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**Manicured nature: nativism, authenticity and belonging in the Armidale State Forest (N.S.W.)**

**Abstract**

Studies of human relationships to place demand an inter-disciplinary approach that stretches across established binaries of western thought. This paper provides a case study of the Armidale State forest, more affectionately known by locals as the 'Pine Forest', to engage in an inter-species, inter-cultural dialogue on the ambiguities and possibilities of place-based identities.

As an exotic plantation the Pine Forest raises a litany of intriguing questions on notions of nativism, authenticity and belonging. In examining emotional attachments to the introduced conifers, I demonstrate the inadequacy of narrow definitions of 'nature', and challenge the discursive boundaries of introduced flora.

This analysis welcomes ambiguity and seeks out plurality, combining imagery, public dialogue and critical academic analysis to capture local engagements with this artificial forest that has become undeniably part of the community.

**Key Words:** Native, Authenticity, Belonging, Agency, Environment, Place

The Armidale State Forest, more affectionately (and appropriately) dubbed by locals the 'Pine Forest', is not a particularly remarkable place. It is not immense, sublime, or even all that picturesque. In fact, it is quite banal, with a dull repetition of pines punctuated only by wide dirt roads and cleared picnic areas. It does not evoke ideals of 'pure wilderness,' or the possibility of 'transcendent nature experiences', but it still holds for me a lingering sense of homeliness in spite of its quotidian nature, or perhaps because of it.

Within walking distance from my family home, but far enough away to offer the excitement of a journey, the Pine Forest was an intimate feature of my youth. As a child I would stroll through the towering conifers with my mother, eagerly retrieving pine cones from the ground for household decoration; as a young teenager I would wait there to meet my first boyfriend; and as an adolescent I once snuck out of the house at midnight to run to a forest rave party that I had been forbidden from attending. It was such a familiar feature of the area with so much vitality and social activity that I barely noticed the anomalous nature of the pines. They had grown, it seemed, over the course of a century to become indigenous to the landscape.

In this paper I explore this adopted nativism, and question how this plantation figures in the lives of the people and the community who have grown up alongside it. I investigate how an artificial forest engages with dominant discourses of the natural, the national and the native, and question its problematic position as a 'conifer invader' into 'Eucalypt country'.

This analysis is predicated on the notion that 'identification with place … is not merely a peripheral aspect of worldly life but a fundamental characteristic of what it is to be who and what we are - to experience being human' (Miller 2003, 414). Jeff Malpas describes the essential characteristic of *place* as an ontological category, as its 'bounded openness' (2008, 200) and its dynamism. He observes that 'place is that wherein things happen, in which things 'take place' – and so while place is distinct from time as well as from space it also stands in essential relation to the temporal' (Malpas 2008, 200).

This forest has a multiplicity of temporalities. It is a poly-chronic patchwork where distinct times gather in pleats and folds. Social time rubs up against environmental time as a developing community, individual life-spans, tree-growth and reproduction and commercial timber harvest all merge together like sun dials throwing a criss-cross of shadows across the trees.

It is a forest shaped by the many stories that have taken place over generations (ideological, mythical, communal, personal, industrial, ecological), each possessing a distinct, often incommensurable, temporal framework. For example, the pines that evoke cycles of death and rebirth, of the relentless reproduction of life through the *longue durẽe* of evolution are also the same pines that fall victim to the commercial time imperatives of a timber production machine. In this paper I trace some of the temporal rhythms of this poly-chronic forest in order to highlight time's influence on interpretations of nature, nativism and agency.

