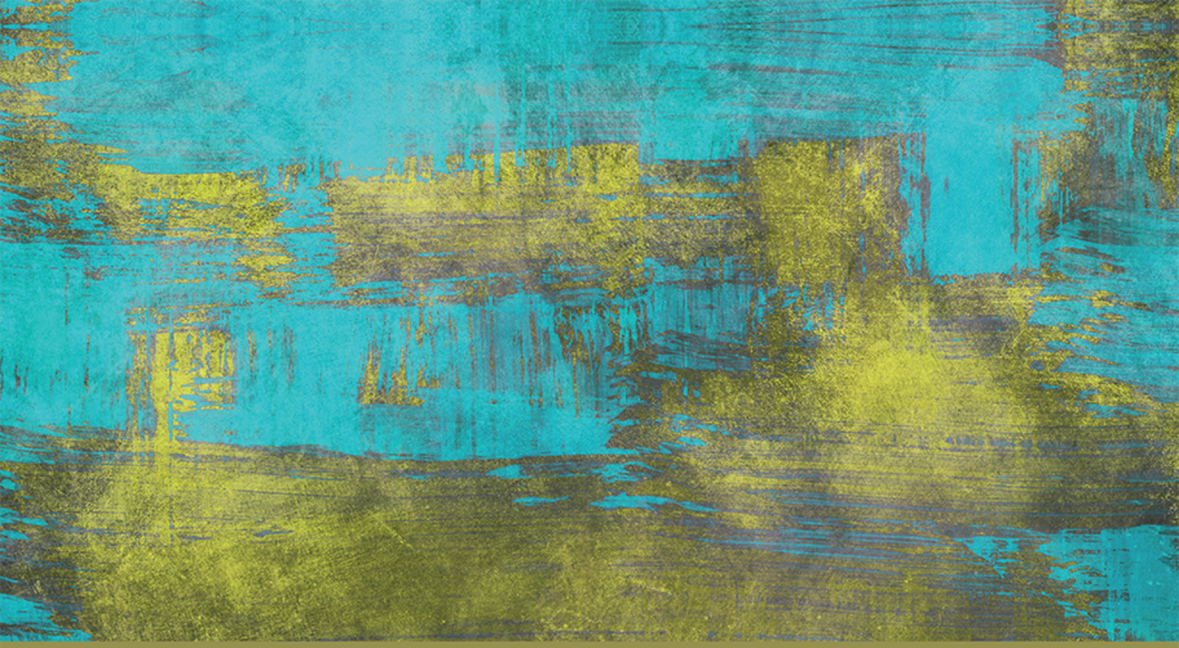
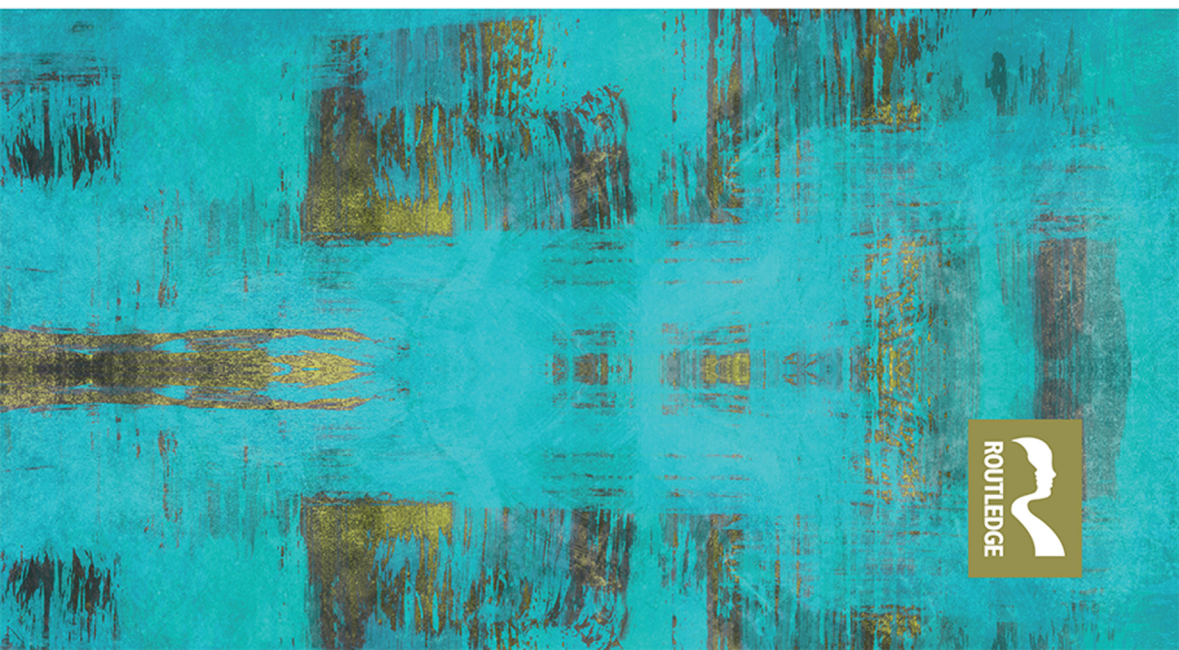


