

C O N T E N T S

Discontinued Narratives: Elizabeth Day
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Page 1 image:
Otago Bay hot-house Tasmania – Elizabeth Day working on a cast for
View from the Sixty Third Floor, exhibited at CAST, Hobart, in 2001.
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ELIZABETH DAY INTERVIEW WITH NICHOLAS TSOUTAS



Left: *The Destiny of Objects*, 1995

Nicholas Tsoutas Let me begin this interview by putting a first set of questions to you, Elizabeth. Displacement and migration are twin and interconnected themes in your work. You arrived in Australia as a migrant and lived in Tasmania and then some years later relocated to Sydney, where you now live. Could you discuss the impact that leaving from Liverpool in the UK as a migrant had on your cultural imaginings. Did you feel displaced even though you were coming to a British colony which not only spoke English but seemed to carry English cultural logics despite distance and difference? Can you not only talk about the differences that you experienced but draw upon the cultural implications of displacement and migration in the way you see and think about things and the way it may have affected your art practice.

Elizabeth Day From the day I left the United Kingdom at the age of nine, I had a sense of unreality and dreamed I was in a movie, one in which I played the role of the stranger. As many writers have described, a *stranger* can make no assumptions, and they must continually reinvent themselves. And that edge, that edginess, that necessity, becomes one's life, one where there is no turning back. This role of stranger defines for me the migrant, living in the in between, between what one has left and where one is, between past and present. This tension is, I believe, the reason for the creativity of many migrants. It comes out of incessant discomfort with what and where one is, with at once unrelenting displacement and irresolvable in betweenness—in a word, homelessness. Metaphor, from the Greek *meta-pha*, means 'to carry over', 'to transfer'. According to John Berger, metaphor is descriptive of a movement resembling a shuttle, one going from one side to the other of a loom, for me one that moves in both directions simultaneously, that double movement of the migrant.

I find that movement, that mutation, that transfer, not only relevant to my life experiences but rich, full of potential. I find that, through words and images, one can alter and adjust perspectives, not only the artist's but the viewer's.

I had such an experience in the writing of my doctorate, *Discontinued Narratives of Migration*, under the supervision of Anna Gibbs in the Writing and Society Program at the Western Sydney University. Before I began it, I had no realization that all my work could be viewed through the optic of migration. The keywords I came to use in it were migration, mutation, ficto-criticism, hybridity, uprooting, transmutation, particles, estrangement, the stranger, the exile, transporting, transplanting, metamorphosing and translating.

As a result, I have come to see my practice as not only transdisciplinary but interdisciplinary, a practice thought as migration, the migration between and across disciplines. And to see thinking, which for me comes with making processes, as travelling. One of my many references in the thesis for that idea was to Mieke Bal's *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide*.

In fact, inspired by it, I have written a ficto-critical essay called 'Travelogue', articulating what I think constitutes creativity, shuttling between artworks that span over a decade, places, spaces, art forms, urban and natural environments, pieces of writing, a garden in a prison, and even the building of a house that can also extend the space and its meaning.

Julia Kristeva, especially in *Strangers to Ourselves*, has contextualised for me the condition of the exile, that shuttler, within a long history of migration and displacement.

You asked me about my travels, Nick. Leaving Lancashire in 1963, my parents George and Margaret Day, sisters Ellen and Sarah and I said goodbye to our extended families. And thereafter for me we became exiles, strangers, transplants — in a word, migrants.

From Wigan, near Liverpool, then the hub of 1960s Mersey beat culture, we moved, you might say travelled back in time, to my new 'home', sleepy Hobart, Tasmania, a place my parents found to be akin to 1930s Britain. There are time warps in travelling.

But, Liverpool wasn't simply part of the 'Swinging England' scene. Like Australia in its own way, Liverpool has a dark, fascinating history, one of slavery and the early capitalist exploitation in the mills and mines. I was born in nearby Wigan, of George Orwell *Road to*

Wigan Pier fame. As a person from England's working class north, the home of socialism, I haven't been a person of privilege. The north was a different country to the south, though there is no appreciation of that nuance when one becomes a 'pom', as in Australia. Ironically, much later, I experienced non-English speaking Australians finding it laughable that I, a person from England, would feel alienated in Australia because historically Australia is a 'colony' of Britain, the language is the same.

My 2005 film, *A Secret Self on the Other Side of the World*, made using my father's super eight footage of our voyage to Australia, exemplifies the discomfiting split.

When we arrived in Tasmania, we wanted to familiarise ourselves with our new 'home' by driving around the state's tourist

attractions, a number of which are, especially surprising to an impressionable nine year old, prisons. It was at that point that I was told that the English had killed off all the 'native' population of Aborigines. It was shocking, as was the island's dark vortex of cruelty and abuse, which I think continues in a subterranean way, not only in Tasmania but Tasmanians.

So in a very real sense we went from a place with a dark history to one with another.

And that darkness and shock of Tasmania has never left me, no more than has the darkness of Liverpool, nor my loving but at the same time ambivalent memories of Wigan, all of which find a place in my work, either explicitly or in likewise subterranean fashion — even terranean, of the earth, fashion.

Moving from Hobart of the early '80s to Sydney was another shock, a profound shift into an art world pre-occupied by 'space' and postmodernism, by feminism and the body.