**Orientation**

The land on which the Pine Forest now grows was previously a common, set aside in 1866. Before this time it had a long Aboriginal Australian heritage, Armidale being home to the Anaiwan people for approximately 10,000 years. The most recent management plan produced by Forests NSW (2009b, 2) states that the report by consulting archaeologist, Suzanne R. Hudson, notes 'no significant findings of Aboriginal cultural significance' in the area. However, this is a point of controversy. Cheryl Kitchener, archaeologist, researcher for

the Armidale Aboriginal Land Council, and traditional descendent of the Anaiwan people claims that Suzanne Hudson is not recognised by local elders as an Aboriginal cultural advisor and failed to contact traditional owners regarding her report (email message to author, July 12, 2010). That the pre-settlement period of the forests' history remains largely unrecognised in official discourse serves to highlight the land as scarred country, marred not only by deforestation but also by violent colonisation, resonating with Deborah Rose's assertion that '[s]ettler societies are built on a dual war: a war against Nature and a war against the natives' (2004, 34).

The 'common' in early twentieth century Australia was most often land that had already been deforested but was not suitable to agriculture, defined as 'land belonging to a community, esp. unenclosed waste land' (*The Concise Oxford Dictiona*ry 1964, 243). In 1910, 246 hectares of this common became the Armidale Afforestation Station, one of the earliest pine plantations in New South Wales.[i] Plantings and sporadic timber harvest continued in the area until 1936, when a statewide review of pine plantations concluded that the area was not suited to pines.  At this time plantings ceased, and it was proposed that the forest be disposed of as private farmland.   However, in 1947 the local State Member of Parliament, Mr David Drummond, halted this process, arguing strongly in favour of the local benefit of the area as a children's forest, a place for recreation and a community asset.  Limited planting resumed in the mid-1960s and continued until 2001 (Torbay September 2004).

This convoluted historical presence shapes the forest's schizophrenic identity.  It is a place marked by a traumatic history and an uneasy tension between its multifarious uses which include, but are not limited to, timber harvest, family picnics, teenage rave parties, motorbike riding, a site for medieval and twentieth century battle re-enactments, and a pleasant aesthetic view for neighbouring residences.

This networked collective of human-society-environment-market lost its already tenuous balance when, in 2000, State Forests, now a trading enterprise, decided to undertake clear felling of 20 hectares of pines.  This sparked community outcry, leading to the formation of the Friends of the Pine Forest, a group who proposed to maintain the area as a reserve and appoint a trust to preserve the forest's 'scientific, historical and recreational values' (Torbay 2008).   Despite this advocacy of the forest as of more-than-timber value, its commercial identity was again given dominance when, in May 2007, a further 35 hectares of the

plantation were clear-felled by State Forests. This felling was particularly upsetting for the community because it occurred in a dedicated historical and recreational zone of the forest, 17 hectares of which were close to the entrance and clearly visible from the nearby road. The justification by Forests NSW for this action was that the pines were in a dangerous condition after being damaged by a severe hailstorm in December 2006. However, this is a point of contention, with many claiming that many of the pines were not badly affected by the storm (maritime and loblolly varieties remaining in relative health) but Forests NSW nonetheless indiscriminately clear-felled all the trees in that particular zone (Torbay 2008).

The community outrage at the felling of the Pines is an atypical reaction to the destruction of an 'artificial' landscape designed for periodic harvest. This heated emotional response raises a litany of intriguing questions on notions of nativism and belonging; and challenges the discursive boundaries of introduced, suburban flora.

## Conifer Invaders

In Australia, forests are inextricably tied to a complex colonial history and its associated identity discourse. The beginning of Australian settlement is marked by the mass destruction of the native wild, by the cultivation of land and by the imposition of a British aesthetic onto a landscape seen as savage, alien and un-tameable.

Pine plantations are often criticised as ecologically unsustainable, as they colonise the landscape, and in many cases radically reduce the biodiversity of the area. Particular varieties of pine, including *Pinus Radiata,* change the chemistry of the soil and starve indigenous vegetation of moisture, nutrients and light (Harley n.d.). Pine is a very successful invader of native ecosystems and the dispersal of winged pine seed via wind and birds has impacted severely on natural systems causing 'reduction in species richness… changes to ecological processes such as water flow,… fire intensity and soil erosion' (Williams and Wardle 2009: 146). The Pine Forest's artificial birth and continuous insemination of soil is thus inherently violent, and the reproduction of pines that now occurs naturally has its roots embedded in wider national debates on indigeneity and colonisation.

