PART 3

The visual context

Introduction

The potentially relevant material for the visual context of this project is vast. However, I feel that it is appropriate to refer only to a limited field of visual practice that I have subjectively identified as most inspiring and influential. Accordingly, many artists who have worked and are working with concepts of the representation of land, landscape and environment will not be mentioned in my discussion.

No reference will be made to non-western traditions including traditionally based Aboriginal art which, I acknowledge, uses complex ways of referring to land and location, as well as spatial and temporal relationships in the land, without employing illusionistic perspectival strategies. I am locating my field of practice within my Western cultural background only.

In the first section relating to the visual context I will reflect on the continuing power of perspectival landscape representation within a Western cultural tradition and the influence of what Gina Crandell has called ‘the pictorialisation of nature’.

In the second section I will examine works that, by the nature of the artists’ intentions and the methodologies and techniques they employ, belong in my view to a phenomenological visual mode.

The visual context – section 1

The pictorialised view

The mention of landscape pictures, be they paintings or photographs, conjures up a set of projections and image ideas. I am speaking generally here and with a popular concept of landscape pictures in mind. This popular concept of the grand vista, the sublime scene or the picturesque view is today confirmed and promoted by the ubiquitous symbol of the camera on road signs when approaching ‘look-out’ locations on ‘scenic routes’. In turn, the popular concept can be referred to a Western tradition of landscape painting and photography and to those modes of seeing and representing which I have located in Cartesian perspectivalism. Gina Crandell writes:

In powerful ways, pictures influence, and perhaps even help to constitute, our perception of places ... pictures often first induce us to visit various places, and then encourage us to photograph these places

... There is a specific set of pictures that ... have helped to mould our conception of the landscape and have thereby played a crucial role in the objectification, or pictorialisation of nature ... 35

The 'specific set of pictures' Crandell refers to belong to the genre of landscape painting, which was established in Europe and America between the late years of the 18th century and the early years of the 19th century. Landscape ceased to serve as a backdrop for heroic human acts, as had been its role generally during the Renaissance, and became a subject matter in its own right. The perspectival system of representing however, which was developed during the Renaissance and was philosophically endorsed by Descartes in the 17th century, remained the predominant visual mode. Notions of the 'beautiful', the 'sublime' and the 'picturesque' became important ingredients in the representation of landscape and the formulation of a pictorialised view from the 18th century to today. 36

Landscape photography has extended the conventions of landscape painting. In America, in the latter part of the 19th century, photographers like Timothy O'Sullivan, Carleton Watkins and Eadweard Muybridge made theatricalised scenographic pictures of the landscape, incorporating ideas of the sublime and the picturesque. However, photographs of the New Continent began also to serve a pragmatic purpose, that of providing authentic evidence for government surveys.

Landscape pictures in America gained political importance. Pictures became instrumental in alerting politicians and the public to the unique value of their surroundings and contributed towards the preservation of areas which have since been declared National Parks.

The preeminent landscape photographer of the 20th century, Ansel Adams has extended and re-shaped both the political and the aesthetic inheritance of his forebears. In turn, he has left a considerable legacy to landscape photographers and a general public today. I will discuss aspects of Adams' legacy and some images by one of his successors, the Tasmanian landscape photographer Peter Dombrovskis.

The legacy of Ansel Adams

In 1992 Andy Grundberg opened the Ansel Adams Scholars Conference in California. In the introduction to the resulting publication, Ansel Adams: New Light, he remarked:

35 ibid.
36 Edmund Burke in 1756 distinguished between the Beautiful and the Sublime. The Beautiful was considered to be a source of positive pleasure while the sublime was defined as vastness, terror and obscurity, bringing an intense emotion of delight. William Gilpin defined the Picturesque in 1792 as 'that peculiar type of beauty, which is agreeable in a picture'. Robert Smithson, a modern commentator, saw the Picturesque as a synthesis of the Beautiful and the Sublime. (See 'Sublime' and 'Picturesque' in The Dictionary of Art, ed. Jane Turner, Macmillan, 1996.)
Whether one considers Adams to be at heart a 19th-century Transcendentalist working in the Romantic tradition of the sublime ... or as the inventor of a hybrid, socially instrumental form of Modernism, ... there is no denying his considerable continuing impact on today's photography ... especially in the arena of landscape photography, the genre in which Adams' presence is most clearly manifest.37

How can one not be taken by the photographs of Ansel Adams! If one cannot afford to own an original print, there are many art posters of Adams' most popular images on the market, with few overtones of their political significance in their time. These images provide excellent windows, for the living-room, into the awesomeness of creation. Adams' technical brilliance, tonal richness, detail, and dramatisation can be triggers for meditation, reflection and longing. The more abstract images, or in Adams' words 'extracts', are based on classical modernist principles and promote the enjoyment of pure aesthetic values of line, shape, tone and composition.

![Image of Adams, Mount Williamson, Sierra Nevada](image)

Adams' work is embedded in the tradition of Western, and especially American, landscape representation and has equally influenced more recent painters and photographers as well as a general public. 'Adams' images

present an ideal; they build expectations within us. Our concept of what wilderness is and how it looks has, in part, been shaped by Ansel Adams.\textsuperscript{38}

In Adam’s photograph Mount Williamson, Sierra Nevada, the carefully orchestrated totalising perspectival view of the particular landscape speaks powerfully. We witness a moment of creation that has been eternally contained within the image. Adams, master of pre-visualising the eventual photographic print at the time of taking the picture, offers us an image of grandiose drama with a perfect balance of light, shadow, tonal variation, rendition of surface detail in the foreground and sense of enormous volumes in the distant hills. Wisps of cloud caress the hills and allow shafts of light, as if emanating from some almighty power above, to bring into being matter below.

When I saw this image in exhibition I was mesmerised by its virtuosity and its completeness. My eyes moved around the boulders in the foreground of the image to be almost forcefully led by the power of linear perspective towards the distance. The picture communicated to me a wonderfully modulated illusionary space; but not experienced, touchable matter. I remained the remote viewer who was granted a vision that celebrated a purely retinal engagement with the depicted scenery.