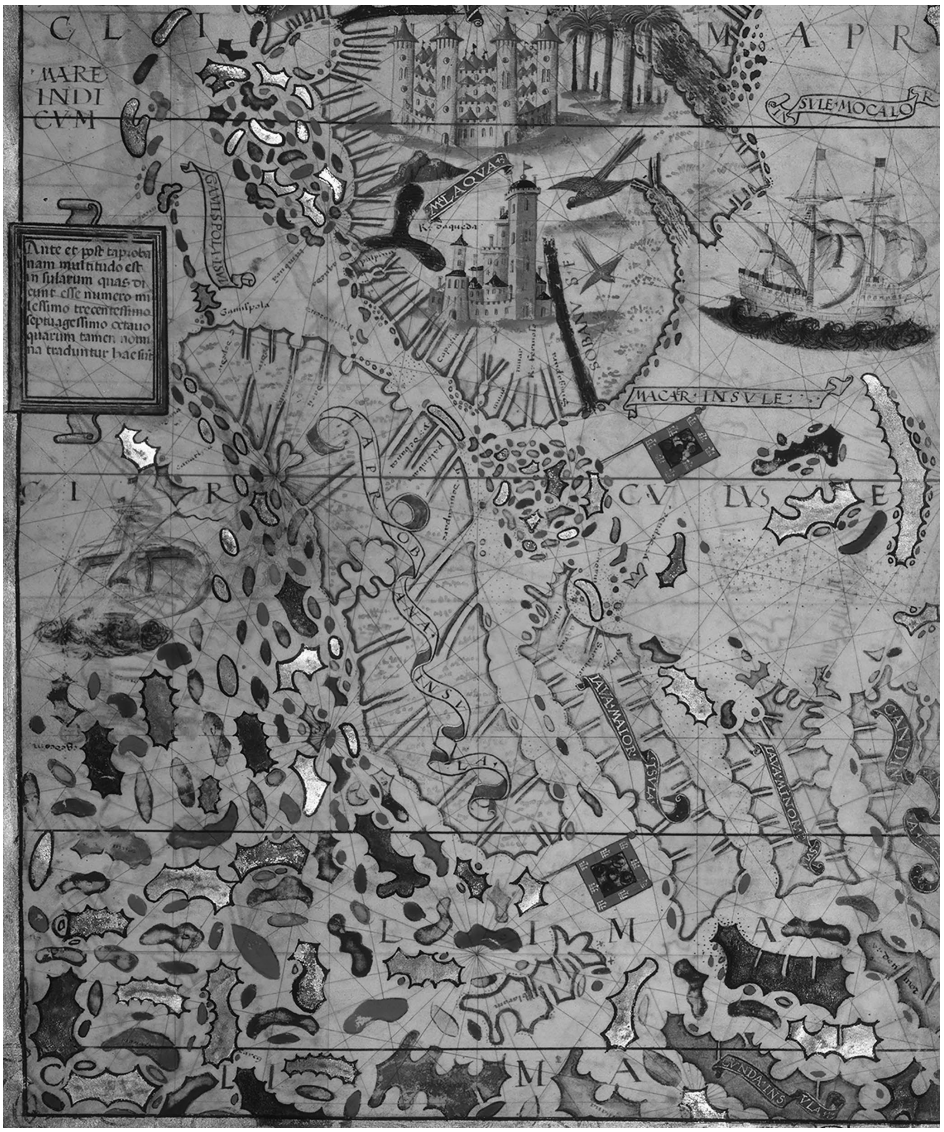
Postcolonial Politics

DECOLONISING GOVERNANCE

ARCHIPELAGIC THINKING

Paul Carter





Lopo Homem (fl. 1497–1572), with Pedro Reinel (fl. 1485–1535), Atlas Miller, c. 1519, illuminated manuscript on vellum, 45 × 590 mm, feuilles 2 à 5. Courtesy of Bibliothèque national de France.