But I didn't go directly to Sydney from Hobart.

I had a bridging year in London. That was 1981. And what was most memorable for me, most significant for my art practice, was meeting feminist artists some of whom were working with the Greenham Common protestors. And this gave me new insights with which to work.

I returned from London to attend Sydney College of the Arts, where I found myself with a great group of 'mature age' women in the sculpture programme, where the use of installation, space and the body was regarded as a political position, imbued with optimistic visions of change. Artists such as Anne Ferran, Margaret Roberts, Mandy Smith, Lesley Giovonelli, Sue Callanan and Rose Ann McGreevy were amongst that group.

In Sydney, where I still live, I found a culture in which I could walk comfortably. It felt home-like. The concepts of space and the body were synonymous at the time with new ways of being as a woman and as an artist. The very visceral bodily drawings that I did at that time spoke precisely to that. Needless to say, at that point discovering Luce Irigaray's *This Sex Which is Not One* was significant and illuminating for me.

By drawing, and by writing, too, I wanted to transform my rage about the world into a feminist aesthetic.

NT So how do you now perceive Liverpool / UK politics, art and culture from this distant perspective? Do you now consider yourself to be an Australian artist? and what of the divide between being in Sydney and the experience of Hobart?

ED In 2011 I exhibited in Liverpool, UK, my *Liverpool / Liverpool* installation piece. Seeing that rejuvenated 'European Cultural City of the Year' and what it was doing in the arts area was exciting and affirming of the path I had subliminally chosen in being involved in the field of contemporary art practice. I felt my DNA was a part of that world. Liverpool had been in a depression prior to its invigoration by contemporary practice.

My ancestors are there. I had the most astonishing discovering of a personal nature while I was there. I discovered a great-great-great-grandfather who was part of the legal system that was sending convicts to Australia! He was a judge, and he himself sentenced, as they say transported, those criminals to Terra Australis. This and other biographical

The Day family on board the *Himalaya* travelling from the UK to Australia in 1963



facts have made me think about how impulses, knowledge, family and national trauma are not only co-implicated but transferred through generations.

But that visit also confirmed for me that uneasy feeling of distance and displacement, that notion of having come from there but no longer belonging there. While that anxiety has now diminished in me, it still resonates to a degree, even as Tasmania still looks and feels to me a place of suffering. All of which confirms for me the enduring nature of displacement and the migrant.

But David Walsh's brilliant Museum of Old and New Art in Hobart has brought its own form of a modicum of relief, even as it has made a dramatic difference internationally to this remote corner of the earth.

Nick, you asked what I consider myself. I consider myself an Australian artist, a Sydney/Hobart one. I have shown in New York, at the Dooley Le Capellaine Gallery, in 1993; at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna 2000, at the Conny Dietzschold Gallery in Cologne 2002 – I've been with her gallery here in Sydney since 2001 and, as I mentioned, at Liverpool. But the reality of my life is now in Australia, and I feel partly grafted and committed to its tragic history.

At the same time I believe the work being done in Sydney, in Australia, including my own, is international art, that the opposition between national and international is a false one.

Indeed, the art I make is about not only the Australian context but that of the whole planet, not only about but of, out of, the very materiality of the earth. Indeed, I see these 'local' issues as at the same time global, and vice versa.

For the last few years I have been working on what we have called *The Longford Project*, a collaborative project with other artists and with descendants of that small town Longford in Tasmania, researching scenes of crimes that occurred in the early history of that district. My own connection, going back to my relative the judge, explores the effect of British Law on the landscape – an abiding subject of my art practice. Julie Gough, a Tasmanian Aboriginal member of the group, suggested that the whole of Australia can be regarded as a 'scene of crime'. This project, with Anna Gibbs, Noelene Lucas and Julie, is an ongoing one that I value because it connects me to the history, including familial, and cultural tensions of my own displacement, or better, displacements.

When I made *Liverpool/Liverpool* in the two venues of St Georges Hall in Liverpool, UK, and the Casula Powerhouse in the city of Liverpool, New South Wales, I used the words of writers on migration, Sarah Day, Nasrin Mahoutchi, Catherine Rey and Ouyang Yu, in one of the cast grass pieces I made for it. I wanted to bring the work into both a local and global context by the use of local place names from both cities, interspersed with the new words of these writers that are inscribing themselves on the surface of this country, in and upon its earth, now inscribed in and on my grass earth pieces, words usually transposed, transplanted, from elsewhere, and in effect attempt to show what links them these cities and how they each migrate into the other, are already in play in each other.

NT You've mentioned earth as an element in your *Liverpool/Liverpool*. Can you talk more about earth's role in your work?

ED My practice is based in a theory of art that is integrally related to earth. My practice is itself a form of migration, of transplantation, that finds its roots in Minimal Art, or better, in the transplanting of Minimal Art into the installation art form known as earthworks, pioneered by the American artist Robert Smithson (and a few daring others, notably Michael Heizer and Nancy Holt). One might say that he, Smithson, de-territorialised Minimalism, indeed art, taking it out of the gallery into the outside world. In *The Deleuze Dictionary*, Adrian Parr proposed that 'de-territorialisation can best be understood as a movement producing change. In so far as it operates as a line of flight, de-territorialisation indicates the creative potential of an assemblage. So, to deterritorialise is to free up the fixed relations that contain a body while exposing it to new organisations'. That's how I understand Smithson's work.