Many photographers in all parts of the world continue to adhere to the principles of a distancing pictorialised view. In the context of this exegesis I will refer to Tasmania’s best-known and renowned landscape photographer, Peter Dombrovskis.

\textit{Peter Dombrovskis}

In the representation of Tasmania’s wilderness the photographer Peter Dombrovskis (1945–1996) followed to a large extent in the footsteps of Adams’ landscape photography. He embraced the European and American traditions of the grand as well as the picturesque view. Nature, as in Adams’ pictures, appears virginal, unaltered by human presence, removed from the reality of everyday living. Dombrovskis’ images are widely published in Australia and hold a prominent place in the commercial market for the national and international promotion of Tasmania as a place with many areas of ‘untouched’ wilderness. His images are almost exclusively in full colour, and splendidly so.

In Dombrovskis’ East Face of Cradle Mountain, Western Tasmania we look at a serene, late afternoon, probably autumnal scene. The monocular lens of the camera provides us with a contained, instantly comprehensible view. The image is formally less decisive than Adams’ Mount Williamson, less dramatic and awesome and, I will claim, less incisive as an image. There seems to be a benign stillness in the air, allowing for an almost perfect reflection of the

\textsuperscript{38} Renee Haip, \textit{Ansel Adams: New Light – Essays On His Legacy and Legend}, op. cit., p. 75.
mountain in the lake. In this friendly setting I can perceive myself as a viewer, not within, but in proximity to the frame of the scene. Besides numerous scenographic views, close up views of small sections within a landscape occupy a noticeable place in Dombrovskis' work. In these we are invited in to look more intimately.

In *Seed heads of Clematis aristata*, Tasmania, we can marvel at a detail within the larger landscape. A cascade of seed heads sparkling with drops of water has been brought into focus by the camera lens. This image does acknowledge the walker and the photographer's presence in proximity to what we are shown. It alerts us to the value of stopping and engaging with the complexity of small things and may entice us to go searching for similarly wondrous corners of our natural surroundings.

While Dombrovskis' photographs do not strike with the same breathtaking operatic vision as Ansel Adams', they do allow us a participatory look. Dombrovskis' passion for bushwalking and his close association with the bush during extended field trips may well have contributed to that shift in expressive tendency.

Both Adams and Dombrovskis were environmental activists in their individual and time-specific ways. Their approaches, to representing landscape, live on through the works of many contemporary professional and amateur photographers throughout the world.

**The visual context – section 2**

**A phenomenological approach**

Moving away from a Cartesian perspectivalist mode of looking at the world I will now discuss art works and approaches to art-making that deal with a subjectified space. Here the artist is active participant in an environment and the viewer or the audience is invited to participate in an imaginative and sometimes physical manner. Maurice Merlau-Ponty wrote 'I do not see it
[space] according to its exterior envelope; I live it from the inside; I am
immersed in it. After all, the world is around me, not in front of me.39

In the attempt to find my visual context I have looked for strategies that are
conducive to visually communicating this experience of being in and part of
the world. By examining the works of several artists, I have identified four
strategies for devising a framing structure through which I will discuss the
works.

Engaging with detail in an environment promotes a physical, haptic encounter
and draws the senses to experience close up rather than motivating the eye to
gaze out. Under the heading detail I will refer to drawings by Alexandre
Lesueur, made on Maria Island in 1802; the art of John Wolseley and his
contemporary manner of responding to land; and the photographic inventory
of plants by Karl Blossfeldt, first published in 1928.

Spending time in a place, dwelling, and being aware of cycles of time nurtures
the experience of subjectified space, of belonging. Under the heading time I
will discuss works by David Stephenson, Tokihiro Sato, Hamish Fulton and
Richard Long.

The use of residues from an environment and the translation of these into
traces represents a material link to that environment. Under the heading trace I
will examine one particular piece of work by Richard Long; several works by
Nikolaus Lang; and some of the photogram works by Susan Derges and Harry
Nankin.

The format of presentation contributes substantially to how works are read
and interpreted. The frieze as open formal device serves to invite movement
and imaginings beyond the material borders of works. To conclude this
section I will refer to some of the properties of the frieze and to works
discussed earlier that employ this format.

While I have found it useful to provide a framework via ideas of detail, time,
trace and the frieze, the distinction between them has also been problematic. I
have found that often two, three or all of these strategies intersect in one work
or a manner of working.

**DETAIL**

*Lesueur on Maria Island*

Explorers, by nature of their mission, had to engage with the land in a
physical and methodical manner. The data they gathered typically included
topographical drawings of aspects and features of the terrain, maps to provide
an overview of the space and the relationships of important characteristics

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39 Maurice Merlau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception (And Other Essays)*, North Western
within this space as well as detailed scientific drawings of found objects. In the context of this paper I will refer to two of the detailed illustrations made by one of Baudin’s draftsmen, Charles-Alexandre Lesueur in early 1802 on Maria Island.40

The illustrations (as well as the written recordings from the voyage) have stimulated my imaginings about the island. They provide tangible links to the past, before the European colonisation of the island. Species of flora and fauna from that time continue to be part of the island’s ecological system. The drawings, together with collected objects, were used to produce taxonomies of flora and fauna. As fragments of a greater whole, they allowed for speculations and deductions to be made about a possible natural and cultural history of the place. The illustrations, while attempting to be scientifically accurate, also suggest a psychological dimension connected to experiences encountered by the explorers at the time.

In 1999 I took the opportunity to visit an exhibition of records from the Baudin Voyage in Sydney. The illustrations of sea creatures particularly impressed me. They supported my unarticulated feelings about the island which came from responses to what I actually saw and what my encounter with the island triggered in me emotionally.