Decolonising Governance

Power may be globalised, but Westphalian notions of sovereignty continue to determine political and legal arrangements domestically and internationally: global issues – the legacy of colonialism expressed in continuing human displacement and environmental destruction – are thus treated 'parochially' and ineffectually. Not designed for dealing with situations of interdependence, democratic institutions find themselves in crisis. Reform in this case is not simply operational but conceptual: political relationships need to be drawn differently; the cultural illiteracy that prevents the local knowledge invested in places made after their stories needs to be recognised as a major obstacle to decolonising governance.

Archipelagic thinking refers to neglected dimensions of the earth's human geography but also to a geo-politics of relationality, where governance is understood performatively as the continuous establishment of exchange rates. Insisting on the poetic literacy that must inform a decolonising politics, Carter suggests a way out of the incommensurability impasse that dogs assertions of indigenous sovereignty. Discussing bicultural areal management strategies located in south-west Victoria, Maluco (Indonesia) and inter-regionally across the Arafura and Timor Seas, Carter argues for the existence of creative regions constituted archipelagically that can intervene to rewrite the theory and practice of decolonisation.

A book of great stylistic elegance and deftness of analysis, *Decolonising Governance* is an important intervention in the related fields of ecological, ecocritical and environmental humanities. Methodologically innovative in its foregrounding of relationality as the nexus between poetics and politics, it will also be of great interest to scholars in a range of areas, including communicational praxis, land/sea biodiversity design, bicultural resource management and the constitution of post-Westphalian regional jurisdictions.

Paul Carter is author of the acclaimed *The Road to Botany Bay, an essay in spatial history* (1987). His more recent books include *Dark Writing, geography, performance, design* (2008), *Meeting Place, the human encounter and the challenge of coexistence* (2013) and *Places Made After Their Stories, design and the art of choreotopography* (2015). Also a poet, his collection *Ecstacies and Elegies* was published in 2013. Through his design studio Material Thinking he has made signal contributions to the public art and design of Federation Square (Melbourne) and Yagan Square (Perth). Paul Carter is Professor of Design/Urbanism at the School of Architecture and Design, RMIT University.

Postcolonial Politics

Edited by:
Pal Ahluwalia, University of South Australia
Michael Dutton, Goldsmiths, University of London
Leela Gandhi, University of Chicago
Sanjay Seth, Goldsmiths, University of London

'Postcolonial Politics' is a series that publishes books that lie at the intersection of politics and postcolonial theory. That point of intersection once barely existed; its recent emergence is enabled, first, because a new form of 'politics' is beginning to make its appearance. Intellectual concerns that began life as a (yet unnamed) set of theoretical interventions from scholars largely working within the 'New Humanities' have now begun to migrate into the realm of politics. The result is politics with a difference, with a concern for the everyday, the ephemeral, the serendipitous and the unworldly. Second, postcolonial theory has raised a new set of concerns in relation to understandings of the non-West. At first these concerns and these questions found their home in literary studies, but they were also, always, political. Edward Said's binary of 'Europe and its other' introduced us to a 'style of thought' that was as much political as it was cultural, as much about the politics of knowledge as the production of knowledge, and as much about life on the street as about a philosophy of being. A new, broader and more reflexive understanding of politics, and a new style of thinking about the non-Western world, make it possible to 'think' politics through postcolonial theory, and to 'do' postcolonial theory in a fashion which picks up on its political implications.

Postcolonial Politics attempts to pick up on these myriad trails and disruptive practices. The series aims to help us read culture politically, read 'difference' concretely, and to problematise our ideas of the modern, the rational and the scientific by working at the margins of a knowledge system that is still logocentric and Eurocentric. This is where a postcolonial politics hopes to offer new and fresh visions of both the postcolonial and the political.