Environmental criticism surrounding conifer intruder's is not always accurate, however. For instance, the widespread notion that pine plantations are 'biological deserts' has come under

attack with recent studies demonstrating that 'plantation forests contain a surprisingly large amount of biodiversity and produce a range of important conservation and protection services' (O'Loughlin 2005: 2). C.K.S Chou (1981: 29) insists that it is important to recognise the difference between *natural phenomena* and *natural laws*, arguing that the lack of naturally growing pines in the Southern Hemisphere is 'merely an accident of the plate tectonic history of the earth' and not an indication of an unsuitable environment. Much of the condemnation of Australian pine can be traced to ideological naturalistic theories that posit virgin nature as 'the ideal environment' implying that any departure from native environments will inevitably be degenerative.

Stephen Hinchcliffe and Sarah Whatmore observe that conventional ecology has an 'implicit and sometimes explicit hierarchy of spaces' that range from 'the pure to the despoiled' (2006, 128). The more sullied by human intervention, the less worthy of the label 'natural' and its associated protections. In this inverted anthropocentrism, any 'tainted' natures that do not reach the required standard of purity can be surrendered, without ethical consideration, to human development. Given the Pine Forest's exoticness to the landscape, and the persistent involvement of humans in its birth, death and reproduction, it clearly rates very low in this taxonomy of nature and artifice.

But how accurate can this exclusionary system of evaluation be when human relationships to place are so complex, intertwined and mutually affective? If we are, as Bruno Latour suggests, to understand our relationship to nature not in terms of a 'brain-in-a-vat' observing a 'world outside', but as part of a networked and 'richly vascularised' hybrid world made up at once 'of gods, people, stars, electrons, nuclear plants, and markets' (1999, 16), how should we think about this alien forest hovering on the edge of town?

Emphasis on networks, collectives, connectivities and the de-centering of Cartesian dualisms has encouraged an understanding of complex assemblages - not only the more-than-human, but also the more-than-tree and the more-than-forest. While conventional ecology may seek to reify nature as a pristine wild, there is just too much to complicate this simple classification, too many exceptions to the rule. If we take native Eucalypt forest, for example, we find thousands of years of Aboriginal 'fire-stick farming' (Jones 1969) where fire has been actively utilized to achieve various land management objectives (Hughes 1995, 38). As Fabienne Bayet-Charlton reminds us the 'whole of Australia is an Aboriginal artifact' (2003: 174). Adrian Franklin questions, how are we are able to define 'proper' or

'appropriate' nature when Australia's 'virgin wilderness' is 'contaminated by a lost humanity?' (2006b, 574). If we take Indigeneity as a measure of appropriateness we run into a similar problem as the combination of native flora and fauna with the introduced now characterises the continent as an irretrievable hybrid, or what Tim Low (2002) has termed a 'new nature'.

Franklin argues that, despite its impossibility, environmentalists remain trapped in 'an enigma of an ecosystem they can never aspire to restore: the extensively burned pre-colonial landscape of Aboriginal Australia' (2006a, 147). That this land is recast as virgin wilderness, despite the ecological agency of Indigenous people who have 'shaped even the reproductive mechanisms of forests' (Langton 1996: 31), colludes with the colonial doctrine of Terra Nullius by 'conceptually removing Aboriginal people from the Australian landscape' ((Bayet-Charlton 2003, 171). Marcia Langton argues that the label of 'wilderness' acts as 'a mystification of genocide' with the term often applied to places where 'Aboriginal people had been brought to the brink of annihilation' (Langton 1996: 20).

In this complex ecological version of nationalist denial, native species are 'seen as paragons of virtue, the epitome of purity and goodness' as conservationists and environmentalists seek to 'return to a pure world expunged of sin' (Franklin, 2006a, 129). This 'Garden of Eden' ideal is accompanied by its own series of rituals that includes 'supporting eradication of introduced species' (Franklin, 2006a, 115), which would certainly apply to an environmentally contentious conifer plantation.