6. Lesueur, Jellyfish, Cassiopea andromeda

40 The Baudin journey of exploration extended from 1800 to 1804 under the command of Captain Nicolas Baudin. From 18 February until 25 February 1802 the ships ‘Geographe’ and ‘Naturaliste’ lay in Oyster Bay off the west coast of Maria Island. During this period one party circumnavigated the island in a large dinghy while other parties explored the island.
The illustration, *Jellyfish, Cassiopea andromeda*, appears as an extraordinarily ornate piece of decorative art. It reminds me of baroque ornamentation in my native Bavaria and of standing on a beach on Maria Island and marvelling at a garden of jellyfish, pulsating and quivering along the whole stretch of the beach, as well as collecting less slippery remnants of life in that same area. Francois Peron's comment in 1802 resonates well with my own experience:

> The prodigious number of these animals, their symmetrical and exotic shapes, their beautiful colours and the suppleness and swiftness of their movements, were a spectacle which excited pleasure in the extreme.

And Paul Carter reflects in the catalogue essay accompanying the exhibition:

> ... their luminous watercolours of dead animals and deserted encampments were in praise of providence; they were the product of the act of grace that had spared them a further horizon of hope. Perhaps this explains their resemblance to Dutch still lifes, those Baroque allegories of mortality, with the feverishness of their clarities.

The expedition had suffered many casualties before reaching Australia. Carter suggests that the psychological impact of those experiences as well as of the encounters on Maria Island left visible traces in what were meant to be purely objective scientific illustrations.

The second illustration I will mention is not of a natural object but an artefact made of natural materials. It is a pencil sketch made by Lesueur in February 1802 of a burial place on Maria Island. It is descriptive of the structure and the materials used and suggests the surrounding landscape. The image becomes poignant in combination with the verbal account. Baudin's journal entry reads: 'Citizen Peron had discovered a tomb and brought back several human bones and even some pieces of flesh that the fire had not consumed.' Baudin refers to the tomb as 'skilfully and carefully made' and deduces that cremation of the dead is a common practice amongst Aborigines. No concern is mentioned in regard to the intrusiveness of Peron's dismantling of the tomb.

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41 Francois Peron was one of the scientists on the Baudin expedition who kept detailed journal records.
45 ibid.
I have gained entry to a past reality of Maria Island through these detailed drawings and notes, which a landscape view would never have been able to grant me. Equally, these records have affected my experience of the island and my image-making.

**John Wolseley**

Following on from my reference to works by early explorers, I will now discuss John Wolseley’s art-making. Wolseley is a contemporary explorer, wanderer, naturalist and artist. Since his immigration from England to Australia in 1976 Wolseley has conducted his personal exploration of the Australian land. His working methods are reminiscent of those of earlier explorers: they pay tribute to the legacy of John Ruskin’s deep romantic appreciation of nature and they call for an articulation of detailed observations in the daily encounter with the natural world.46 Sasha Grishin in a monograph about John Wolseley writes:

... It is as if he [Wolseley] combines the methodologies of the eighteenth century explorer artist, an empirical scientist, an environmentalist and an unbridled Romantic, to make a series of observations whose strength lies in the journey and the process rather than in the finished art object.47

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46 Wolseley makes reference to his upbringing and early training ... ‘I had John Ruskin, the Victorian painter and champion of Turner, shoved down my throat because he was a cousin and had given my father’s mother drawing lessons.’ John Wolseley in Orienteering: Painting in the Landscape / Carmichael, Makin, Wolseley, Deakin University, Victoria, 1982, p. 120.

In an exhibition catalogue we find specific mention of Wolseley’s attraction to detail: ‘Intimate vignettes of the landscape are his concern, rather than wide vistas.’ This is supported by many of Wolseley’s engaging and prolific journal entries. A sample reads:

... [I]t was the most gigantic grasshopper, rounded and plump, exactly camouflaged on the rocks on which it leapt. It measured three inches by two inches. BUFFORANIA CRASSA, I think. Got back to camp 4.30 pm and then drew it on one of the 12 x 26 cm bits of paper.

Wolseley passionately lives his nomadic life and passionately assembles his works. His visual language is far from restrained. Wolseley works mostly on eclectic montages, often combining topographical drawings, diagrammatic map references, botanical drawings, diary notes, rubbings and sometimes bits of found matter together on his picture surfaces. He tends to work on location in segments which he later assembles in the studio into large murals. The media he works with range from pencil to pen, gouache, oils, watercolours, ochre, sands and dyes.

Wolseley’s works are extraordinarily elaborate, intricate and filled. They are self-absorbed, engaged with the time and place of happening. As a viewer one needs to find points of entry, needs to find some way of navigating through them. The depictions of fragments, the areas of intense focus, provide the zooming-in and the navigational clues. We meet Wolseley the naturalist, through whom Ruskin’s emphasis on the value of drawing and ‘word

8. Wolseley, A search for rare plants in the George Gill Ranges NT, detail

painting’ lives on. Although I have concentrated here on Wolseley’s representation of detail, I acknowledge that he employs all the strategies I have identified in my exegesis and I will return to his work further on.

From John Wolseley’s detailed drawings of selected objects I will move to Karl Blossfeldt’s photographic inventory of plant specimens.

Karl Blossfeldt

Karl Blossfeldt worked at the Kunstgewerbeschule in Berlin during the 1920s and early 30s as an educator. Like Lesueur and Wolseley he travelled, collected and recorded natural objects. But Blossfeldt’s mission was not that of the explorer of land. Blossfeldt pursued the idea that all art forms stem from nature. He was ‘searching for a repertoire of forms that might be transposed into art and which, as part of nature, had generally been overlooked’. Although he used the photographic medium for his recordings, he did not set out to produce momentous photography but, rather, material to serve as an educational aid for his teaching in the area of decorative arts and design.

Blossfeldt’s photographic work, which was published originally in two major volumes: Urformen der Kunst in 1928 and Wundergarten der Natur in 1932, brought him instantaneous success and acknowledgment. It proved of great significance to the field of photography and its development at the time; and it has retained its captivating power and relevance.