Up to now, I have painted a rather bleak picture of migration, describing it in negative terms. But I do like to see it as possessing as well that potential, that liberating component of the line of flight, what in my own work I have called 'The White Line'. And that would cut against any Utopian vision of home, making home rather always lost, de-territorialised.

Smithson's influence has been strong in my work. My use of the garden, which I see as a practice arriving via the feminine, draws upon his *Site/Nonsite* concept. The garden asserts at the least what for me was lost through migration for a generation of my family, that is, the language of the maternal line.

In the '80s in Sydney, I shared a house with the artist Bonita Ely. I was intrigued and influenced by her feminist work with the environment, which had conceptual connections to the earth/art movement I mentioned. The study of the origins of conceptual earthwork helps one to understand what had occurred in Sydney before I arrived here and also gave me a way of thinking about how I embodied my own concerns in the real world.

This was powerfully evidenced for me in *The Boronia Garden Project*, which took place in the harsh reality of a women's prison and in which I wanted to address not only that field of neglect – the women's prison – but a second: the abject feminine zone.

I have continued to use earth in my works, by that means continuing my exploration of my migrant status and the issues it has raised for me in terms of migration and belonging. The hydroponic systems I used in *View from the Sixty Third Floor* were about the earth, emblematic of the binary technology/nature and their hybrid co-implications... Like the electrical circuit the hydroponic system plugs into, as migrants we 'plug in' to our new surroundings and function within a new system. That is what my parents did, market gardeners who became the first hydroponic farmers in Tasmania. They lived through a change, a metamorphosis, that took the form in all my earth works of a mutation in a Minimalist grid.

You ask, why earth? One of the key subjects and themes of my art practice is the imposition of British rule, in particular the prison, upon this land, this earth, 'Terra Australis', and its indigenous inhabitants, a land, an earth, anything but what the British, to further their colonising project, declared Terra Nullius.

As a Brit, I have internalised not only that imposition of the prison on the landscape and its inhabitants but also the landscape, the earth, imposed upon, as well as have externalised both in my art. The guilt you carry as a Brit for what the English, including the judge, have imposed on Aboriginal earth is inevitably marked in my work.

Here I must also reference the series of eight site-responsive grass carpets and the writing prints I made. The minimalist grass carpets are expressions of transit or transience, but also inevitably grave-like, serving as reminders of the earth, the earth threatened with extinction. But, of course, the earth that also has the power to turn against, to destroy, to render extinct what is imposed upon it. They are also critiques of the British obsession with lawns, but thereby also often alluding to homes in suburbia.

When I made the grass carpet at the stately colonial site Werribee as part of the *View from the Sixty Third Floor* series, I had a grave dug into the grid pattern, registering in it the Aboriginal deaths that had transpired on that site.

In my installation at the Tin Sheds at The University of Sydney, *notes on the castle*, the work was clearly related to others that I have made about the institution of the prison and its avatars on the Australian landscape.

The different sites with which I work create a clear space for me as a concept, a smooth space in the Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari sense of the word, of earth as a space of possibilities. earth as rhizomatic migrant, as opposed to the arborescent, authoritarian prisons.

I relate to the *synesthetic*. Sound, colour, scent and meaning are what is palpable or tacit. Resonant is the word often used. The carpets are possessed, olfactory embodiments of a sense of the earth present in exquisite landscapes of Tasmania. When I built my studio on Bruny Island, which as you know is off the south east coast of Tasmania, I wanted to allow that influence of the earth to flow through into the city locations, the galleries and other urban spaces, where my work is exhibited.

I have a studio there on Bruny Island and had one perched in Parramatta Road in Sydney with a small group of artists also from elsewhere than Sydney.

I have made a number of works after *The Boronia Garden Project* which reflect on the spaces inside an institution. In 2013, at the of the National Art School Gallery in Sydney, I gave virtual presence to that installation by creating the *Drawing of the Map of the Boronia Garden*, a mixed media work combining photography, knitting and collaged materials on hessian. The 'drawing' drew together four notions: the materiality of earth, smooth space, the maternal and the physical pathways in the garden made by women, figured by mycelial underground networks evoking Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the rhizome, which for me, a member of the pre-Internet generation, links to this wonder of the networked world.

NT Can you tell us more about your priorities as an artist and what influences your thinking. Clearly your practice in Australia emerged during the introduction or emergence of post-modernism and the end of modernity, which caused huge, controversial debates in Australia and had a major impact on how and why art was produced in this country. How do you perceive your own practice in light of these theoretical and critical debates. There is evidence of certain abstractions present in your work, so you may wish to reference particular works or certain projects and also the different materialities that exist in your work.

ED My first introduction to art historical study was in the field of painting, with late modernism, at the Tasmanian College of Advanced Education in Hobart. And not surprisingly, as a young woman with no female mentors, it was confusing. My work has emerged through an analysis of modernism, as it was first taught to me by two European male lecturers, the Austrian artist Anton Holzner and Dusan Marek, a Czech surrealist painter. My work still bears a strong relationship to painting.