There is an incredible hypocrisy here, however; a bitter irony obscured by the common-sense rhetoric of interventionist environmental practice. According to Bruce Rose's 1995 survey of attitudes to introduced animals among Aboriginal people living in central Australia, the puritanical desire to return to a Rousseau-esque idyll of Indigenous Australia, and the consequent devaluation and eradication of introduced flora and fauna, is not shared by many Indigenous people. One interviewee raised the penetrating question 'If white fellas don't want these [introduced/feral] animals then why don't they *all* move out?' (Rose 1995, 13). Rose observed that the 'distinction between native animals and feral animals is difficult for Aboriginal people to accept. Most people said that so-called feral animals belong to the country now that they have been introduced and have grown up and reproduced there …'(Rose 1995, 13).

This reveals a distinctly different attitude to the temporalities of settlement. The animals have *reproduced,* they have borne children and established lines of kin through generations, their deaths and births signify their belonging. In settler discourse belonging is bound to a much wider temporal framework. Individual life spans do not legitimise connection to place.

In her work 'Wild Country: Ethics of Decolonisation' Deborah Bird Rose observes that settler societies viewed themselves as 'agents of disjunction' (2004, 57) as they sought to obliterate the old and build the new. Rather than a continuous and dynamic understanding of Australian nature, the line between native and introduced, belonger and alien was carved at settlement. Rose takes the evocative example of footsteps to symbolise the temporal distinction between Western environmentalism and Aboriginal ecological philosophy. She notes that in traditional Aboriginal Australia the 'ancestral footprint is a sign of ecological coherence, human care and mutual life-giving' whereas in natural resource management discourse an 'ecological footprint is a quantifiable measure of impact' (2004, 177). Aboriginal philosophy emphasises a continuity of the present with the ancestors, past footsteps that stretch ahead to mark out tracks to follow. In a Western chronotope, the past is invariably behind. In a 180-degree inversion footsteps are the unwanted shadows that signal the damage our tainted humanity has inflicted upon inert, vulnerable and wild 'nature' as we tread toward the distant redemptive future.

Mary Graham (2008) observes that in Aboriginal philosophy there 'never was and there never will be a paradise – neither an Indigenous one, a religious or moral one, a worker's, futuristic, technological or even a physical one', while Western society seems 'always on the way to some *destination,* to a better position, life or world' (185). In Indigenous Australia the essence of life is located in the land – 'the land is the law', 'a sacred entity', and 'the great mother of all humanity' (181) - 'all meaning comes from land' (182). Therefore, in Aboriginal culture, custodial responsibility and care for country is a deeply ingrained philosophy, 'not just a green solution to environmental degredation' (192).

**Adopted nativism**

Ecological philosopher Freya Mathews has argued that all human beings have the right to resist the alienation of Western modernity in favour of forging a sense of continuity with a particular place to 'become native'. She writes (1999, paragraph 5):

> To be native is to have one's identity shaped by the place to which one belongs: one is a creature of its topography, its colours and textures, saps and juices, its moods, its ghosts and stories. As a native, one has one's taproot deep in a particular soil: one has grown in that soil, and continues to be informed and sustained by its essence.

Mathews' nativism renounces oppositional taxonomies of the natural versus the despoiled. This expansive, counter-modern approach does not devalue the entire category of 'Nature' but instead expands and complicates its boundaries. Similarly, the many people who have found a kind of native belonging in the manicured space of the Armidale Pine Forest, despite its artificial and tainted origins, suggests a need to rethink our oppositional taxonomies of place.

The State Member for the Northern Tablelands, Richard Torbay (2004), a vocal activist for the protection and restoration of the Pine Forest actually cites hybridity, exoticness and a history of human interference as an argument *for* the protection of the Pine Forest stating that:

> The mixture of large, mature trees with abundant natural regeneration has created a forest with quite a unique environment. The on-again off-again nature of its development with a combination of softwood, and native and exotic species, resulted in it behaving more like a natural forest than a traditional plantation.

