A Dreaming, A Sauntering: Re-imagining Critical Paradigms

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Franz Kafka asserted that "writing is an observation which is also an act" (qtd. in Blanchot, *Space of Literature* 73). All our forms of writing and text contribute to cultural meaning-making: the counterfactual virtuality of the novel, the charged concision of the poem, the modest, perhaps halting, confessions of an oral tale—these resource us as profoundly as theoretical disquisition and philosophical inquiry. Maurice Blanchot, commenting on Kafka, suggests that the belief that writing is an observation which is also an act is a form of *confidence*, almost metaphysical confidence, in the face of bureaucratic phantasms and desolating injustice. It is, in Blanchot's words, "fidelity to the work's demands, the demands of grief" (*Space* 75). There is a solemnity to this statement that is very compelling: it suggests that all writing, in a sense, is an assertion against loss, a wish to commit to the figure, or figuration, what seems otherwise assigned to wordless compliance or surrender. Yet the work's demand here implicates or assumes a kind of redemptive drive, a promise of reparation within words themselves. I hope modestly to affirm this promise by the end of my paper.

THE DREAM OF BONES

Let me begin, then, with a simple personal story around which I hope to rehearse a constellation of themes: writing across, figuration, writing as act or activism. I spent several years of my childhood living on a former quarantine station, a remote settlement of three buildings on a peninsula in the Kimberleys. The nearest town was Broome, where I went for my schooling.

The quarantine station was a kind of emancipated space: imagine sand dunes, spinifex, an indigo sky, a single lighthouse, set high on fantastically sculptured rocks, a sense—for this child at least, this freckled, skinny girl—of imaginative excursions, wind-swept agitation, the utterly lovely, abstracting possibilities of play. The sound of the ocean was omnipresent, and at night the lighthouse striped with regular beaming the circular sky. But in other ways the station seemed *deterritorialised*, without markers of stable meaning, unbounded, ambiguous, indivisibly spacious and full.

During the Second World War Broome was strafed and bombed by the Japanese, and several planes were shot down in flames into the bay. My brothers and I talked often of the aircraft under the water, beyond visibility; but knew too that at very low tides, very occasionally, the bombers were exposed. We waited for such a tide. With my father and my older brother, I set out and walked a mile across the ocean floor, to see the Japanese plane. It was an impressive object— like a surrealist vision—festooned with corals, weeds, encrustations of many kinds. Its bird shape was intact, but for a broken back and sadly drooping wings. It was murky and strange; it was oddly otherworldly. Yet I was disappointed, almost distressed, that there was no pilot in the cockpit. I had imagined a skeleton, sitting upright, wearing pilot's bug-eye goggles and a peaked brown leather cap (an image derived, I think, from old-fashioned war movies). This disappointment initiated a recurring dream. I dreamt I was walking underwater on the ocean floor, my limbs heavy and impeded, the waves swelling above my head, seeking the long-lost Japanese pilot. What I found here and there were drifting bones, which I gathered in the flimsy concave of my skirt. A thighbone here, an ulna there, the small white components of former hands. The dream of bones, as I now think of it, is an allegory of loss and incomplete recovery, of the aesthetic failure to *fully figure*. And now, as an adult, it seems in retrospect to illuminate both my fictive and critical practice: I tend to gather fragments, to assemble paratactically, to assume ontological gaps and incompletions. Against organic and mimetic models—of the reconstitution, for example, of the body of experience, of textual plenitude and recreated presence—I favour signifying absence and the trope of dis-integration.

THE FRAGMENT AND THE ALLEGORY

My story furnishes an epistemological model and a critical attitude. This is, I trust, no narcissistic elaboration, it is a wish to narrativise matters which

seem to me intrinsic to all writing practices: the negotiation of lost histories, the power of idealisation and the wish, even if unconscious, to embrace or to incorporate the body of an other.