By contrast, I began working spatially when I came to Sydney in the 1980s. Painting for me begged to have a context outside the gallery, which Smithson's had. The installation works, such as *The Viaduct Project*, *The Unravelling of Form*, are critiques of painting. Using space was personally 'empowering'.

The Destiny of Objects, as viewed from the upper floor at Casula Powerhouse, is also a large abstract painting but using 3D objects. Modernism established aesthetic principles and language that we can now pick and choose from with freedom to play as one likes in order to recreate.

It wasn't until I discovered artists like Louise Bourgeois and Eva Hesse and saw the Lucy Lippard Power Lecture in about 1975 that I could acknowledge a whole linguistic dimension of myself. That was how I connected early on to American art. The idea that there was a world of women's work that had never been recognised and written about was clarifying personally and intellectually. I was working with *affect*. That wasn't a word I knew at the time, though the world surged through me in ways that demanded that I understand what was going on through writing and making artwork. Eva Hesse's articulate language of her states of being, her sexuality, was and remains the most influential on me as an artist. In 1990, the Australia Council for the Arts awarded me the Greene Street Studio in New York to study her work, and it was amazing to be in its electric presence.

I am engaged with artists in whose work I can feel the heat of some transformation occurring, as in the case with Eva Hesse, where there are very profound issues that disturb and engage her. The work entwines around her.

The work I make is often deeply personal, and I am also a socially involved person and for a variety of reasons. In the art and textual work that became fashionable in the '80s, there was a highly self-conscious effort towards rejecting the history of modernity whilst exploring the notions of the postmodern. I was absorbed by these new philosophies but at the same time frustrated because I wanted to work in a way that included both subjectivity and corporeality and that was not encouraged.

My year in London amongst an inspired feminist crowd helped me find a way through the barrage of the heady early '80s. I gravitated to feminist thinkers like Luce Irigaray,

Kristeva and Hélène Cixous, as well as Anna Gibbs, whose work with art and text and ficto-criticism has been influential on the theorising of my practice, which has always co-mingled with writing. I also read Michel Foucault and Deleuze and Guattari. The institution of philosophy was being challenged by these French philosophers. I liked thinking, as many did at the time, of how institutions might develop into great places. Now, shamefully, we seem to have regressed. The world seems to be hitting a new low.

Art for me is a *process of enquiry*, and my work has constantly shifted between art, science and technology. Everyday processes and materials are part of that refusal to distinguish between 'life' and 'art' that defines both my art and life.

I am from a family of makers. I have continued to invent work using what I think of as textiles, such as the unravelling and the knitting and weaving, the grass growing. These are processes with a domestic origin. I was bringing the private to the public. Asserting the maternal body has been a very persistent thread, though not necessarily a foregrounded aspect of my practice.

The machine/nature conjunction of hydroponics systems that had been my parent's livelihood recognises hybridity and 'in-betweens'. My mother transposed her connection to the earth in a huge garden she made around our house in Otago Bay, a transient installation with European trees immersed in a bush setting.

For *Cementa15*, a biannual art event held in Kandos, New South Wales, I made *Myco Logic*, a work using the image of fungi, which form an interwoven 'underground', subterranean, rhizomatic network, a mycelial conglomerate, in the shape of a three-dimensional floor painting. It explored my interest in primitivism, newly revived because of its recognition of the earth, and values that are not capitalist in nature. The artwork, composed of woven, knitted and crocheted fungi, was made with the help of the Kandos community of crafts people, as well as contributing artists.

I had hoped it would be a way of telling stories that tapped into and re-examined the colonial past, possibly in a reconciliatory way between the colonial and the Aboriginal histories. I wanted the participants to draw on their own family histories to use and examine those forgotten things from their own pasts, such as doilies, lace, knitted garments, and so on. I made an image, as it turned out, more about the art/craft binary. I'll try that project again. Most of the projects are ongoing. For me, all projects are incomplete, they are a constantly ongoing process.

I am at present studying nanotechnology through a residency at the University of Newcastle and am looking forward to investigating as well the bio-mimicry of photosynthesis.

I believe art should be a wild animal. That is why the idea of working in a prison captivated me. I read Foucault on the prison. The prison was the paradigmatic institution and at the same time its most extreme form, and therefore for me the most challenging. Prisons and asylums resonate personally as relatives of mine had disappeared into the latter. This foment of intellectual and emotional 'problems' around institutions determined my choice to be committed to the education of criminals and the restoration of decent power balances for women. Deconstruction of institutions from within seemed like a good idea. Deconstruction of painting led me to installation practice.

The sense of space in Australia is palpable. It's vast. The concept of big space was attractive and allowed me to engage with space and this country, this land, outside of the confines of the gallery space and contextually mark a difference for me from the constructed idea of English and European closed space. The white lines that often appear in my work are rhizomatic 'smooth spaces', as I mentioned before; and the concept of a *smooth* space occurs if you link all my works as a whole – the carpets, the prison work, the writing and the gallery work.

One seeks a model. I wanted to include the damaged spaces of institutions. The impossibility of restitution preoccupies me, and I am still thinking that through, including philosophically. For me, installation art functions within a complex hybridity, transgressively moving between spaces analogous to the in between spaces of cultural displacement, like a virtual interface with the actual world.