Blossfeldt assembled an inventory of plant forms, recorded in around 6000 photographs, over a period of 30 years. Several aspects of his work and his way of working have been of particular significance and inspiration for my project.

Early on Blossfeldt developed a standardised technique. He would collect plant material in the field, sometimes far away from his home in Berlin – around Rome and in Africa for example – and bring his collection back to the studio. There he would prepare the plants to reveal what he considered to be their formal essence and make photographs of individual plants or segments of plants. Each object would be placed in front of a white or grey board, lit without dramatisation by soft daylight from above or the side, and be photographed without the involvement of compositional or pictorial strategies. Juergen Wilde observed in his essay that at the centre of Blossfeldt’s work was ‘not aestheticism but aesthetic recognition’.

Another element of Blossfeldt’s œuvre is its open-ended quality. It is a series without end, with potential sub-sequences, ways of ordering and grouping.

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52 ibid., p. 16.
Although he does not create tableaux - he does not make arrangements suggesting a narrative within a frame - he nevertheless gives structure to each individual image by controlling the paper format. Slender objects such as the series of images of horsetail are printed on narrow paper. Several images in the same format may be grouped together.

9. Blossfeldt, Equisetum (horsetail)  10. Aconitum (monkshood)

Blossfeldt is considered to be one of the pioneers of factual photography of the Neue Sachlichkeit movement, while the roots of his work can also be found in the Jugendstil of the late 19th century. When his first book was published in 1928 it met instantaneous recognition from various quarters, from the general public as well as fellow artists, theoreticians and writers. Walter Benjamin wrote in regard to Blossfeldt’s work: ‘He has done his part in that great examination of the perceptive inventory, which will have an unforeseeable effect on our conception of the world’. In *Kleine Geschichte der Photographie*, Benjamin considers Blossfeldt as a major authority of the ‘optico unconscious’.

Blossfeldt’s work is frequently mentioned in association with Surrealism. The surreal quality is, I believe, enticing because it is subtle and relies on the potential of associations. It may be promoted simply by taking an object out of the space continuum of Nature, or by enlarging a fragment beyond familiar dimensions. And there is the obsessiveness in the sheer numbers of images combined with their frugality, their ‘formal logic and stringency’.

The images are factual but make no claim to scientific-botanical classification.

54 ibid., p. 14.
55 Juergen Wilde, op. cit., p. 11.
What fascinates me above all is that they exist as art works and as images of nature. 'Blossfeldt's photographs manage to reconcile image and illustration, realism and the aesthetic self-referentiality of the artwork'. The work makes reference to land or a particular landscape only in an oblique manner. His photographs aim to exemplify the extraordinary wealth of form, structure, surface and suggestive charge that can be found in an aspect of the natural world. He used the monocular vision of a photographic camera, and by implication, the linear perspective. However, his images communicate a profound intimacy of engagement with his subject matter. His working method required him to be in the location where his specimens grew. He touched, collected and carefully handled them in order to photograph them.

By discussing works by Blossfeldt, Wolseley and Lesueur I have drawn attention to the engagement with land through the representation of detail. This demands the physical presence of the artist on location and an intimate encounter with objects found and collected. It belongs to the shift from looking at landscape (through the vertical gridlined screen of the Renaissance painter or the monocular camera lens directed towards the horizon) to a bodily, haptic experience in an environment. The records of detail from the land in turn provide clues for deciphering the whole, be it a location, a stretch of land or the world of plant forms.

TIME

While I have discussed John Wolseley's art with particular emphasis on his attention to detail I acknowledge that for Wolseley, being in time in the land – the issue I will concentrate on next – is of crucial importance as well. Keeping Wolseley the 'wanderer' in mind, I will now focus especially on the awareness of being in time by looking at works by the photographers David Stephenson and Tokihiro Sato and the 'walking artists' Hamish Fulton and Richard Long.

**David Stephenson and Tokihiro Sato**

David Stephenson's prolific photographic practice over the past 25 years has to a large extent circled around the representation of landscape. I will in this context examine one of his multi-panel images from the 1980s and an image from the series *Stars* from the 1990s. In these two bodies of work Stephenson

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56 ibid., p. 18.
particularly deals with time, his extended presence in a place as photographer and an immersive quality in his images.

In the multi-panelled construction of (Leslie) Cape Raoul for example we see the image of a re-configured landscape, assembled from three panels, each panel representing a different moment and a slight shift in angle of view. We are invited to take part in the experience of looking and being in the landscape over a period of time. Stephenson comments: 'The impetus for these elaborate panoramas was the all-inclusive eye – an attempt to gather all information from the space surrounding me in the environment.' The inclusion of the human figure, a strategy Stephenson uses in most of the works belonging to this series connects these images to 19th century representations of the landscape while involving us, his contemporaries in the environment. In (Leslie) Cape Raoul the same figure appears twice, in different locations in the picture, further supporting the reading of the image as testament to duration, time of dwelling rather than moment of the fixed gaze. In an artist's statement concerning this body of work Stephenson writes ‘...with a contemporary expression of the sublime I attempt to recover a sense of awe with nature; nature not apart from man.’

12. Stephenson, Stars 1004

57 David Stephenson, Towards a Photographic Sublime, PhD exegesis, Centre for the Arts, Hobart, Tasmania, 2001, p. 48.
58 David Stephenson in Australian Photography of the 1980s, edited by Helen Ennis, Australian National Gallery, Australia 1990, p. 58.
In the *Stars* series Stephenson deals with space and time remote from our tangible human experience. The photograph again speaks of the photographer's presence in a place of observation over an extended period of time, at night, in the solitude of silent contemplation. The photograph shows us what the human eye cannot hold, a multitude of moments describing in astounding patterns the passages of stars. Keith Davis reflects on the star photographs as 'nature "drawing" itself by way of human intervention, action and idea ... The observer is an integral part of the observed. Light and vision are one'.\(^59\) Beyond the record of the extended-time observation of the photographer we are invited to ponder vaster unimaginable cosmic time-spans and spaces.

