

# 2006 Vol 6 Issue No. 1 — Making Badlands

> EDITORIAL

This issue of *Transformations* follows from the *Making Badlands* conference held in December 2005, and jointly hosted by *Transformations* and the *Bundaberg Media Research Group*. The conference included an exhibition space along with the theme of the conference, and an online version of this exhibition was available on the *Transformations* Artspace site.

The conference was based around the concept of the “badlands” arising from Ross Gibson’s *Seven Versions of an Australian Badlands* (UQ Press, 2002) which describes the central Queensland region as haunted by a violent colonial past and fraught with troubling incidents that make it an Australian badland. This conference addressed the concept of an Australian badland — what it means to speak of a space as a badland, its relation to history, the imaginary, and to questions of regionality, representation, myth, archival authority, and the formation of narrative and discursive knowledge.



The articles comprising this issue explore these ideas of the badlands in extended contexts and environments, and in various and diverse ways. Ross Gibson’s keynote address titled *Places Past Disappearance*, which is transcribed in this issue, offers us a thinking out loud about what he calls “vestige work” which is “the work we need to do with history in order to understand better how to live well in the present and future”. He says

*Rummaging in Australia's aftermath cultures, I try to re-dress the disintegration in our story-systems, in our traditional knowledge caches, our landscapes and ecologies. My job is to investigate and recuperate scenes and collections of artifacts that have been torn apart somehow, torn by landgrabbing, let's say, or by accidents, or exploitation that ignores rituals of preservation and restoration.*

The next three articles in this issue are loosely grouped because they are all in some way about artistic production that is central to the practices of the places under investigation, a querying of the relation of the place/space and the engagement with it. Phillip Roe in *Ghosts in the Landscape* takes up questions of photography, language, landscape and representation in relation to a particular site – the vast, million-year-old salt lake known as Lake Ballard in the heart of the Goldfields region of Western Australia. The article explores the idea of landscape in this place that is simultaneously the site of a significant art installation. The sculpted figures that now inhabit this landscape haunt not so much the landscape itself, but the very discourses that have previously articulated the means of its representation. In *Our place: in-between the primordial and the latter?*, Ashley Holmes is concerned with the specificity of a place, a beach near his home, which is the influence for and content of a new media artwork which was exhibited during the conference. In both paper and artwork he examines this place, and his own relationship to it, as both artist and inhabitant. He speculates as to its history, and to the use made of the area by its previous inhabitants, siting his speculation always in the complex and often problematic space between research and artistic practice. Saffron Newey, in *Domestic Imaginings*, uses her own artworks to explore the concept of the badlands as an uninhabited, de-peopled exterior. Newey's paintings are photo-realistic depictions of cropped and close-up domestic space, pure interiority that invokes the outside world only as absence, as mystery. Through the tremulous boundary between inside and outside, she explores the edges of the self and its relation to home and other.

The second grouping of articles coheres in that they take a specific suburb or area to investigate the badlands idea. Sharon Thorne's *Ley Lines* investigates a peripheral space within the city of Melbourne which until the 21st century escaped the jurisdiction of any Melbourne Authority. Unfolding the repressed history of the *Dudley Flats* space from the early days of white settlement, when the Aboriginal population were shunted to this unwanted swampland, the paper examines the processes of change at work on this site over the past two centuries, as it has evolved from the periphery to the front line of the new docklands precinct. As a landscape haunted by displacement, loss and waste, the everyday lives of the women who inhabited this site during the Depression are taken up in her art practice. From the heart of the Capricornia badlands, in *Making Badlands All Over the World: Local Knowledge and Global Power* Steve Butler investigates the use of depleted uranium at the Shoalwater Bay military training area near

Rockhampton. The training area's adjacency to significant environmental and heritage sites prompts Butler to ask questions about the capacity of the local community to contest this burgeoning badlands, and the relations of nature and culture that underly such contestations. In *"I wish I was anywhere but here": 'Structure of address' in the badlands*, Constance Ellwood examines the riots that took place in March 2005 in the suburb of Macquarie Fields in the Western Suburbs of Sydney, New South Wales. She examines in particular the print media and talkback radio constructions of the riots and their influence over responses by police and government, ultimately arguing that the discourses of these media and organisations constitute a unidirectional "address" that leaves no room for the voices of the residents of Macquarie Fields.

Wendy Madsen's *Badlands at the Bedside: Fact or Fiction* stands alone as a unique engagement with the badlands concept. It translates the space of the badlands to the nursing bedside, examining the struggle between trained and untrained nurses in late 19th century Queensland, and how this struggle proceeded in accord with an imaginary badlands structured through cultural narrative and fiction.

All of these papers pursue badlands as spaces of multiplicities, greater than, and hence excessive to, the centres found within them – sites of boundaries, margins, peripheries, and frontiers, with contingent and transversal relations to any 'core' centre. All centres are regional, and all regions have their centres. Urban, suburban, inner and outer metropolitan, town and country, outback, bush, are all regions capable of both producing and resisting badlands as cultural imaginaries.

The *Making Badlands Conference* also examined how imaginary spaces are actively produced through technological, aesthetic, conceptual, visual, audio and other sensory engagements with the materiality of regional contexts, and sought to develop ways in which these may be contested through alternative practices of making that may lead to more progressive and empowering visions of regions. To this end, the conference also included an exhibition space where artists and artist practitioners engaged with these various senses of the badlands. The online version of this exhibition is produced here on the [Transformations Artspace site](#).

The Editors  
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