NT Following on from the previous question, your work seems to me constantly curious in relation to its materiality and in relation to a certain attitude to site-specificity. Can you discuss the interdisciplinarity/hybridity in and site-specificity of your work?

ED I am a border crosser. As I said earlier, my art practice is of the order of the transdisciplinary, working across the arts and sciences, and the interdisciplinary, working with hybridity, restlessly migrating between and across forms, materials and mediums – sculpture, installation, video and painting.

I would argue that my chewing gum works are performative paintings.

I have invented processes that resonate with the visceral experience of history. Chaotic, exuberant and also painful, *The Unravelling of Form* was made with many unravelled jumpers, migrating Jackson Pollock's drip paintings to a new medium.

I like inventing a process that gives a succinct, evocative and vivid idea, one which the viewer can 'get' in a subliminal, poetic way. For instance, the work that I made for the *Drawing Lines in the Sand* exhibition in 2011, *The Law Is Not Always Just*, was made out of orange coloured industrial mesh from Bunnings Warehouse, drawn across the large area it occupied on Cockatoo Island in Sydney Harbour. Viewed from above, it is a large scale drawing of the institutional, demarcated, 'striated' space that now exists across that location.

I choose materials so that they are what they are – road mesh, found every day in road works, that divides space with authority.

I like the confusion of the virtual with the actual.

Within that Cockatoo Island project I made another work of the same title but out of grass letters. I see my work as drawing, drawing with everyday materials. I return to stitching again and again because it is my way of drawing, for me more comfortable than a pencil.

There is a Zen proverb that there is nothing more valuable than a dead cat. I think it the most non-materialistic thought. A dead cat is valuable because you can't put a value on it! 'Art' is still to many people something durable that you put on a wall, and it accrues value; but that value is monetary, a commodity, usually made by one person. In my work, I think the art occurs in between all the various forms and can occur between different people in collaborations. These in between, hybrid spaces are interesting and worth exploring

as spaces of possibility, of the virtual, of migration and displacement, of transformation and transplantation.

The site-specific *Longford Project* has brought together people I know from my life in Sydney. As it happened, three of them discovered they were related genealogically: Anna Gibbs and Noelene Lucas from colonial times through Longford; and Anna to Julie Gough through another Tasmanian colonial line. I think these creative relationships are also about cutting through history, wanting to be contemporary women re-grouping the past, reforming bonds and re-evaluating them.

I have been involved over the last few years with what has been called the *Parramatta Female Factory Memory Project* in Parramatta, New South Wales. I was asked to design a garden for that site, once the place of confinement and retraining of convict women. I designed a pathway system that threaded through the walls of the conjoined institutional buildings. These abject colonial spaces are very rich places to work for me. I think that is because there are aspects of my own past that resonate when I am in those spaces, what with, as I mentioned, the entwining of my family history in the judicial system of 19th century England and the mental health system of 20th century England, in which latter system my grandmother was confined.

I participated in an exhibition curated by Lily Hibberd at the Bethel Orphanage on the Parramatta site with another grass text work made specifically for there, reflecting some of the graffiti marks drawn by the incarcerated on its walls, a ghostly echo of my own history.

The new projection work that I am making will be designed to be projected on the sandstone walls of the Orphanage. As with *The Viaduct Project*, *The Unravelling of Form* which used the brick masonry of the structure in relation to the unravelled wool, this work indicates an awareness of sandstone colonising materiality, and in this sense can be seen as re-inscribing history.

NT You perceive your practice as political. Can you tell us what the political means to you? Can you please elaborate on your philosophies and how you see the world and what motivates you to make work that has a political context or edge to it. I find in your work certain political concerns, or at least a social awareness that indicates a political awareness, but not necessarily in the conventional binary of western politics.

ED My work has always been political. I arrived in this country even as a child thinking that something was wrong with the state of things. Gough Whitlam was elected Prime Minister shortly after I arrived, and his idea that the arts should be the 'spearhead' of the nation has stuck in my mind as essential, though subsequent governments haven't followed this direction despite knowing how crucial the arts are to the health of a culture. Aboriginal culture has rightfully moved more to the foreground. I am political in my belief about art as a necessity, but less and less can see the sense in making things that just become part of salesrooms. Creating an impermanent experience for viewers is really compelling, despite its being ridiculously not a good financial proposition.

For me, there is a politics to fungi. Mushrooms grow in the dark and transform the past. A lot of work I have done is about power and its inequalities. I like networks. Northern Soul?!

Occasionally, working in an institution one can be creative, as was the case with *The Boronia Garden Project*, in which I mapped a garden for a women's prison housing Aboriginal and migrant inmates. I designed a creative structure which gave a certain amount of autonomy to the women to empower themselves be empowered by working with their own ideas. With the new work, *Invisible Worlds / Invisible Words*, I am also considering sites of trauma, such as colonial prisons and the ongoing dilemmas afflicting their descendants. As a few people have said, until the ghostliness of the past is recognised, we won't be able to move on as a nation.

Some of my work is coded and abstract, some are actual on-site developments; but, as I have said, I have often worked with the idea of the prison on the landscape and the implications of that forcing, a kind of attempted incarceration of earth.