13. Sato, *Photo-Respiration* HATTACH 1

In the series *Photo-Respirations*, Tokihiro Sato, like Stephenson in *(Leslie) Cape Raoul* and the *Stars* series, uses the camera and the photograph to address time as duration by accumulating an image over an exposure period of one to three hours and using bursts of moving light. For the production of these images Sato walks through the landscape and flashes the light from different locations during the long exposure. He measures and relates time and space. 'Sato's photographs give us a strong feeling of space, depth, and, through the artist's process of applying light, even a sense of time.'\(^60\) The many light spots in the resulting image seem to make the landscape strangely alive, looking, breathing. The title of the series poetically refers to the landscape as living


body and his particular act of photographing as breathing in and out, marked in the photographs by the pulsating pattern of light-spots.

The working methods and the resulting images of both David Stephenson and Tokohiro Sato require and incorporate being in time in place. The photographic medium, while employing the monocular lens of the camera, has shifted from presenting a window on the world, the idea of the fixed gaze and the singular decisive moment, to inviting contemplation on being in the world.

Hamish Fulton and Richard Long

Hamish Fulton and Richard Long’s works deal with time, duration and place in an intensely physical way. For both artists the activity of walking has been and remains pivotal to their works and I relate to this activity in my own manner and for my own work very strongly.

Richard Long refers to his walking as walking without travelling: ‘The patterns of my walks are unique and original: they are not like following well-trodden routes ...’ Long considers a walk as one of the layers amongst ‘thousands of geographic and human layers on the surface of the land’. Fulton articulates a similar notion when he says: ‘The physical involvement of walking creates a receptiveness to the landscape. I walk on the land to be woven into nature.’ Hamish Fulton has referred to himself as ‘an artist who walks’.

Both artists have regularly employed the photographic camera and perspectival views of particular locations with texts that refer to a broader, multi-sensory involvement and experience.

In the context of this exegesis I will look at Hamish Fulton’s particular use of the combination of image and text and discuss an early work by Richard Long.

Hamish Fulton refers to his works as ‘Walks’ and intends them to demonstrate that ‘...with a journey one must be aware of an unfolding of many moments. One is not looking for a perfect moment. Potentially each moment is a perfect moment.’

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62 ibid.
64 ibid.
Fulton regularly complements and extends his photographs with text. The combination of the two elements produces new works that surpass what each component can achieve by itself. The series *TOUCHING BOULDERS BY HAND* resulted from a fourteen-day walk in Norway in 1992. Each photograph is accompanied by an extended title detailing the specific location, the day of the walk within the context of the whole walk and the overall area covered. This image/text combination evokes in the viewer and audience a sense of participation in the experience of the walk. Each day of the fourteen-day walk is marked by one of these works. The words *touching boulders by hand* entice us to examine the photograph for its tactile suggestions, to sense the touching through our looking. The sequence of 14 works shows us a journey, the change of terrain and, particularly through the boulders, the geological history. The boulders spoke to Fulton and they speak to us in his images.

Fulton also creates text pieces without images. In their poetic directness these works communicate a physical, emotional and spiritual encounter. He sparingly and decisively adds colour to text, highlighting and questioning, as in this piece from a walking journey in the Pyrenees in 1992.
Richard Long has worked with complex text components as well.⁶⁶ The early work I have selected here has a title that is important as a description of the event.

_A Line made by Walking_, 1967. I consider this work to be one of Long’s most evocative, as well as simple and elegant, pieces. The photograph shows a straight line within an area of grassed land. Richard Long made the line visible by repeatedly walking it. The line exists as a temporary trace of his walking until the grass covers it over again.

The simplicity of this work contains complexities relating to time and space. I imagine the time it took Long to walk the straight line; I wonder how many times he walked the line to produce the mark. The line resulted from a designed, deliberate human physical activity that subjected itself to the power of the ground, the tenacity of the grass. What took place in Long’s mind, his sense of physical and emotional being while he was walking back and forth? What would the walking of a straight line, back and forth in a natural or rural environment do to me, to others? How does this contrived line resonate with other passages that have been walked by humans and other creatures in this land? What impact, besides the visible one, did the walking have on the soil, the grass and its inhabitants, for how long?

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⁶⁶See for example his _Sound Circle – A Walk on Dartmoor_ 1990, in which he placed words relating to multi-sensory perceptions over a map of the Dartmoor area.
I wonder what determined the beginning and end point of the line? I wonder what the landscape beyond what we can see in the photograph might look like. What was the time of year, of day, the temperature, the weather; what were the smells and the sounds?

While a straight line marked on a piece of ground makes valid associations with a minimal aesthetic of the 1960s, which I appreciate, the photograph of it evokes a multitude of existential reflections that reach beyond aesthetic concerns. It comments on the fragility as well as the tenacity of the land, the living body of the earth.

In both Long’s and Fulton’s works time is contemplated as duration as well as transition. The experiencing human presence is acknowledged in both its importance and its temporality. Technically, the photograph is a tribute to Cartesian perspectivalism but here it evokes issues that reach beyond ideas of the scenographic view.

For Long the photograph represents a residue of his experience, ‘of me being there at that time in that state of mind’. And Auping states ‘the reasons he [Fulton] chooses to photograph particular images, is a direct result of his physical involvement with it’.

Fulton does not alter or remove anything from the environment in which he walks. Long often leaves his mark and also takes elements from the environment to create his works in the gallery. This brings me to the issue of the trace, and the discussion of one other work by Richard Long.

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68 Auping, op. cit., p. 8.
TRACE

By trace I mean broadly artwork that has been produced using a material residue or by physical contact with matter. The trace of that matter itself constitutes the key content of the artwork, not excluding, however, a range of different interpretations that this trace may evoke. The trace relies on touch. To touch is to physically participate: 'to touch is also to feel oneself being touched'. Equally, matter that touches a surface is touched by that surface.