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The Institute of Postcolonial Studies (IPCS)
Edited by: Phillip Darby, University of Melbourne

'Writing Past Colonialism' is the signature series of the Institute of Postcolonial Studies, based in Melbourne, Australia. By postcolonialism we

understand modes of writing and artistic production that critically engage with the ideological legacy and continuing practices of colonialism, and provoke debate about the processes of globalisation. The series is committed to publishing works that break fresh ground in postcolonial studies and seek to make a difference both in the academy and outside it. By way of illustration, our schedule includes books that address:

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Decolonising Governance

Archipelagic Thinking

Paul Carter

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Other parts of *Decolonising Governance* had their first airing in journals: 'The Enigma of Access: James Dawson and the Question of Ownership in Translation,' 'Law and Its Accidents,' a special symposium issue of the *Griffith Law Review*, vol. 22(1), 2013, 8–27; 'Tropical Knowledge: Archipelago Consciousness and the governance of excess,' *Etropic: electronic journal of studies in the tropics*, 12.2 (2013), 79–95 and 'Archipelago: The Shape of the Future,' *Antithesis*, vol. 21, 2011, 11–25.

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Introduction

Translations

Decolonising Governance: Archipelagic Thinking explores a new approach to region governance. It argues that even well-intentioned plans for culture-led or responsive regional development, or Indigenous-led inter-regional co-operation or even 'hotspot' biodiversity conservation perpetuate neo-colonialist assumptions about authority, vesting them in the language of administrative prose and the cartography of territory. Posing three archipelagic regional governance scenarios – an Indigenous ocean management strategy for the Arafura and Timor Seas, a regional cultural development vision for the Western District of Victoria and an alternative environmental biodiversity plan for Wallacea (Indonesia) – *Decolonising Governance* notes that Indigenous peoples are regularly acknowledged, but integration of their knowledge systems into regional and global governance policy is one way. It links this failure of translation to poetic illiteracy, arguing that the decolonisation of environmental governance is inseparable from renewed metaphorical competence, the capacity to understand storytelling. The book reflects on the retreat of the hermeneutical sciences from their primary cultural function, the understanding of the knowledge invested in stories: when anthropology becomes a narrow social science, the challenge of polysemous meaning (essential to setting the rates of poetic exchange) is subordinated to the pragmatics of reducibility.

In *Decolonising Governance*, the archipelago is a geographical concept. In this context, the book is a contribution to the evolving field of island studies, ocean studies and, in general, the turn away from nation-state territorialisations of the Earth's surface. Unlike these, though, it argues that archipelagos have a significant ontological property: grounding the relationship between being and becoming in relationality, they are distinctively open, ordered systems. To continue the metaphor, if grounding carries with it terra firma associations, then archipelagic thinking ungrounds concept formation, finding meaning in the interest created when things are exchanged. The primacy of relating in the life world of the archipelago gives metaphor, or the carrying over of unlike concepts to form new crossings of sense, a

primary role in conceptualising and operationalising cross-cultural relations. Narrativising exchange defines the business of decolonised governance wherever regional and global communities seek to act locally in the imagined human interest. Deterritorialising the traditional association of decolonisation with the securing of Indigenous rights, *Decolonising Governance* extracts indigeneity from its colonial definition and presents it in the context of creative region cultural production or plural self-relating.

Because *Decolonising Governance* is about a hyper-story – to adapt Timothy Morton's notion of the hyper-object – it is obvious that it will meet with specialist objections, and that it must be reflective, carrying on a commentary with its own narrative that ensures its limitations are incorporated into the map of governance proposed. The hyper-story – decolonising governance – is an interdisciplinary one. It brings together normative concepts of rationality, non-normative or poetic economies of sense-making, anthropological descriptions of different local knowledges and the rhetoric of regional development. We should not expect an easy consensus to emerge: a multiplication of case studies would only amplify the opportunity for disagreement about details. Although I make the point that the archipelago, whether considered as an areal arrangement or as a way of thinking (or, of course, both) is defined by its ultimate indeterminateness – it gives full value to the free agency of the participant actors – it serves in the book to limit the scope for unproductive debate about what is missing: the archipelago establishes a reflective template within which all the local histories presented exist doubly, as concrete situations and as sites of immanence, growth or transformation. This double existence belongs to a discourse that seeks to bring into dialogue anthropological curiosity and political utopianism; in the practical sphere these meet continuously and unequally in the realm of internationalist master-planned development strategies, where environments and cultures under threat are recruited to supposedly universalist goods of cultural and environmental biodiversity.