Ann Finegan wrote about the cast writing on the undersides of my grass work as the unconscious. I am grateful for that thought. These works are interfaces with the imposition of the colonial past upon the earth in this country, a thin skim on an ancient country.

Much of my work continues to deal with that abjection. In the two parts of my *Chewing Gum Series* – *Cosmos* and *Assorted Spat Out Ones* – the devastated eliminations of our society are addressed. These works are made from actual chewing gum (many colours and varieties mixed like paint) and hessian. I also made a wall work in that zone of neglect, exclusion and abjection called *Shadow*, again out of hessian and low cost materials. After these works I moved into using actual historical spaces and away from simply representing them. There is definitely a social justice impulse in these works but also some turgid emotions of my own that needed to work themselves out.

Art is animated by the circumstances one is in. The chewing gum paintings were made at a time when I was really poor, though their raison d'être isn't just that. People do a double take when they look at them, as they look like subtle, attractive Fred Williams paintings from afar, then up close they look like something repulsive. I often couldn't afford anything much but managed to make art out of recycled cheap things, as at the same time I was interested in the politics of the Arte Povera group and Fluxus. Many artists use re-cycled materials these days, and hence it has just become part of art's vernacular.

Artists work out how to 'be' in becoming. I spoke to a group of artist friends who also didn't have children. We had all felt that we wanted certain of our families' behaviours to stop with us. We wanted to make the world different and indeed better. We didn't see bringing more children into the world as necessarily doing that. Even as I have felt it to be important to bring the maternal out of the private into the public sphere, so too for me the personal is always political. Directly and indirectly, my work always seems to be woven with the complex problems of suffering and social injustice, uneven histories and political issues addressing indigenous and women's inequality.

I come from a gifted family of readers. I like the perspectives and clarity that reading poetry and literature gives, as well as philosophy. I like an artwork to resound with clarity and unmistakable affect and 'presence'. A lot of good art does convey information and insights about particular political situations.

I recently re-read some of Emily Dickinson's and Gwen Harwood's poetry. That is what I mean by resounding. They are very simple and very complex at the same time. They reverberate at a level that is simultaneously emotionally charged and intellectually acute. It can only happen when there's a distillation of an experience that might be deeply personal but somehow transports the reader or observer into a new experience that they might find hard to explain exactly, or they create a condition for some deep rumination about how the world moves them.

Art is moving into the idea of 'research' these days. After having completed my Doctorate in 2013, I have found it difficult to make art as I used to, because the research develops such heightened self-consciousness about everything you do and how we are placed historically, though at the same time that has been useful in finding my bearings.

Making art and writing are the two ways I think about the world. I grew up with a rage about something and a sense of injustice, even tragedy, a viewpoint that came out of having politically left-wing parents who were appalled, as many intelligent people were, about the state of the arts in Australia in the 1960s, which led to the Whitlam 'It's time' campaign in 1972.

I loved punk when I was growing up, the Ramones' belief that anyone can do it. It continues to get me into trouble. I like art that is living. This is going to become more and more difficult to do, I fear. For sure, the world is doing things in ways that don't make sense to me and seem to be really unfair and stupid, like ignoring global warming and neglecting people in poverty whilst many have obscene wealth.

NT You describe yourself as a feminist. How do your views of feminism affect your art and would you then describe your art as feminist practice?

ED I am aligned with feminism, mental health issues, ecology, social justice and artists' rights. Being involved with 'grass roots' artists' run initiatives for much of my life, and now having developed an artist's studio that can be viewed on Resartis.com that is available to other artists, is a way of manifesting my politics. Non-institutional networks that I could subscribe to as rhizomatic, more than ever, I think, need to stay active and alive with creative people. We enable each other to become. Neo-liberalism smells like death to me. Politics becomes increasingly important to us in the arts who don't want to be institutionalised and sanitised or eliminated by the Liberal Party in this country. We are at a point where we must fight for our rights.

I have worked in Corrections New South Wales as a part-time income, but it has always felt that I was doing important work alongside my studio practice. It has been research in a very real sense. It also gave me a way of recognising the dark side of Australian history, crime and corruption part of the country's DNA.

NT This leads me to ask about your experience in working in the prison system and making art in relation to your prison experiences.

ED I had a deep fear of institutions that I think pervaded my family in a really unhealthy way. For this reason, but not it alone, the image of the prison on the landscape and all its implications were and remain quite central to my feminist art practice. Reclaiming the maternal body for me meant not denying the darkness but naming what has traditionally be consigned to invisibility and silence as the un-namable. I have worked with women who are incarcerated, which is challenging; but it is a way that I find out something about my own invisible and silenced family history.

I'm interested in my own becoming and the becoming of others. Creativity is an animating force in such becomings across the arts and sciences, across borders and walls. I am really moved by collectivity, and people standing together.

I am very much in support of environmental and ecological issues that are intrinsic to my aesthetic practice. Global warming is clearly something we all have to address politically and be individually and collectively responsible for keeping to a minimum. I think all artists must be part of a paradigm shift for the better. Being ethical and being an ambitious artist can be perceived as being at odds with one another, but not for me. I think that activism can take many forms.