The Pine Forest is thus argued to be a 'unique ecology' and an 'irreplaceable ecosystem' (Torbay 2004). This valuation also depends on community involvement and active engagement with the forest. Torbay (2004) claims that the forest's historical status as an environment for communal gathering and recreation means that it 'has had a special place in the hearts of the people of Armidale over a long period of time'. Torbay (2004) also

emphasises the networked collective of forest and township, highlighting the 'crucial role that the adjacent community plays in the welfare of the forest, especially the Rural Fire Service, which has already "saved" the forest several times from bushfire'. The forest is thus established to be what Donna Haraway has described as an 'integral partner' in a 'constitutive social relationality' (2004, 85). The lasting affection of the community for the plantation suggests a relationship that stretches beyond narrow oppositional definitions of nature and artifice, the commercial and the communal, into a more fuzzy social space where human and nonhuman, native and introduced, interact in unexpected and undefined ways.


## Traumatised land

It is from within this foggy social relationality, interdependency and adopted nativism that the Armidale community expressed their grief and outrage at the desecration of the forest. On visiting the site myself I was surprised at my own emotional response, given my current geographical distance from the effects of the destruction. No longer part of the Armidale community I could claim no offense at an interruption to my everyday lifestyle, but I did feel distress at an interruption to my memories, to the parts of my narrative self that took the forest as their setting. This all-too-common experience of the industrial rape of environments and the associated feeling of alienation demonstrates place as fundamental to our sense of self-through-time, a continuous narrative carved across earth, rock and tree. The dismembered trees became a kind of dis-remembering[ii]; my past was cut off from me, severed in a way that was disconcerting and beyond my control. I felt an unexpected loss at the realisation that place-based memories cannot survive very well in ruins. Out of the charred earth came nothing.

Clear felling is an ugly process. It leaves, where there was once high, green, idyllic pines, blackened, charred tree carcasses and torn-up denuded earth. The aesthetic impact of this process was a major reason for the public outcry, with many community members at a meeting of the local council complaining about the 'unsightly nature of [the] clear-felled area', its 'lack of beauty'. This visual unpleasantness translated to a 'lack of respect for [the] forest' as the 'responsibility seems to belong to no one' when the landscape is left in such a devastated condition (Armidale Dumaresq Council, 2009a). It was as if the bodies of the

trees had been discarded without appropriate burial, or the forest was acting as nothing more than a rubbish tip for the discarded off-cuts of the State Forest enterprise.

It is important to remember, however, that living, thriving pines are also scars of the irrevocable wounding of Aboriginal Australia. They represent the imposition of the geography, ecology and society of Empire onto an Indigenous natural and cultural system. With this double destruction in mind, the Pine Forest can be considered what Maria Tumarkin (2005) has termed a 'traumascape', a wounded space bound by repetitive violence. The first devastation was to the native ecosystem, with the destruction and subsequent mono-culturing of this area designated for harvest. This is the familiar violence of colonialism with its ongoing devastation. Deborah Bird Rose articulates this relentless destruction – stating that as 'systems change, there is loss of habitat, loss of biodiversity, and, increasingly, the loss of life support systems that make life… possible. Losses amplify, generating more death, damage and disorder' (2004, 36).

The second wounding was the 2000 and 2007 clear-fellings of the established pines, undertaken not with the intent of restoration or reconciliation through a harmonious establishment of a more fitting, diverse ecosystem, but for market driven imperatives, and in an undiscerning, offensive manner without consultation with the community it would emotionally effect. This second trauma does not eliminate the first but, instead, contributes even more to this ongoing ecological violence and its wounding of place and the people who are connected to it.