As a book about the negotiation of values, about the recognition of how values are produced and their producers valued, *Decolonising Governance* is centrally about the language of exchange. Although I want the discussion to be outward, facing, as it were, towards real seas and real forests, it has to be reflective, committed to acknowledging the way in which disciplines destroy each other as effectively as atomistic, reductionist ways of describing reality run down our capacity to inhabit the planet creatively. Pierre Bourdieu points out that the concept of rationality or rational agency (disengaging Indigenous knowledges and polities from these 'hierarchical models that privilege Western modes of knowing, is also fundamental to the decolonisation process'[1]) 'presents a normative model of what the agent should be if he wants to be rational (in the scientist's sense) as a description of the explanatory principle of what he really does.'[2] This creates an agonistic

relation between disciplines; paradoxically, agreement to differ rationally is impossible and is condemned as encouraging a subversive relativism:

> The moral asset of the transcendental conception of communicative reason is *also* its greatest moral liability. It grounds the moral conviction of the indignant in their ferocious condemnation of their opponents for failing to adhere to the rigour of scholarship, the standards of argumentation.[3]

The key victim of this rigour – faithfully reflected in the administrative prose of legislation, executive orders and every kind of contractual arrangement – is the dimension of language that makes communication across difference possible:

> Its overriding emphasis on truthfulness and trustworthiness, forecloses the question of why irony, ridicule, joke, allegory, or for that matter, insinuation, indoctrination, propaganda, proselytisation, or even lie, *could* or *should* have no role to play in either the production or dissemination of truth.[4]

Another way to put this, critical to the way *decolonising* governance is discussed here, is that it discounts what is carried over in communication beyond the subject of the sentences: the fact that ordinary language is open to interpretation is how 'the social (the many) comes to terms with itself and becomes (one with) itself.'[5] Further, the pluralist politics that flows from this is irreducible: 'The people is different from itself and divided within itself. As such, it is always miscounted and misnamed.' Or, as Huen puts it, in what we might call archipelagic terms, 'politics is possible (and indeed necessary) because "the people" is always more or less than itself, it is neither one nor many, but more or less than one.'[6] At the heart of communication, then, the primary social contract, if you like, is a willingness to add value to what is received – to give back with interest; hence, the primary contract is ethical as it can be deliberately subverted. Modifying Marx's definition, Greg Urban suggests that something else is carried over when a commodity is exchanged; besides the addition of 'exchange value' to 'use value' there is 'cultural motion.' Video purchasers, for example, are hardly likely to produce an identical video:

> However, insofar as they extract some of the culture contained in it, they may reproduce the plot through re-narration or in their own lives, imitate a hair or clothing style, reuse a catchy phrase, come away with a feeling or attitude, or acquire a sensibility about the world, any and all of which have been deposited in the video as cultural artifact.[7]

This is a conspicuously contemporary example of cultural interest adding, but Urban recognises its economic precedent in the kula ceremonial

exchange system famously studied by Malinowski.[8] In Urban's model the creative response is commodity-mediated and deferred: in a conversation where cultural capital is at stake, though, the 're-narration' is instantaneous, inscribed into the discursive exchange.

Possibly as a consequence of the verifactionist orthodoxy, we tend to think of this kind of value-adding as secondary, and to theorise it in ways that make it sound supplementary at best and gratuitous at worst. However, in the context of decolonising the discourse of governance, it is the reflective self-awareness in the language performance (or any other symbolic exchange) that allows a new place, meaning, understanding or purpose to be discovered. Myerhoff and Ruby point out how interpretation is fused into the performative act: in fact, encounter, as opposed to rote meeting, may be distinguished by this double aspect. Referring to a 'system of signification (including that of an individual person) to reverse, or "bend back," at the moment of encounter,' they comment, 'We become at once both subject and object. Reflexive knowledge, then, contains not only messages, but also information as to how it came into being, the process by which it was obtained.'[9] Translated into the protocols of meeting in Indigenous societies, referred to here is the expectation that the messenger will introduce him/herself, saying where they come from (family and country), for the story of the messenger is inseparable from the authority of the story to be told. But it would be curious to say that these diplomatic courtesies, so notably absent from the transcendental conception of communicative reason, are evidence of a 'human capacity to generate second-order symbols or metalevels–significations about significations.'[10] 'The withdrawal from the world, a bending toward thought process itself" may be 'necessary for what we consider a fully reflexive mode of thought,'[11] but it is also the characteristic trope of irony or, less aggressively, whatever gestures are introduced into the exchange that serve to differentiate content and context, performance and performer, subjective and objective, and hence to allow for the emergence of something new.