What might it mean to take the fragment or the trace as a paradigm of knowledge and to assume that assemblage, not reconstitution, is our critical task? In this model it is the manufacture of intelligible design—rather than, say, the explanation of facts—that generates and constitutes our understanding. It also assumes a culture always-already multiple, such as the term multiculturalism was intended to convey, and a stance of intelligent scepticism concerning unifying (that is to say monocultural) ideologies of nationhood. Ken Gelder's and Jane M. Jacobs's *Uncanny Australia* argued that the coexistence of secular modernity and Aboriginal sacredness predisposes our culture to incommensurable division, to a system of relentless transactions between so-called main and minority cultures, to an oscillating avowal and disavowal of indigeneity that we now recognise as the marker of the post-colonial. We are a country, that is to say, internally *disharmonious* and culturally contradictory. Australia has never been a "unity." Every settler colony strives to manufacture ideological unity, but such manufacture is characterized by its forms of perpetual failure.

Norman Tindale's famous 1940 map of tribal boundaries (reproduced in the Gelder and Jacobs book) imagistically confirms, though in another context, the paradigm of a nation of disunity. Rather like drought-cracked earth, the map pictures a densely crazed surface with hundreds of irregularly bordered areas signifying discrete Aboriginal territories. Tindale's map, constructed and revised over fifty years, was an audacious early act of presumption of native title, and had the effect, paradoxically, of rendering visible the immense variety and complexity of Aboriginal knowledges, language groups and lands. I'd like to take this map as a kind of ideogram. Crazed and crazy territories, cognitive maps, sites of memory, memorialisation, nostalgic retreat, desire—these are all tokens of gorgeously fractured space, in fact anti-cartographic, if you will. For the space of this paper I wish to abolish the geometric authority of state boundaries and ask you to striate and derange the surface, to trouble the glaze, as it were, of our spatial imaginary.

(As an aside I would like to add that Tindale was from Adelaide, and worked for many years as chief anthropologist at the South Australian museum. He had also spent the first 15 years of his life in Tokyo, and thus during the

Second World War was enlisted in Army intelligence. His job was to visit the wreckage sites of Japanese bombers to try to read them *as text*, and to decipher the aircraft production codes of the Japanese air-force. Tindale also had only one eye—his other was lost in a photographic accident. Thus for me he is an oddly irresistible figure.)

Let us consider the relevance of spatial readings from a critical position that honours the fragment. Michel Foucault once remarked that in the Western tradition time has been considered an entity of "richness, fecundity, life, dialectic," but that space, by contrast, is regarded as "the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile" (qtd. in Soja 15). His critique of traditional historiography includes a plea for the spatial imagination—a cause taken up locally by figures like Paul Carter and Robert Dixon—and one of his contributions to this realignment of critical scrutiny was an essay, "Of Other Spaces," in which he posited the concept of the heterotopia.[1] Conceived as a heterotopia, a system of multiple sites that are richly particular and distinctive, which are irreducible to one another and not susceptible to superimposition,[2] Australia might be imagined as creatively crazy. Recognition of sites as relations of power, recognition of cultural multiplicity and immanent difference, means that *every* act of writing is *writing across*. Jean Baudrillard said that Foucault's metaphor makes possible a focus on the interstitial, the flows of power between spaces, the ways in which power and knowledge establish our understanding as "relations between sites" (9). To quote Foucault: "Endeavouring . . . to decipher discourse through the use of spatial, strategic metaphors enables one to grasp precisely the points at which discourses are transformed in, through and on the basis of relations of power" (69).

The child, any child, who imagines her own history, re-dreams it, enters impossible perspectives (in my case *drowned-but-alive*), performs the transitive and transferential, recognises in an almost intuitive way that her nation has various and diverse "situated knowledges" within it. *All* children apprehend in their play, their symbols, their curiosity about otherness, a kind of proto-awareness of heterotopic space. The particular is enchanting; everyday life is essentially disunified. This is the condition of being. Wishing to *collect* the lost other or the otherness of one's own place might also be seen as intuitively heterotopic: collecting, as Susan Sontag points out, is always an act of redemption; it is always a means by which the "profane relic" (Walter Benjamin's term) is used to establish practical and material forms of remembrance, a means by which we recognise multiplicity.