The Pine Forest's traumatic legacy highlights modern settler society's reductionist tendency to treat place as a utility over and above its interactive and inter-subjective position in a network of human and nonhuman. Under this rubric, place becomes a mere 'modification of space… a modification that aptly can be called 'site', that is, levelled-down, monotonous *space* for building or other human enterprises' (Casey 1997, x). This utilitarian approach always favours what is most efficient and effective for the development of human enterprise. 'It thus positions mass killings as 'creative destruction, conceived as a *healing surgical operation*' [Bauman 2000, 11], undertaken in the interest of better economies or environments' (Rose 2008, 63). Rose argues that this kind of sanctioned slaughter 'breaks up the dynamic synergies between life and death and in that process desecrates both' (2008, 63).

Leaving the ruins of this denuded forest in an unsightly mess heightens this sense of irrevocable wounding.  The clearing taking place in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries across Australia left similar remnants of damage and an uncanny feeling of unresolved trauma.  In 1824 Edward Curr lamented that Tasmanian farms were 'studded over with large stumps of trees ... impressing the mind with the painful sensation of incommodiousness and half civilisation' (cited in Bonyhady 2000, 86). Ecological desecration is thus granted a cultural dimension as butchered landscapes become both mirror and siphon of social disorder. A traumascape is in this way rendered a 'badland', a site where embedded violence surfaces and infects the behaviour of the people that traverse it (Gibson, 2002).

In October 2008 Richard Torbay commented on his impressions of the forest, imploring that some immediate and direct action be taken.  His observations reflect an implicit assumption that this battered landscape will foster disorderly behavior, that the trauma and violence of the place will infect the community surrounding it.  He claims that the Pine Forest:

> … has always been regarded as a magic place where families go for picnics or to walk along the many paths through the trees.  I visited again this week ... It was a distressing sight.  It looked like a wasteland – clear-felled, neglected and an eyesore from the road.  Not surprisingly, its derelict state has made it a favourite haunt of trail bike riders who hoon around the moonscape deterring the few walkers who now use it.  There are no signs to indicate speed limits or that unlicensed drivers and unregistered motorbikes are not allowed.  The walking paths have been destroyed, wildlife has scattered. (Torbay 2008)

 This Mad Max-esque vision of an apocalyptic lunar-scape dominated by delinquent motorists evokes the place as a wounded environment whose traumatic underbelly will bring out the worst elements of humanity.  Instead of law-abiding walkers and natural wildlife we are left with an oily petroleum dystopia.

This vision is not uniquely Torbay's.  In fact, much of the community response to the clear-fell has centred around illegal or antisocial behaviour.  Some main concerns included 'vandalism', 'illegally ridden motorbikes', 'use of unregistered vehicles by unlicensed drivers', 'shooting (using rifles and shotguns)', 'uncontrolled fires', 'illegal/antisocial users', 'rave parties', 'noise' and 'some threatening social behaviours' (Armidale Dumaresq Council 2009a).  These complaints are probably not new, but they have certainly been more vocal following the clear-fell, with community members concerned that these problems will

intensify as the traumascape continues to infect the land and turn it 'bad'. The implicit assumption here is that there are intimate and affective connections between people and place. If the forest is not cared for, it will become bad, or wild, country[iii].


**A hybrid solution**

This perceived threat to the imminent safety and well being of the community prompted action and in September 2009 a public meeting was held with the local council, concerned community members and other stakeholders to discuss the future of the forest. Following this meeting a Pine Forest Committee was established, with a new management plan which recommended an unprecedented level of 'formal community involvement in management of the area' (Armidale Dumaresq Council 2009b, 5).

This is in response to the willingness of individuals to become directly involved in caring for the forest – with insightful suggestions such as different 'interest groups could be given different responsibilities e.g. Dog walkers pick up rubbish; motor bikers/horse riders maintain tracks; New England Medieval Society maintain toilets' (Armidale Dumaresq Council 2009a). In part, it is the hybridity of the forest that allows for this direct engagement. As an exotic plantation it cannot be regarded as a sequestered-away, untouchable wild.