The project of decolonising governance is usually associated with the assertion of Indigenous rights,[12] a problematic position when most Indigenous peoples have plural heritages and complexly residual cultural identifications. In any case, theoretical and practical advocacy for the recognition of Indigenous knowledge systems, Indigenous rights and sovereignty and, concomitantly, the dismantling of the 'antics and oppressive practices' of the 'colonial oppressor' that 'continue to script the lives of the subordinate and colonised even as we resist such dominance'[13] rarely address the problem of communication, that is the discursive reform needed if different knowledges are to speak to one another. This is also a challenge inter-culturally, as it were: if a decolonising approach articulates local/Indigenous knowledges as situated, contingent, multi-sited, dispersed and intricately connected to place, person and identity formation, then how will they relate to one another? Valuing the multiplicity of local knowledges – dismantling the hierarchical model within which Indigenous knowledges are typically

subjugated, marginalised or erased – may produce postcolonial disintegration rather than radical anticolonial integration. De Sousa Santos and colleagues state that 'starting from the assumption that cultural diversity and epistemological diversity are reciprocally embedded … the reinvention of social emancipation is premised upon replacing the "monoculture of scientific knowledge" by an "ecology of knowledges."'[14] The logical conclusion of this emancipation is drawn by Arun Agrawal, who argues, in a development studies context that, if Indigenous and local knowledges are to play an important role, 'we must go beyond the dichotomy of indigenous vs. scientific and work towards greater autonomy for indigenous peoples.'[15]

I have no quarrel with these ideals. In their context *Decolonising Governance* simply invites attention to the challenge of translation between Indigenous cultures: what is the operator or translator that makes an 'ecology of knowledges' a living generative system? But our context is more sullied, layered and cruelly complex. It involves the extraterritorial negotiations of deterritorialised peoples, and the navigation of so many self-interested cultural projections, that any call to simplify the decolonisation process, notably through the reverse stigmatisation of the coloniser, is doomed to remain utopian. No man is an island, and the meaningful existence of place-based cultures is inseparable from their multiplicity and their capacity to relate to other self-appointed planetary custodians. The issue is not the validity, whether cultural, ethical or scientific of local knowledges – a better phrase because it recognises an ecology of local knowledge holders including the immigrant, the displaced and the plurally loyal – but the capacity to establish exchange rates. The inward problem of antagonism between disciplines – in our case notably between the humanities and the social sciences – is replicated in the real world in the poor communication between, say, government and non-government agencies committed to land and sea conservation and the traditional custodians of those domains, whose relationship with nature, all too human, may be collectively egotistical and almost certainly only maps to western biodiversity ideals through what Lockhart calls a 'double mistaken identity.'[16] In any case, I am suggesting that in the matter of decolonising governance it is translation all the way down.

Epiphanies

It is customary in social science texts, although not in writings coming out of the humanities, to disarm the reader with an opening anecdote. Reaching the subject matter of the book through a vivid recollection of natural beauty, Indigenous encounter or epiphanic revelation assures the reader that the author is a tabula rasa subject like themselves, coming to the world of puzzling contingencies without prior suppositions. It identifies the writer as a trustworthy witness, like Montaigne's unlettered topographer, resistant to ideological parti pris. Of course, this is a journalistic sleight of hand as, a few pages on, one is invariably in the thickets of theory and disciplinary

disagreement. More fundamentally, this kind of introduction shortchanges the reader because it parodies the storytelling function, reducing it to a walk-on part in a discursive drama that henceforth will be conducted according to the abstractions of social, political or cultural theory. How, then, to personalise my motivation without reducing it to a kind of photo opportunity? It is protocol in most human encounters, and certainly in negotiating rights of passage or residence amongst Aboriginal peoples, to say where one comes from: the same, logically, applies to a book that purports to demystify the stratagems of communicative reason, calling for poetic re-education – a new rapprochement, if you like, between social anthropology and textual hermeneutics – in the interests of governance transformation. Paul Ricoeur, whose book *The Rule of Metaphor*, is a vade mecum to our own poetic education, insists that poetic thinking – the symbol and the myth – 'are the result of an occasion or occasions.'[17] They embody what he calls a 'reflective philosophy of the concrete.'[18] What is the situation out of which *this* mythopoetic vehicle, the archipelago, arises? What, to borrow from Dietrich Bonhoeffer are the regions of care – 'the times and places which in some way concern us…which confront us with concrete problems…The "among us", the "now" and "here" is therefore the region of our decisions and encounters' – that inform what follows?[19]