The other to the fragment, one might argue, is the allegory, or the allegorical impulse. I mean not the impulse to produce national master narratives—which I have already suggested is tendentious and problematic—but to regard the small and the local as freighted with more general social relevance and ethical gravity. Here is another small story… In 1999, a white lawyer spoke at a senate inquiry into human rights on the issue of mandatory sentencing laws in the northern territory:

> To illustrate the absurdity of the laws, [the lawyer] flamboyantly produced a pencil he had stolen on his way into the hearings, and, holding it up to the committee, he snapped it, pointing out as he did that if he were charged with the theft and the damage of the pencil, there would be no way for him to avoid a compulsory two weeks in jail. He went on to explain that if on release from jail he were to steal another pencil, he would face a compulsory three month prison sentence. And if he were so stubborn, stupid or desperate to do it again, the minimum penalty would necessarily be a year inside. (Johnson 143)

(These laws were overturned by the newly elected Labor territory government in late 2001.)

A week after this performance, the lawyer was dismayed to hear of the suicide by hanging in a Darwin cell of a 15-year-old Aboriginal boy from Groote Eylandt. He had been mandatarily sentenced for stealing stationary items (among them, a few pencils) and was sent 900 kilometres from his home to detention in Darwin. I would want to impute allegorical significance to the story of the immunity of the white lawyer and the appalling vulnerability of the Aboriginal youth. This ghastly comparison, the implication of despair, of child-suffering, the minor but utterly symbolic theft; these oblige us to understand that if we acknowledge the crazy map, the map that begins with honouring difference, the map that seeks to instate a model of community that does not, in Emmanuel Levinas's terms "absorb the difference of strangeness" (qtd. in Diprose 170), then we must also acknowledge differentials of power. *Writing across*—or, indeed, reading across—is the negotiation of symbolic regimes which alerts us not just to the precious specificity of different communities, but also to disparities of serious social implication. As Eva Sallis's work reminds us, some territories of otherness are enforced, some are heteronymous, not autonomous, and mandatory sentencing has been politically relocated by its cruel and pre-emptive application to refugees sent to "migrant detention centres." Perhaps writing across includes recognition of the *déjà disparu*, the lost space, conceptualised in terms of sites of erasure or denunciation.

HAUNTOLOGY

The child seeking the remnants of a dead man is perhaps seeking a ghost. To put it another way, she is unwittingly performing the work of mourning; she is entering an imaginary search for the space of death in which she also repudiates death's finality. In his *Spectres of Marx*, Jacques Derrida begins with the premise that "haunting belongs to the structure of every hegemony" (37). That is to say, within every dominant discourse or, indeed, dominant world system (such as capitalism) there is a repressed order of value which is hidden but not eradicated, an alternative which threatens, in fact, perpetual insurrection. Derrida creates a pun, "hauntology": every social ontology is also the condition of being haunted. With this in mind, it is interesting to see how vigorously Australian scholars currently adopt the trope of haunting—*Uncanny Australia* takes it for granted, as does Sneja Gunew's fine contribution (and I have used it myself to talk about the Stolen Generations). If we are to avoid what I have called the seductive allure of "terminological Gothicism"—the simple pleasure of invoking the decorative vocabulary of spectres and phantoms—then the metaphor of haunting needs too to be considered a strategic discourse.

Derrida insists that there are two central issues here: anachronism and justice claims. Using Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, he affirms that the time of revenant interception is always "out of joint" (to use Hamlet's words). Just as the logic of haunting is the destruction of the opposition of "to be or not to be," so too it rejects the sovereignty of the present (and the promise of the future) to re-present what we might call "apparitional subjects." The no-longer-living rupture time—philosophically at least—in order to make a claim, to register ghostly disquiet. Fundamentally these are justice claims: the ghost requires us not to forget the wrongs of history and to work for reparation in the future, for the *arrivants*, the not-yet-born or arrived. This use of haunting is to my mind a wholly radical re-imagining of a kind of trans-historical community, an insistence that responsibility comes from the debt of what has gone before and extends into an obligation to the future. (Foucault argued that if we accept the principle of heterotopias, we must also accept *heterochrony*; what would it mean to imagine Australia as riven by multiple times, perhaps not in the way he envisaged, but in this deconstructive sense?)