During the 1980s Richard Long started to collect mud from riverbanks in order to produce several 'Mud Works' in gallery settings.

Richard Long's Muddy Waterline 1989 is a trace. Long collected mud from the Avon creek near his home and applied it with his hands in repetitive gestural motions directly to the wall of the gallery. This mud/matter carries the physical trace from its source as well as layers of physical, mental and emotional associations he has with the Avon and its surroundings. The motions Long used are rhythmic and repetitive, multiples or variations on a gestural theme. The format of this particular mud work was a long horizontal rectangle. Its size was determined by the length and height of the gallery wall, but its borders suggest the possibility of expansion. I consider it also as a frieze, a visual format I will deal with more later on.

To continue with the strategy of the trace I will examine works by a number of artists who use a variety of means, methods and techniques, all incorporating the trace. The idea of the trace as communicating experience features prominently in my own project.

Nikolaus Lang

Nikolaus Lang started out as an artist in Germany in the 1960s. During the 1970s Lang’s work became closely associated with the term ‘Spurensicherung’ and the related art movement. The word Spurensicherung has been borrowed from the world of criminal investigation, meaning the securing of evidence via the trace.

I will concentrate on some of Lang’s works, which he has made on several occasions in the central Australian outback. There he searches for and finds traces that connect cycles of the natural environment with layers of human histories. His works relate to various concepts, zones and rhythms of time: geological, human/animal, botanical, Aboriginal cultural and European cultural. In an article about Nikolaus Lang, Daniel Thomas refers to his art as ‘homage to nature’ and as ‘permanent traces of a gentle caress’. Both notions appeal to me greatly.

I find three particular works by Lang especially inspirational and relevant for my work.

**Colour Field, Ochre and Sand 1987.** During his second and so far longest visit to Australia from 1986 to ‘89, Lang lived and worked in Adelaide and the Flinders Ranges. For one of his pieces of work he collected clumps of coloured clay and coloured sands from Maslin Beach and Maslin Beach Quarry. This raw material and squares of white paper constituted the physical substance of *Colour Field*. The raw material represented several geological phases, as well as Aboriginal and European cultural references. The ochres, so important for Aboriginal ceremonies, appear as neatly ordered piles of unground clumps with precise conical heaps of ground ochre next to them, in the middle section of the work. On either side of this middle section is a field of equally precise conical heaps of coloured sands.

![18. Lang, Colour Field, Ochre and Sand](image)

In its visual format, the piece is reminiscent of a scientific experiment or an archaeological collection, as well as conceptual and minimal art. It also

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70 See internet page [www.nbk.org/Ausst/Lang.html](http://www.nbk.org/Ausst/Lang.html) (German language)
reminds one of colour charts. The piece is installed on the gallery floor and it measures 504 x 600 cm, the floor area of a generously sized living room. The rigid order as well as the numbers of ochre and sand samples indicate obsessiveness on the one hand and humility on the other. By humility I mean the artist’s decision to abstain from any obvious personal reference, any individual gestural imprint. The piece potently displays the diversity of matter and honours Aboriginal tradition. Lang quietly deals with his pilgrimage to the sites where ochre had been collected for long periods of time, a meditative, slow engagement with place and the making of art. The piece does not impose on the viewer but allows for resonances.

Varrioota’s daydreams after his escape near Aroona homestead 1987–88. During that same period in Australia (1986–89), Lang made work at Hookina Creek in the Flinder’s Ranges. Varrioota’s daydreams was part of a project he constructed around Peter’s story, a story ‘about mistaken identity, about an Aborigine who was wrongly accused of killing a white shepherd’. Varrioota was one of the suspects in the murder case who escaped.

Lang made a large print in sections by inking up a fallen river gum tree trunk and fabricated two paper pulp casts of the tree trunk in location at Hookina Creek. In this work Lang combines his search for potential evidence with physical traces of natural processes. The lines, patterns and marks on the prints directly represent the passages eaten into the wood by insects. Lang

72 Colourfield also relates to an earlier piece where Lang collected samples of Tuscan clay to refer to pigments used in Renaissance painting.

recognised the tree trunk as collaborator and ready woodblock and made a relief print.

Bernice Murphy in her catalogue essay talks about the underlying dynamic of these ‘captured drawings’ as ‘that of a particular and purposeful life-cycle within a niche of nature’s total functioning.’ The physical trace of natural processes as it appears on paper and the work of art in a gallery setting with the title Varriota’s daydreams refers back to a character in Lang’s story and ultimately to himself. The white marks on black hint at the randomness of life as well as a sense of underlying principle. They seem to emerge from the black and retreat back into its mysterious opacity. The image is a segment of a larger reality. It shows processes in a non-human world and alludes to possible events in a social human environment.

The third piece of work I have selected dates from 1999 and was extended in 2000. The title is Roadkill 1999. The detail of work I have as reproduction and am using as illustration in this text reminds me on first impact of reproductions of prehistoric cave paintings. The whole work is huge, 330 x 3150 cm, and imagining the relentlessness of imprints of dead animals over such an area is severe. Roadkill pays homage to nature in a grim and powerful way.

Lang’s working method was simple, direct. He collected the carcasses of freshly killed animals, kangaroos, dingos, snakes, lizards etc from the roadside on long drives through the desert. He sprayed them with ochre, which he had collected in the Flinders Ranges and then hurled the carcasses at long strong sheets of paper supported by chipboard.

I ponder what prompted him to make this piece. I imagine driving long distances over roads that traverse country that is largely unsuitable for human habitation. I sit in a jeep or similar, closed windows, air conditioning on or windows wide open to let air blow through. My physical contact with the world I am driving through is almost non-existent. I am shielded in a hard and heavy container of metal, plastic, glass and rubber. I am moving at 10 to 20 times the speed in which my soft, vulnerable body could transport itself, and only for a short period of time in this surrounding. For every other, similarly encased human being I pass, I pass a good number of dead bodies of animals that have lived in this country. I find them mostly on the side of the road, sometimes in the middle of the road. I reflect. I do not want to stop travelling here, I know I cannot stop others from travelling here. I have no solution for change but I need and want to respond.