I did want *The Boronia Garden Project* to be a structure for participation. It also was an attempt to work across the land of a fenced in prison with images from the Aboriginal and migrant women. It was difficult and quietly subversive. Some of the Aboriginal women made totem designs, translating them into gardens, to regenerate some parts of the bush. When I devised that project, it was partly because I couldn't stand that I was teaching Aboriginal inmate students in a building that looked like a colonising castle on the landscape without acknowledging that architecture's violent history.

I do claim to be a feminist artist because I have gained so much from the relatively new traditions of women's art history and feminist philosophy. It has enabled me to find a way to work with unwritten histories. My work is about history and its re-writing or unravelling and about being the fullest of what one is in relation to the world. Unless one recognises the debt to women who fought the toughest battles by simply being active and intelligent individuals, we will go backwards. There is a new future waiting to be defined by women, and I am a proud part of that. Most politics is still defined by men, and I see women still having to battle for their survival in institutions. I became involved with *The Boronia Garden Project* and the *Parramatta Female Factory Memory Project* because I wanted to support women who have been damaged by institutions. It externalised something that was damaged in myself. Social justice is a powerful motivator in what I do creatively, but it goes through many filters.

I have written a story called 'The Black' that explored my relationship to damage and trauma in institutions.

NT Following on from the last question, your work reflects a deep concern with the environment. Do you think this is an important part of you being an artist and do you think that your art practice and artists need to be socially responsible?

ED My work draws on some legacies of feminist art practice. The forms my work has taken are a reaction to the masculine ‘brothers of the brush model’. Some large drawings that I did in the ‘80s were very performative, about the presence of a female body. The tendrils of wool replicated paint splashes so well! *The Unravelling of Form* is one of several ongoing projects that I come in and out of... It isn’t finished yet. I came out of a modernist era that was largely about masculine dominance. By contrast, I see creativity in everyday processes such as gardening, shopping or stitching and site-specific or responsive practice as opposed to the notion of the monumental, the self-contained object dominating a location, though my work is informed by 20th century abstraction, and the aesthetic presence of a work is very important to me. I like working with spaces because you integrate the work with existing textures, smells, colours, making a multisensory spectacle that the viewer experiences with you. There’s an ethics in that, too.

Feminist art mainstreamed the crafts, though I think that largely the art market hasn’t caught up with that. I have made works using knitting such as *Myco Logic* and *The Fragility of Goodness* series. Even though Rosemary Trockel and others have definitely broken the ground there, I think that there’s still not a lot of parity between a painting and a knitted sculpture as far as salability goes. Collectors still see permanence as a prerequisite for ‘great art’. Defying ownership is perversely part of my content. I like a sustainable and decomposable object!

The Longford Project is an example of my collaborative process. I think this process comes out of feminism. Collaboration works against the idea of a singular vision in favour of community interactions and shared discourses.

Disappointingly, some women aspire to be the same as male artists in the art world. I had always hoped we would do things differently.

I have mentioned a few early influences. These include outstanding artists such as Louise Bourgeois and Eva Hesse, whose work came powerfully from their emotional responses to the world and in reaction to what had traumatised them, such as patriarchy, or genocide, in Hesse’s case. Personal experience is an inevitable part of larger streams that artists tap into and define.

Miriam Kahn’s drawing had a big impact when I did a lot of drawing. She draws with her body rather than her will in a very distinct way. Bonita Ely’s and Joan Ground’s work especially had an impact on my wanting to bring the earth into play...

I have also worked on the peripheries of society with its rejects and neglected. It is the investigation of unknown territories in ourselves and in the world that drives me.

NT More recently, writing has been a big influence on your work and in the way you undertake the research that informs your work. Could you discuss what you are reading and what writings have influenced you and your practice and how writing is revealing itself in your work as an artist. Are art and writing two different things to you? Let me add, you have recently completed your PhD, which has particular demands on how you undertake research in the development of the text. Has this influenced your increased desire to write as an integral part of your practice? I personally believe that art has always included writing, text, etc., as part of its visual languages. That includes concrete poetry. But you may want to discuss why and how you write and how writing works in relation to your work and also what writers influence you and what artists who use writing within their practice influence you. So again a big question in several parts.

ED I am currently working on a collection of short stories. Writing remains an intrinsic and interwoven aspect of my practise. These include visual images, and they began to uncover secrets and subliminal texts of my own migration and memories associated with that. They are about the effects of institutions on their occupants through a fictitious character, and I hope to create in them an atmosphere that resounds with a critique of colonial history. My writing has extended in unanticipated directions, unlocking new connections that the visual and installation work addresses more obliquely. These pieces are adopting a kind of hysterical writing, a writing moving not simply from position to position, but between positions as well. A writing refusing and incapable of an ordered account...

It is also the nature of traumatic writing to have to struggle to say something, and that gaps and silences are a feature of it. Here my work enacts or performs what it speaks about – the difficult work of integration of trauma into narrative. I am continuing to experiment with writing for the work being developed for projection onto the colonial site of historical institutions in Parramatta. No buildings, particularly colonial buildings, are politically or ethically neutral. My work in prisons and the extraordinary stories of women inmates have been crucial in connecting the tensions between my art practice and my writing, how writing has been instrumental within that practice.