The figure of the ghost—to return to writing—is perhaps associated with spooky tales of bygone ages, with torch-lit or séanced adolescent thrills, with

naïve anti-rationalism or downright dumb credulity. The ghost is emblematic of the presence that cannot be fully figured, the paradigm, if you will, for the representational conundrums of writing-loss-into-being. Yet metaphorically this attachment we have to virtuality, the phantasmic, the magical, the indeterminate, the weirdly dematerialised, locates the wish to venture across physical and ideological boundaries, to assess the claims the dead have on us to be heard and acknowledged, the claim, moreover, of *unreconciled alterity*. I have in mind here not just the dead, but those made invisible or voiceless by our culture. Alphonso Lingis (following Blanchot's *Unavowable Community* and Jean-Luc Nancy's *Inoperable Community*) calls these subjects "the community of those who have nothing in common" and this seems to me the great challenge of constructing an "ethics of remembering."

I rang my father recently to ask him if he remembered our walk to see the sunken plane. He did, but said that what we saw was not a Japanese plane— one of these fell further out in the bay—but a Dutch amphibious craft, which had flown from Java with a load of refugees, had been moored in the bay and was one of eight sunk during the bombing. My brother and I were apparently mistaken, and all my life I had believed that my dream was based on the search for a Japanese pilot. My father also told me that he had taken a souvenir from the plane. With a fretsaw he removed part of a propeller and remodelled it into a lamp-base. Until that phone-call I had forgotten the aeroplane lamp, but suddenly saw it again, lumpish and displaced, a rather kitschy object, which we eventually dumped unceremoniously when we left the Kimberleys.

My father retrieved the material sign; I the immaterial dream, based on false belief. At first I felt stupidly disconfirmed, but think now that children's imaginings have their own integrity—dream knowledge *is not*, after all, historical knowledge; it is its emotional and figurative residue, its ingenious symbology. I suppose too that I would like to leave room in critical commentary for some kind of para-historical negotiation. I have in mind here what the French novelist Georges Perec calls "fictive memory" (129). In the sixties Perec and his friend Robert Bober worked on a film about immigrants on Ellis Island in New York from 1880-1940 (134-38). They considered the film a work of memory, even though neither had ever left Europe. It was densely researched, scrupulously compassionate and concerned with ethical responsibility for the community of the displaced. Perec's "fictive memory" is what he calls "a memory that might have belonged to me," imagined from a position of solidarity (129). Of course, the term sounds oxymoronic,

perhaps slightly fraudulent, a fancy term merely for the art of fiction. But Perec insisted there was a zone in which we enter history as a floating ghost might, looking around, absorbing details, affections and experiences, yet not wholly actualised. Neither subject nor object, this is a position, one might say, of ethical transitivity. In phenomenological terms both reading and writing operate in this way. We engage in spooky projections, we read and write across thresholds of actuality, even plausibility; we detach and attach with spirited mobility, gratuitous and energetic. "Never does the soul think without the phantasm," Aristotle famously wrote in *Rhetorics* (qtd. in Castoriadis 228). By phantasm he meant the work of imagination and what is interesting here is the perception, twenty-one centuries ago, of the centrality of the connection between the sensible and the intelligible, the assertion that all thought (*theorin*)—like dreams—has both excursive and figurative functions.