Spraying the carcasses with ochre, as Lang did, is a ritual, a gesture of veneration. Hurling them against the picture surface prevents the imposition of designed order and perhaps re-enacts that last moment of life, including the collision. The explanatory caption which accompanies the reproduction of part of the image states ‘... [T]he resulting imprints resurrect the animals in a

strange, almost magical way, looking as one commentator put it, like "photographed souls which, after leaving the body, become momentarily visible ...".\textsuperscript{75}

Nikolaus Lang's work *Roadkill*, the lasting trace of animal bodies on a two-dimensional surface, leads me to my discussion of the photogram as trace. I use the photogram technique in my own project. After a brief historical reference I will look at photograms by two contemporary artists, Susan Derges and Harry Nankin.

**The Photogram as Trace**

'The photogram assumes the guise of a real trace, a visual footprint on the scale of the original, a memory of the essential contour devoid of redundant information.'\textsuperscript{76}

The invention of the technique of the photogram pre-dates the invention of photography that employs a camera. Henry Fox Talbot in 1834 produced his first photogenic drawings and by 1843 Anna Atkins had started on her

comprehensive record of British algae and ferns using the related cyanotype process. The principles of the process have remained the same over the 170 years since its inception. An object is placed on light sensitised material and exposed to light. After removal of the object the material is developed and fixed in order to reveal a silhouetted light image of the object where it was placed, surrounded by dark. The image of the object is a direct imprint or trace, not a perspectival representation. Gibson's concept of the visual world comes to mind.\textsuperscript{77}

This simple camera-free process has been applied in various ways and for a number of purposes at different times. After its initial application, mostly for the recording and cataloguing of botanical specimens, it became a tool for the avant-garde around the 1920s and 30s in Europe and the 1950s saw another renewal of photogram experimentations.\textsuperscript{78} In recent years a number of contemporary artists have integrated the photogram into their art-making process.\textsuperscript{79} In the context of my project I will look at some works by British artist Susan Derges and Australian artist Harry Nankin. Both artists have worked with traces of water in motion, elemental power encountered in rivers, oceans and on the ocean shore. The processes both artists employ include a high degree of experimentation and unpredictability of image outcomes. I imagine that the times spent in the location of experimentation and making are intense, potentially long and exhilarating. In regard to Nankin's photogram work I will also refer to some images he made prior to working with water in motion.

\textbf{Susan Derges}

Susan Derges' art-making has close associations to observations, examinations and recordings in science.\textsuperscript{80} Derges' connection to the natural sciences operates on an elemental level. She is fascinated by recurring patterns in nature and by relationships and likenesses, and implicitly in a coherent order in the universe as well as the chaotic multiplicity within this order. Mel Gooding states in reference to Derges' work: 'As science constructs realities, so does art, and

\textsuperscript{77} See The Theoretical Context of this exegesis, Part 2, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{78} Artists like Christian Schad and Man Ray conducted extensive experiments during the 1920s and 30s. Laszlo Maholy-Nagy used the photogram technique with students at the Bauhaus for studies into the relations of colour, light and form. Since the 1950s Floris Michael Neusuess has been a prominent proponent of the photogram. In 1983 he curated the first photogram exhibition in Kassel, Germany.
\textsuperscript{79} The re-evaluation of the photogram technique has been accompanied by conceptual and formal innovations. Adam Fuss and Susan Derges have become internationally renowned for their photogram work. In Australia several artists have embraced the technique including Anne Ferran, Ruth Maddison, David Stephenson and Harry Nankin. The exhibition First Impressions at the Ian Potter Centre, NGV Australia, 1/3-9/5 2003, has celebrated contemporary Australian photograms.
\textsuperscript{80} The strong reference to science in Derges' work can be seen in her work from images of Chladni figures in the early 90s, to the work with ants and systems in beehives in the mid nineties, to her large photograms of shorelines and the river Taw in the late nineties. (See essay by Martin Kemp and images reproduced in Susan Derges – Liquid Form 1985–99, Williams Fine Art, London, 1999.)
both set out to define aspects of that intuitive self-awareness that is the essence of human experience.\textsuperscript{81}

Derges' image-making process is participatory, relying on intuitive self-awareness in an experienced physical environment. I will refer here particularly to Susan Derges' series of photogram images River Taw and Shoreline.

Derges retains the basic principle of the photogram, showing the trace left by matter through the action of light. Yet her photograms take on a very different form from the cataloguing of specimens by Anna Atkins. Atkins' objects are still, unmoving and the photograms attest to that stillness. The trace of a perishable object at a chosen moment of its life cycle is eternalised. The photogram image is an index of the object.

Derges makes her River Taw and Shoreline photograms by directly submerging photographic paper in the river or by placing it on the shore and recording the actions of water and waves. The landscape becomes her darkroom at night when she makes her exposures with the microsecond light blast of an electronic flash and a low ambient light level in the sky.

![River Taw and Shoreline photograms](image)


The resulting images are records of a specific time, place and activity, of a trace, or traces left by substance in motion, fixed by light and chemicals on photographic paper. They remind me of fractal images as much as of studies of water movements by Leonardo da Vinci. They could be of any river or shore and yet, every other image of river or shore would be different, as the individual images in her series demonstrate. The images speak of universal patterns in nature, detectable on macroscopic and microscopic scales alike.