The environmental recommendations for the forest are also indicative of an acceptance of hybridity. The Management Plan states that in the clear-felled area there will be planted 'an open woodland of native trees' that 'will be of great value to future generations' (Armidale Dumaresq Council 2009b, 2). This native reforestation suggests a recognition of the need to foster diversity and an appreciation of indigenous flora and fauna. This does not negate the value of the existent conifers, with the concomitant recognition that the part of the old forest that was not cleared has significant historical value in that it is one of the only remnants of the first exotic pine forests planted in NSW and all efforts should be maintained to preserve this area' (Armidale Dumaresq Council 2009b, 2). The focus is not on the impurity or inappropriateness of the pines but on their exoticness as a positive quality. There is no attempt to return to a pre-settlement ideal of the area; rather, there is an admiration of the combined eucalypt and conifer natures as part of the story of the place.

There is something wonderfully enlivening in this approach. It turns away from the strict oppositional classifications that dominate conservationist discourse, opening up the natural

world to the intrigue and complexity of social relationships. The pines cannot be separated from the meanings that develop as the forest grows. The story isn't a wholly commercial or ecological one, and while we must recognise the devastation of a monoculture of pines on a native ecosystem, we must also acknowledge the role this forest has played in people's lives, beyond its original envisioning as timber for industrial consumption.

In consultation with the council, many community members implored that the forest become 'a community forest where timber production is minor' (Armidale Dumaresq Council 2009b, 4) and their voices were heard. The response was that the 'Armidale State Forest will be developed with community input as a recreational woodland reserve with commercial forestry of secondary importance in the management plan' (Armidale Dumaresq Council 2009b, 4). In this new characterisation the forest becomes not unlike a friendly neighbour, entering a well-earned retirement from extensive work in the timber industry and left to peacefully enjoy a more relaxed, community-based lifestyle.

With this new identity foregrounded there is a necessary 'redistribution, or redefinition, of expertise' (Hinchcliffe and Whatmore 2006, 131). More intimate and embodied knowledge practices, such as Donna Haraway's conception of 'situated knowledge', seem necessary for this repositioning from forest-as-timber-resource to forest-as-community-actor. Situated knowledge rejects the disembodied objectivity of Cartesian rationalism. Instead it proposes ways of knowing that emphasise embodied physicality and cultural construction. Hinchcliffe and Whatmore describe how these knowledges might work in practice:

> Civic attachments and associations are also likely to take many other forms that will produce different kinds of knowledge. From the routines of walking the dog or working an allotment to planting a tree or constructing a pond, all these activities involve or en-fold people and a myriad of living and nonliving things. (2006, 132).

These 'new forms of social learning' (Robinson 2004: 379) represent embodied and engaged ways of knowing that are necessarily partial and incomplete, but sit more comfortably with notions of connectivity and hybrid networks than an objective and detached scientific gaze. As Katherine N Hayles asks: 'What happens if we begin from the premise not that we know

reality because we are separate from it, but that we can know the world because we are connected with it?' (1995: 48).

## Time and agency

This networked, collective embracing of environments and all their material and ethereal inhabitants also avoids detached representational strategies in favour of articulating environments as agential co-actors. Val Plumwood (2009, 125 – 126) has implored humans to re-animate their world, to:

> … become open to hearing sound as voice, seeing movement as action, adaptation as intelligence and dialogue, coincidence and chaos as the creativity of matter. The difference here is intentionality, the ability to use an intentional vocabulary. Above all, it is permission to depict nature in the active voice, the domain of agency. (Plumwood 2009, 125 - 126paragraph 45)

Carol Greenhouse claims that 'time articulates people's understandings of agency: literally what makes things happen and what makes acts relevant in relation to social experience' (Greenhouse 1996, 1). In part, it is the incommensurability between human and nonhuman temporality that encourages humans to monopolise agency and ignore the agentiality of the natural world. For example, Franklin observes that because trees 'move very slowly and their activities are spread out over relatively longer periods of time than we would normally attribute to an act, [they] appear inactive and passive, like slowly moving clocks' (2006b, 563). Michelle Bastian extends this discussion with her assertion that 'reinterpreting the creative changes, possibilities and causalities that do occur within nature as agency is impossible if one attempts to integrate nature into the schema provided by linear time' (2009, 103). 'This is because within linear time, what counts are individual wills, and, when combined with teleological or progressivist tendencies, rationally guided logical change' (2009, 103).