CULTURAL DREAMING

Even tourist visitors to Australia have heard of "the Dreaming" or "Dreamtime," the designation, originally by Baldwin Spencer and F. J. Gillen, for the cultural mode and expression of indigenous Australian narratives. The term is a peculiar one: initially a kind of ethnographic attempt to contain collectively produced stories apparently unbounded, always *crossing* into the real, it is now part of Aboriginal English, pragmatically assimilated, as it were. Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra point out that "the many Aboriginal words in different languages that are now automatically translated as 'the Dreaming' normally have no semantic connection to dreams or dreaming" (28). Moreover, they go on, "[t]he unusual syntax of the word, combining a definite article with a gerund, with no agent presumed to be doing the dreaming and no object that is being dreamt, is a product of the grammar of English, a grammar deformed by certain English speakers for their own purposes to create a specific form of discourse which renounces the standard language and the dominant rationality" (28). They are interested in identifying the term as one driven by delegitimation and in pointing out how mediated by non-Aboriginal agents is our understanding of indigenous knowledges. In its favour, perhaps, one could claim that at least "the Dreaming" has a cultural signification released from, say, the Freudian understanding of a dream as a symptom before it is a representation, the delusional pictograph of an individual psyche.

Might there be a *cultural dreaming* beyond these disputed discourses? Might the metaphorics of dreaming allow for, or even inaugurate, a social imaginary that includes the forms of daydreaming necessary to imagine a politics of hope? Speaking to Mary Zournaz, Michael Taussig makes a plea for recognition of states of suspension, what he calls "in-between consciousness" between dreaming and awakening, which he claims furnishes both writing and reading experiences and the production of social hope (52-57). W. E. H. Stanner's *White Man Got No Dreaming* reminds us that from the indigenous perspective white Australia is deficient, bereft, unable to sustain narratives that might relativise the present and invoke the mysterious as an essential element of existence. The case for dreaming as a cultural and social metaphor is certainly beyond the scope of this paper, but I want to signal my interest in the dream trope as a potential mode of radical figuration, of the recognition of cultural stagings of desire, the inclusion of the apparitional subject as one with whom we might have intercourse, the undertaking of forms of thinking that are implicitly heterotopic, crazed in their territorial reach, unstable in their projections, and beyond the hegemonic tyranny of monolithic ideological systems.

In his recently released five-hour director's cut of his 1991 film, *Until the End of the World*, Wim Wenders politicises, in a somewhat clumsy way, the act of dreaming. The movie ends in central Australia, in an Aboriginal community, one governed by a European scientist who is developing apparatuses of vision to cure blindness. He also, coincidentally, has developed a machine for recording dreams, and the male and female protagonists both become enchanted, to the point of madness, with involuted and repetitious acts of re-dreaming. The film identifies a "disease of images" (the madness of revisiting dreams), which it counter-poses to the redemptive power of words (the screenplay is by Peter Carey, who perhaps had a vested interest in recommending words over images). In this story it is the Aboriginal community which refuses to have their dreams recorded, believing that it can only be an act of misappropriation and spiritual evacuation. Wenders is possibly guilty of ascribing to Aborigines primitivist superstition (rather than endorsing their rationally motivated resistance), but the movie also rehearses anxieties about dreaming itself—in its collective form, as cultural knowledge, it is apparently too destabilizing and fragile to be seen; in its individual form it is pathologically self-regarding. I would like to believe that there is an intermediate aesthetic possibility here, that for all its bewildering emplotment and representational volatility, the dream is a mode of heuristic narrative we should take very seriously. This is a vague proposition; it is,

however, an argument for more stylised literary and cultural meditations, for an imagistic hermeneutic and for the radical forms of day-dreaming necessary to re-imagine community.

SAUNTERING, ETHICS

At this point I would like to signal my reservations about positing dream-work as a kind of viable heuristic and conceptual model. The principle reservation is in regard to the loss of the contextual and the corporeal. Ironically, the dream I had as a child was about wishing to make a body; it was a refusal of the lost object as the centre of history, imagining and affective response. It was also about walking. I was not swimming, I was walking on the ocean floor. In his odd little essay on walking, Henry David Thoreau contemplates the word saunter, which he particularly loves. The word derives from the description of medieval pilgrims; they are *Sainte Terrer*—saunterers, holy landers. Then again, Thoreau says, perhaps the term is from *sans terrer*, without land or home, a wanderer. Whichever it might be, to learn the holiness of the land as one walks upon it, or to embrace vagrancy as a philosophical attitude, is recommended by Thoreau as the condition of unbounded thinking and cordial humanity. We grow grumpy if we remain still, at our desks, or confined in our institutions; we know our amplitude if we push into space with our own bodies, rehearse heterotopic encounters and our own displacement. As Henri Lefebvre reminds us: "The whole of (social) space proceeds from the body . . . (405).[3]

