilderness Discovery Site was the promise I read into the title that I might be able to discover wilderness there. One of the two stories I tell foregrounds the let-down of the site’s promise, disguised in the premise of state-funded celebration (of what was, only a few years before, grounds for state-sanctioned arrest). The other story emphasizes parallels between the arcs of official history and personal history. It is only when these stories are brought together that they can begin to probe each other, to be used as “sites” for reflection. My interpretation of the artworks at the site is informed by the stories in which I embed them, and these are only two of the stories I have to offer, both which probe my being (at the site, as an Australian, a post-settler, an activist, a country girl . . .). The potential of wilderness to function as the grounds upon which a politics of belonging might be established depends on the kinds of stories we can tell ourselves of wilderness. As myth, it tends to precede and exceed our labels for it, but we might approximate it in accounts of our stories of it. To stress personal narratives is to stress the stakes of being human in a postcolonial world, in a world of “environmental crisis” that according to Lawrence Buell, “involves a crisis of imagination the amelioration of which depends on finding better ways of imagining nature and humanity’s relation to it” (2). To attempt to engage with the “others” entailed by postcolonial ecocriticism means that I move away from a model of comprehension that requires a centralised subjectivity, a container-like individuality that can be filled with information, narratives of identity, and consequently neatly labelled (I might instead trouble some labels, which is the work of the “post-” in front of the “settler”). This goes

for myself and for “others” (elusive or not). I can only articulate my relations, my connections, my positionings. To stress my story in its plurality is to stress the processuality, the malleability, and importantly the social dimension of hermeneutic processes; it is to foreground the uncertain grounds my feet walk over, past the walls and doors and artworks of the site and the world.

## Notes

- 1 A slideshow of the artworks—including the Door of Perception and the Wall of Perception—can be accessed online at the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects at <http://www.aila.org.au/projects/wa/swarbrick/slides/001.htm>.
- 2 I use the neologism “positionings” in order to stress the processual component, to reflect the idea that these are also open to change and in a state of becoming—to use a phrase that has gained some currency following the work of Deleuze and Guattari. “Positionings” is also my attempt to account for the influence of patterns and movements around that which is being positioned: the term insists on subjecthood and on being subjected.
- 3 The site is part of a network. The Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC)—previously known as CALM, or Conservation And Land Management—has a website that suggests that Swarbrick be “best visited in conjunction with a visit to Mount Frankland and the Valley of the Giants Tree Top Walk as these sites collectively form the Walpole Wilderness Discovery Centre” (Department of Environment and Conservation, <http://www.dec.wa.gov.au/content/view/4413/1558/>).
- 4 Some would call this approach fictocriticism: “Faced with matters of ways of knowing things coming from all points of the compass,” Muecke argues, “the contemporary writer asks what now can legitimate his or her point of view, and then tends not to just *add to* existing views of the world, but traces a part (which the region will follow, avidly of course) showing how we got to this position, and what is at stake” (108).
- 5 The term “old growth forests” is used to designate what are considered primeval forests—forests that have not been affected by human use, specifically logging or clearing for agriculture. The term has political weight in conservation debates, yet is very problematic because it, in its allusions to wilderness discourses, masks indigenous interactions with the environment (relegating these either to deep history [“old” as ancient, cf. Byrne] or to an erased history).
- 6 The phrase “Door of Perception” is clearly a reference to Blake, as becomes clear in the inclusion of the following quote on the wall: “*When the doors of perception are cleansed, man will see things as they truly are, infinite*” (original from Blake’s *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, 1793; as quoted on site). The phrase was taken

up by Huxley as the title of an account of his experiences taking mescaline (*The Doors of Perception*, orig. 1954), which in turn was adopted by the rock band The Doors, fronted by Jim Morrison. The palimpsest of meaning of the phrase “doors of perception,” reaching back to Romantic Blake, has a countercultural impetus. The object in Swarbrick called “the Door of Perception” alludes in this way to the counterculture of activists, even *Psilocybe subaeruginescens* the “magic” mushroom endemic to the area.

7 I have used the term interpolation following Ashcroft:

Interpolation counters Althusser’s proposition of the *interpellation* of the subject, by naming the process by which colonised subjects may resist the forces designed to shape them as “other.” Interpolation describes the access such “interpellated” subjects have to a counter-discursive strategy. This strategy involves the capacity to interpose, to intervene, to interject a wide range of counter-discursive tactics into the dominant discourse without asserting a unified anti-imperial intention, or a separate oppositional purity. (47)

8 The path suggests ready access, but remember that the site itself requires private transportation: there is no bus or railway station (passenger trains are rare outside of the metropolitan area of Perth in Western Australia), and the car or a rented private bus is prerequisite for visiting; the closest city—a denomination that Albany with its 33,000 inhabitants can bear in this part of Australia—is over 100 kilometres away; Perth, a metropolis in most people’s terms, is over 400 kilometres away.

9 It was much more difficult to find information about Alan Clarke. One issue may be the spelling of his name, which is consistently Clarke on all Swarbrick materials (AILA, DEC). My research indicates that he may also/properly spell his name Clark, as is the case in the materials, for example, on works done near Mundaring: I apologise if I am working under an incorrect assumption in this respect.

10 Similarly, the well-known Bibbulmun Track nearby has a history that closely connects it to dates of state and national anniversaries; its name and symbol reference indigenous Noongar culture.

11 The date at the beginning of June does not correspond to the time when this act took place, which was actually in August, but rather the day in which the boat *Parmelia* under the command of Captain Stirling arrived. Also of note is the agent of this action, a female, chosen as the wife of the captain of a later boat. There is a further entanglement at work here: the family *tree*.

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