This last quotation comes from *Ground Truthing* (2010), a book subtitled (with a sense of irony) 'explorations in a creative region,' the region in question being a distinctive inland ecosystem stretching across western New South Wales, north-west Victoria and parts of southern South Australia. The object of this book was to illustrate a method of cultural analysis that demonstrated the existence of a poetic economy that could sustain a new model of regional self-governance. In many ways, the governance model outlined for the Western District of Victoria in Chapter 5 follows from this enquiry: as important as the demonstration of internal story lines drawing together Indigenous, colonial and postcolonial senses of place in the Mallee was the relationship of these story lines to other regions, either immediately adjacent (the Western District) or conceptually and metaphorically convergent. That book overlapped with a long place-making engagement with governmental and non-governmental agencies in Alice Springs, Central Australia. This sharpened my sense of the is/is not character of Indigenous place-making narratives, as well as my awareness of the connection between white settler 'antics and oppressive practices' and what I will call metaphorical illiteracy. It established for me the fact, later explored in depth in *Meeting Place* (2013), that the problem of translation lies at the heart of attempts to decolonise governance.[20] As Mbantua Elder Doris Kngwarreye Stewart told me, talking about the Council destruction of trees, 'For every damage we lose a life'; 'after damage my ancestors come to me.'[21] This is not simply a totemic identification story of the kind discussed in Chapter 1 – not just about the language of metaphor – it is about the 'Ersatz economy' of master planning, where picturesque representations are substituted for

genuine relations. As Mrs Stewart said, 'Why re-create when we already had the thing?'[22]

Alongside these experiences of the profound, and profoundly destructive, mismatch between white settler government cultures and Indigenous people's 'creative "drive"' to make sense of their universe – writing in 1952, Stanner compared 'the logos of the Dreaming,'[23] characterised as 'a network of enduring relations recognized between people … an intellectual and social achievement of a very high order' comparable with 'such a secular achievement as, say, parliamentary government in a European society'[24] – there was a concomitant fascination with the landscape of translation. If the mythform of western democracy is the agora, centralist, rhetorically and socially hierarchical, its use value predicated on uncounted slave labour,[25] and if its corollory is colonisation's territorialisation of the globe and enslavement of natural and human resources, what would the *other* meeting place look like that corresponded to those alternative knowledge systems characterised as 'situated, contingent, multi-sited, dispersed, and intricately connected to place, person and identity formation'? This question is taken up in *Places Made After Their Stories*, and in it, in the context of developing a bicultural sense of place culture at Yagan Square, Perth, the image of the string figure emerged: referring to our method, I wrote,

> A creative template is a technique for holding things apart together: in an urban context it enables us to see the public space as immanent, self-organising. In terms of heritage, it isolates the through lines or principles of change that materialize at certain times and places. The cultural, educational and symbolic significance of string figures in Australian Aboriginal cultures is widely documented: they are spatial mnemonics for the fundamental relationship between sky and earth; they can model family relations. They translate social laws into a lasting physical gesture: the sinews of the body are transformed into the 'tension' that tunes the good society.[26]

Obviously the spatio-political figure of the archipelago is implicit in the string figure. But here I simply wanted to document the zones of historical and actual non-meeting that shadow any project of drawing together.

It occurred to me that one place where alternative geographies of encounter, different configurations of governance and the critical question of translation came together was in the management of oceanic environments. I had written about the colonial idealisation of the coastline as the metonym of exclusive territorial possession (and the consequent repression of cultural cultures, amphibious environments and their associated 'hinterseas' economies).[27] Then I began to push out from the shore: practical engagement in the Chennai Adyar Poonga Ecological Restoration Plan (2006–2007),[28] a recuperative ecology project in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, in 2007, overlapping with the design of a new cultural faculty called 'Pearl' for the new Darwin

waterfront, drew my attention to the problems traditional fishing cultures across the Timor and Arafura Seas, and even across the Indian Ocean, shared. Out of this was born the 'Ocean Connections' project, on whose work Chapter 3 is based. One manifestation of this research partnership was 'Tidal,' a program for bicultural environmental planning mediated through the discourse of tidal phenomena. Citing the Aboriginal Land Amendment (Inter-Tidal Waters) Act (2007) and the government-funded CSIRO's response, the commissioning and funding of a Tropical Rivers and Coastal Knowledge project to record Indigenous social and cultural knowledge relating to water, we suggested that this offered an exceptional opportunity for translation: between epistemologies, environments, and even the human and physical sciences.[29] A feature of 'Tidal' was the equal billing it gave to cultural production, expressly the potential of digital design techniques to integrate the hyper stories of oceanic rhythm and their human counterparts into the physical morphology and visitor experience of 'Pearl' – an ambitious extension of the 'places made after their stories' principle to architectural design.