Writing enables me to bring art history, autobiography and love of fiction together in the works that I make and the ideas that I engage with.

I wrote in the ficto-critical story called ‘The Black’ about how I saw that northern gothic darkness was transported to Australia with convicts. I wanted to connect my work with female prisoners to some early memory. The role of memory is central to my practice. Much of that colonial history still, I think, lies covered over and embedded in the psychology of Australian culture and, as Foucault would suggest, in the un-named injustice that continues to damage. I seem to feel that profoundly, in a way that determines what I do. White people always run the risk of meddling, as so many have done to ‘help’ the Aboriginal cause, when that in turn runs the risk of making things worse. I wonder whether many British people seriously consider the damage that their colonising has had on Australia. By enabling and empowering the indigenous female prisoners involved in it, *The Boronia Garden Project* affectively reclaimed land from the institution of the colonising prison and restored dignity

to the women and their relation to the land, a fact that I am particularly proud of insofar as that garden project continues today 10 years on.

One reason that I used Smithson's work to write about was his use of many disciplines, including film, writing, painting, printed word, sculpture, aerial photography, etc. I like what he said about how his art is coterminous with all those forms, flowing through and in between all the different media as they feed each other. His 'art' occurs in those in between spaces that thread through many kinds of places – mines, disused suburban plots, deserts and sometimes in galleries. The *Site / Non-site* concept of his has been and remains really useful and clarifying for me.

I think that it is only through writing that I can think about the confusion that is life!

I chose to do a Creative Arts Doctorate in the Department of Writing and Society at Western Sydney University partly because of my inclination to writing, though I am not a scholar. A lot of artists that I know have no desire to write at all, but I did. And do. Words have been integrated into my practice for a long time. I loved Cy Twombly's use of words 'married' to graphic qualities, such as the series he made about ancient Greek poets. He scrawled 'OVID' in an almost child-like, searching way, as if to ask 'Who are you?'. I used text in my grass prints such as *The Law Is Not Always Just* because I wanted to make the words connect with the earth, to in fact speak. I am developing a work with nano-writing at present that is about the invisible and forgotten histories of the institutions where people were housed in Parramatta, as I said earlier, making images that resonate with the invisibility of the incarcerated and what lies beyond what is immediately visible.

I want to work in ways that my writing and visual practices come closer. I think that my favourite writers are highly literary, in that they use words in a brilliant, illuminating way. I love Alice Munro, the Canadian writer. There are many artists working with writing that navigates our interfaces with digital technology.

NT A final question. Do you see yourself as a spiritual person and do artists need to be spiritual to make work?

ED I have to think about what a 'spiritual' person is... So many possible understandings of that word. It's often used for people who have a meditation practice or are part of a religious organisation, which I'm not. I see it in a real way as digging into the shit of life, such as poverty and, say, bad attitudes towards people with mental health issues. I support compassion and movements towards better things as the Green Party stands for, or artists run initiatives that support creative independence. I also support very much the recovery of Aboriginal history and independence, as well as women's rights.

I try to behave ethically rather than spiritually, but I confess a desire towards transcendence of some kind through aesthetics. When an image works, it brings together ideas and enables insightful connections to others, which is what I think many regard as spirituality.

I catch onto ideas and draw them down into images and projects. The persistence that is required to follow ideas over years and bring them to realisation takes something, but I'm not sure many spiritual people would see that as spirituality. It is dogged determination driven by a need that might not necessarily be a healthy one. Yet maybe I think having an



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art practice is 'spiritual' in a very authentic way. I'm a free thinker but have learned from some traditions. Making art is an aesthetic freedom and, for me, an ethical discipline that can enable the integration of ideas through images and can actually change physical and mental states.

An art practice is a spiritual tradition for those of us who are visually oriented. It is a very powerful

activity, and it causes deep connections with people and the world. Finding images that resonate with my concern for the environment is in my framework spiritually... connected! A thinker such as Luce Irigaray uses light as a metaphor for women, deep water to deep space... I like to think I am walking towards the light, moving out of the deep water of emotional sludge. I am connected to the earth in a way that the new animists suggest.

I think it's important to process one's life and one's relationship to the world. I confront fears to be an artist, fears of failure, poverty, institutionalisation. As I say, I worked in various institutions to figure out what dreadful things existed behind those walls for my unfortunate family members. Doing and making art so that one isn't overwhelmed by the world and one has some agency in the traditions of languages is life-saving for me. Sometimes I feel that art functions like a religion or a space where one finds inner peace or even where one can transcend reality itself. I am not sure if this is spiritual in itself, but there is enough evidence in art history and art theory that connects art and spirituality. The best artists, such as Marcel Duchamp, Hesse, etc., distil their minds, hearts, and aesthetic directions into a cohesive narrative embodied materially in their creations.

Many 'spiritual' people do not, I think, have much compassion, as is evidenced by various Catholic leaders and politicians. The practice of kindness and compassion is important. My mother had been through many painful things in her life but retained these virtues, which was inspirational.

Artists make art for so many reasons, probably not always spiritual. One has to live, and good luck if you can live on the sales of artworks. But, yes, I personally felt that the meaning had to be embodied in the process and form of a work. So a work that is about my concern for the environment, inherent in the grass work, was better expressed by the work being biodegradable.

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