So where am I walking to in this chattering saunter? I wish to link a crazy map, the emblem of national space marvellously and irresistibly complicated, with politics and ethics. The heterotopic model is above all a critique of falsifying totalities, of their erasure of locations of culture which deserve our regard not because they contribute to a national narrative, but because they enjoin us to recognise the beautiful complexity of difference. And difference ought, of course, to be consubstantiating, the groundwork of reciprocities and honourable translations. Homi Bhabha has argued that our culture is already *translational*. It is the transnational aspect of cultures—"immigration, diaspora, displacement, relocation" which requires us newly to address particularity ("Postcolonial" 438). "The great though unsettling advantage of this position," Bhabha says, "is that

it makes you increasingly aware of the construction of culture and the invention of tradition" (438).

Australian scholars have conscientiously and intelligently led the way in attempting to construct an ethics of consubstantiating difference. I have in mind the e-journal, *borderlands*, public intellectuals like Robert Manne, Deborah Bird-Rose and Ghassan Hage, a wide range of novelists—Brian Castro, Michelle de Kretser, Eva Sallis and others—all of whom together imagine the subjective and inter-subjective worlds of hybrid communities. They instantiate Kafka's "observation that is also an act," producing writing that seeks to intervene socially and in the spirit of metaphysical confidence. Of particular importance to me is Rosalyn Diprose's *Corporeal Generosity*. Her chapter entitled "Truth, Cultural Difference and Decolonization" is an extraordinarily lucid reading of both Friedrich Nietzsche's and Emmanuel Levinas's philosophies in relation to documents like *Bringing Them Home*. She argues that the model of community based on shared experience must give way to one based on ineradicable difference, a premise which requires an economy of unconditional generosity. "Ineradicable difference" is a disturbing and unsettling premise. It allows for no self-serving pity, no coercive identification, but does assume imbricated interests and the perhaps necessary risk of losing one's own centrality in the scheme of things. Edith Wyschogrod's *An Ethics of Remembering*, subtitled *History, Heterology and the Nameless Others*, also entertains these arguments, but insists that community must be imagined as a gift economy, offering, among other things, the gift of hope. And so the sort of dreaming I am thinking of is that which Siegfried Kracaeur calls "the social hieroglyph," the figuring—he calls it "allegorical" figuring—of historical and social narratives embedded in what might seem otherwise merely ephemeral, private and internalised experiences (qtd. in Rodowick 153-61)

The site I visited as a child could only be seen by commitment to a strenuous and exhausting walk—or so it seemed then, to an eight-year-old girl. And although it signified war, death and the trauma of history, it was also a ruin, a relic, a marvellously protean thing. Beneath the sea slugs, the barnacles, the crenellated weeds, beneath the moist and glossy substances of submarine life, was the wreck of history, "not the story of the wreck, but the wreck itself," to quote Adrienne Rich. My dream was not exemplary, merely illustrative, the product not of thoughtful regard, but aleatory memory-making. Yet it recurred and persisted, and I have retold it here as the skeleton of a somewhat disarticulated argument. I

have told of a far-fetching child, walking into impossibility, gathering up fragments, as the modest journey into symbolic forms of knowing that might retrieve lost subjects, visit dislocated others, that might enter the oceanic oblivion of history and retrieve a small significant fragment to cherish and hold dear.

ENDNOTES

1   These were lecture notes from 1967, discovered after his death in June 1984, and never intended for publication, but their prescience and assertiveness were and remained central to the spatial turn in cultural studies.
2   These are of course Foucault's criteria but one should be mindful of critiques, like Homi Bhabha's which insists on *hybridity* and the inter-space of translation (see *The Location of Culture*).
3   Lefebvre rejects what he calls "abstract spatiality" and even suggests that the senses, differentiated, prefigure social interactions. His *Production of Space* is important because "spatial practice" includes the categories of representational, conceptual and lived spaces.

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