Such were the translations we imagined then.[30] If there was an epiphanic moment in relation to the emergence of the archipelago, it occurred when, still optimistic about the realisation of 'Pearl', we began to dream a region of care:

> A critical sense of place is one that develops tools for calibrating the *sentiers* said to lend places their experiential drag. The pathways may be physical grooves, representable in plans, but they signify because they bear poetic associations, rhythmic, kinaesthetic, metrical and ultimately poetic dimensions. They are discursive in the etymological sense. In this case, what is called place emerges where *sentiers* meet, intersect, interfere with one another or cancel each other out. Place is not a meeting place of stories – themes that the heritage lobby can restore and reinterpret – but an arrest, or filtering, of passage … *Sentiers* give passage sense, just as passage scores places. Here, the first clue to the arrangement of things is the successive walls normally relegated to the status of scenography: the window, the jigsaw of divisions across the hotel grounds, the breakwater, the handsome curving wharf, the horizonal coastline of the Cox Peninsula with its refineries, and the horizon itself – I say 'itself' but the horizon is also seven-shelled with mother-of-pearl cloud laminations climbing into the dusky evening. If you Google Earth the region, passing from one scale to another, you discern that the geographical forms exhibit a Mandelbrot-like tendency to reproduce essential characteristics at different scales. The generalisation of this is a coastline that is not a line at all but an arrangement of permeable passages – promontories sinking to form necklaces of islands, the emergence of straits, alternative passages and new permeable barriers – spits, banks and shoals – created and uncreated by tidal fluctuations.

> At progressively smaller scales, the archipelago effect is reproduced in the constitution of coastal flora – the aerial root system of the mangrove swamp is a field of stakes that supports a colloidal medium (mud) able to stabilise land-sea relations. The oyster that finds a home in this humid environment carries out its own filtering operations. The *branchiae* or gills leach the salt water for nutrients and occasionally by a kind of fertile oversight admit grit that a process of nacreous inhumation transforms into pearl.[31]

Illustrations

Here, recognising that 'These stories of passage that makes a difference could be multiplied. They are essentially sites where the flux is inscribed with significance, where media incubate embryonic forms,'[32] the irritation in the intellectual oyster was secreted that eventually grew, concentric layer-by-layer, to the present book. But no origin myth is entertained: just as Charles Darwin's non-visit to Darwin has not prevented the emergence of a sense of place myth modelled after his life, so with *Decolonising Governance*, it is undeniably metaphorical. As, indeed, is its cartographical inspiration, the Lopo Homem charts of the Malay/Indonesian archipelagos and the Pacific Ocean as far as they were known to Portuguese navigators c.1519 (Frontispiece). If the archipelago is a reflective template laid over the hyper-story of decolonisation – a way of mapping some essential features and their relationship – then the jewel-like swarms of the Homem chart are a visualisation of the template, a further simplification of the hyper-story to its essential rhetorical appeal. Although I had carried these images around in my head for a long time, I came back to them in Darwin.[33] As conceptual scaffolding, their value resided in their irreducible ambiguity: it was, and remains, impossible to say what they represent, a quality I found inestimably valuable in floating off my conception of the archipelago from what I took to be the literalist politics and poetics of the new sub-branch of the environmental humanities concerned with island studies. These representations of – what? – gaps in knowledge, expressions of wonder, fantasies of wealth or even some kind of optical distemper communicated an essential feature of the archipelago: its irreducibility, its resistance to translation. As a figure of translation where the work of relating (*energeia*) and the form of relating are indistinguishable, the challenge of interpretation is incorporated entirely into the everyday praxis of communication. There is nowhere else to stand – no outside – while, as for the inside, like the nesting of island within island, there is no end to the interest that can be found there.

The Homem swarms are a good way of introducing dimensions of the archipelago that are not immediately apparent from the modern map. As an innovative but not entirely unique Renaissance cartographic,[34] they serve as geographical place holders. In the absence of definite information, they