Mel Gooding refers to collaborations involved in the making of Derges' photograms, to layers of touching:

... where the light from a flashgun registers on the paper the otherwise invisible energies of flow and counter-flow, turbulence, eddy and

\textsuperscript{81} Mel Gooding, Song of the Earth, Thames and Hudson, UK, 2002, p. 10.
ripple in the water. Other presences – moonlight, the shadows of overhanging leaves or of the artist herself or her helpers – may also be trapped and traced in the images, forming what Derges calls ‘a kind of collective memory made visible in the photograms’.

Derges titles the images in a diaristic manner, as proofs of evidence, ie Shoreline, 19 October, 1998. Similar to some of the works by Long, Lang and Wolseley, Susan Derges’ works from the series River Taw and Shoreline are fragments, the sections we see represented on paper extend in reality and can in our imagination expand beyond the borders of the paper. I love the directness of Derges’ photograms, their unmediated beauty and the contemplations about matters of life and the universe which they invite.

Harry Nankin

Harry Nankin’s photograms using static objects resonate with Anna Atkins’ images of specimens and I see close connections in format with my own work. They precede his works with water in motion. I will briefly discuss two works from the 1993 series an epocal ecology of being.

In this series Nankin addresses ‘pressing issues of global environmental degradation’. For the work I, terra, thou/Nothofagus (Cradle Mountain), Nankin has stretched a large piece of photographic paper at night between the branches of one of Tasmania’s indigenous species of myrtle and exposed this to light. Where the branches touch the paper, they leave their shadow on the resulting photogram, or shadowgram as Nankin prefers to call it. Nankin refers to the image as evidence of presence: ‘the shadowgram of nature is a direct witness to the material opacity of real, often living, objects and events’. It also seems to alert to the possible disappearance of species. The photogram process renders the object as negative, as white to grey trace of presence, which evokes a sense of absence. Intense areas of white occur only where the

82 ibid., p. 33.
83 First Impressions, exhibition brochure, curated by Isobel Crombie, National Gallery of Victoria, 2003, p. 10.
84 Harry Nankin, in First Impressions, exhibition brochure, p. 10.
object firmly touches the paper surface. Thus, in *Taxa aqua*, 1993, the skeletal remains of fish seem to hint in a double-fold manner at a potential threat of extinction.

Harry Nankin's *Wave* series share similarities with Susan Derges' *River Taw* and *Shoreline* series. Nankin's subject matter is water/ocean. He makes his exposures at night with flash and a number of voluntary helpers and his images are large. Yet his intention and his images differ substantially from Derges'.

Nankin builds huge rafts for the photographic paper to float on. The rafts also form part of the finished artwork. I imagine a sense of operatic orchestration to surround the event of making the photogram and a grand dramatic quality emanates from the piece installed in exhibition. However, the images do not lead to reflections about universal order or, in fact, elemental qualities of water. Simon Cuthbert in a catalogue essay mentions the artist's sense of frustration in regard to the resulting photogram and then states: 'Its [the artwork's] success however, lies in the ambition of the project and the energy it generated across different media. There is something prophetic in this explosion of elemental activity ...'\(^{85}\)

Nankin in his artist's statement talks about *The Wave* as 'partly a performance, partly a sculpture and partly a photograph'.\(^{86}\) In regard to its presence as a photograph he writes:

> The Wave elegantly affirms a respect for tactile and photosensitive materials and a sense of wonder in the natural world. By abandoning the camera in favour of a direct interplay of artist, emulsion and ecosystem, The Wave offers an alternative way of seeing to the cool objectivity and tired optical conventions of the landscape photography

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Nankin’s voice is confident about the success of the project as a whole. Looking at the installation of *The Wave* in exhibition I admired the concept, the imagination for the process and the description of the event.

![Image of the installation view of The Wave]

After this extensive emphasis on the trace as carrier of experience I will examine the visual format of the frieze in reference to the works of art discussed above.

**The frieze**

In my theoretical context I have discussed the frieze in relation to a phenomenological approach to visual representation. ‘The frieze involves a sense of narrative, of development into which intersecting paths and events can be woven. The frieze invites the viewer to become a participant by his/her own physical movement.”

It acknowledges a temporal dimension of sight in experienced time.

In my view, the open format of the frieze as a formal device occurs in some works by John Wolseley, Richard Long, Nikolaus Lang, Susan Derges and Harry Nankin. As a result of Wolseley’s way of working, his collages of components and his composite images have the openness of the frieze and invite the viewer’s participation. His wall installations operate in a similar manner. Information, as drawings and words, is ordered or scattered on the

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87 ibid.
gallery wall and becomes accumulative as one walks and views across the gallery space. Wolseley's implied narratives have much to do with his manner of living, his physical, mental and emotional journeys.

Richard Long's *Muddy Waterline*, which I have discussed earlier on, works as a frieze. By his repeated gestural movements, when applying the mud to the gallery wall, he refers to the endless interactions of soil and water. The artwork is only brought to an end in order to fit the gallery space. We follow a rhythmic progression, we are not held by an illusionary view.

In Nikolaus Lang's work *Roadkill* the frieze takes on gigantic dimensions. The very fact that Lang planned in '99 to extend this piece later on confirms the format's prospect for expansion as well as its fragmentary nature. *Roadkill* refers to the passage Lang travelled and to his act of collecting carcasses. In turn the work takes the viewer on a journey of visual and emotional encounter. Derges' and Nankin's photograms pay tribute to a larger time and space reality of which their frieze-like images are fragments or samples.

**Conclusion**

The framework I have constructed for the analysis of my visual context correlates with the structure of strategies I have developed for my own project. Accordingly, the engagement with detail in the land, the awareness of being in time and a multi-sensory experience in the environment, the use of the material trace from the land and the application of the frieze will reappear throughout the description of the development of my project. In turn, these strategies hark back to what I have identified in my theoretical context as a phenomenological approach to visually communicating the experience of being in the land. I consider that the combination of detail, time, trace and frieze, employed as visual tools, corresponds with the concepts of the glance, the embodied seeing participant and the simultaneity of time and space. 89

89 See 'Part 2: The theoretical context', p. 9.

25. Wolseley, wall installation