This anthropocentric vision is dangerously narrow. As we become uncomfortably aware of our position as 'geological agents' whose behavior has effects on sublime timescales (Chakrabarty 2009), the earth can no longer be imagined as an essentially stable setting - as timeless, or so incommensurably gradual that its changes are irrelevant. Franklin emphasises

that 'it is vital that hybrid collectifs are not simply defined in terms of social time, for fear that our understanding of agency relations will… simply revert to the study of those networks that centre on human agency' (2006b, 563). With climate change looming ominously over our future, it is apparent that even the actions of human beings themselves are not confined to social time. In this tumultuous period of human history it is vital that we recognise our interdependency with our environments, and the connectivity that characterizes the 'more-than-(but including) human world' (Curry 2008, 59).

While the Pine Forest has been dominated by a discourse of timber-harvest in its official capacity, it has continued to speak to members of the community in more intimate, agential ways. In the forest's partial destruction this dialogue was made public, and it became clear that this land could no longer be considered an isolated area of town defined by its market value. In its hybridity and exoticness the Pine Forest is freed from the trappings of narrow conservationist discourse and its associated rhetoric of protection and untouchability. The community's willingness to become directly involved in its maintenance and protection indicates the ethic of collective responsibility that can arise when people do not feel a need to admonish themselves from a Rousseau-esque idyll of nature, but instead recognise their connectedness and role in the maintenance and experience of the human-nonhuman network.

## A multi-temporal future?

The response to plant native trees in the clear-felled area seems to me to suggest a fundamental turning point in the conceptualisation of the forest. It is not perceived as necessary or desirable to destroy all the pines in an attempt at re-establishing a purely native Australian forest, but it is essential that the forest be a place of diversity and the respectful incorporation of indigenous Australian nature. As these new trees outgrow the protective milk carton coverings that have been carefully installed by community volunteers they will bring a new temporality to the forest. This polychronic hybrid will combine the native with the introduced, pre-settlement Australia with post-settlement, ancient alien conifers with a growing generation of eucalypts. To witness a line of trees that you once helped plant grow is an extremely intimate connection to the livingness of the natural world, a way of becoming embedded in a network of life-sustaining and life-giving. The collectives that form in the process of plantation and rejuvenation have the potential to transform this desecrated site into a generative place of embodied active knowledge. There is hope that this traumascape,

bound by ecological violence and destruction for a century, may now begin a process of healing.

In this exotic forest of my youth I found an intriguing story of loss, of death and rebirth, of a community battling against a corporation, and of an expansive nativism based on inclusion, care, responsibility and communication. The willingness of the Armidale people to save and restore this alien conifer plantation because it holds their memories and their histories is a testament to our complex interdependency with environments, regardless of their botanical or conservationist taxonomies. That this story came from such an unlikely place only serves to further intensify its message: that we cannot deny the nuanced and profound relationship between humans and the places that texture their lives.

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[i] The first commercial conifer plantation project was initiated at Tuncurry, near Taree. The Armidale State Forest is the site of the First Forest Experimentation Station (Horne 1986, 5).

[ii] 'Dis-remembering' is a term taken from Janet Walker's 2005 work *Trauma cinema*. The term is used in relation to post-traumatic recollections of events (p.17).

[iii] Deborah Bird Rose uses the concept of 'wild country' in her 2004 *Reports from a wild country: ethics for decolonisation* to describe a loss of connectivity in cultural and physical ecosystems leading to death and disorder. Wild here is not understood in its idealised form, but instead signals destruction caused by the processes of colonisation.

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